

3-1-2010

Taking the Lead Role in Intern Supervision: The Mentor Teacher Intern Project

Melissa Sullivan

sullivan_melissa@columbusstate.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://csuepress.columbusstate.edu/pil>

 Part of the [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#), [Online and Distance Education Commons](#), [Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Commons](#), and the [Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Sullivan, M. (2010). Taking the Lead Role in Intern Supervision: The Mentor Teacher Intern Project. *Perspectives In Learning*, 11 (1). Retrieved from <http://csuepress.columbusstate.edu/pil/vol11/iss1/11>

This Research is brought to you for free and open access by CSU ePress. It has been accepted for inclusion in Perspectives In Learning by an authorized editor of CSU ePress.

Taking the Lead Role in Intern Supervision: The Mentor Teacher Intern Project

Melissa Sullivan

Columbus State University

Abstract

Classroom teachers participate in many university teacher education programs as partners in the education of teacher candidates. The Mentor Teacher project was initiated in 2003 to allow teachers a voice in the school internship or student teaching process. This study investigated the strengths and weaknesses of the program through individual interviews and open-ended surveys. The program was perceived as very successful by the Mentor Teachers as they moved into a new level in their profession.

As teacher educators, we are aware that professional internship or student teaching in the schools has been considered the most important event in a teacher candidate's professional preparation (Yee, 1968). Research has indicated that the cooperating teacher is a vital support person in the teacher candidates' internship (Roberts & Dyer, 2004). Bowman (1979) thought that the cooperating teacher would do a better job supervising the intern than a university faculty member. Patty (1973) predicted that the university supervisor would some day be replaced by the cooperating teacher.

Research has indicated that the cooperating teacher is thought to be the most influential person in the preparation of a teacher candidate. The amount of time that teacher candidates have spent with their cooperating teacher during internship is much greater than any university faculty member (Guerrier, 1976). Andrews (1965) suggested that the cooperating teacher had greater influence on the success of the teacher candidate. Morris (1974) found that there was little difference in the performance of the teacher candidate supervised by a

university faculty member and those supervised by cooperating teachers. Yates (1981) thought that the cooperating teacher would offer more support than a university supervisor.

Cooperating teachers have often had concerns about their role in the supervision of a teacher candidate. Some explained that they felt uncomfortable with their role in the triad model (teacher candidate, classroom teacher, and university supervisor) of supervision (Silberman, 1970). In most cases, the cooperating teacher spends the most time with the teacher candidate during internship, but she does not have authority in relation to actually grading the progress of the teacher candidate in the classroom. Emans (1983) believed that the university supervisor has little real influence on the teacher candidate and suggested allowing the cooperating teacher to take the lead role in the supervision of the teacher candidate.

Cooperating teachers often do not take a role of authority when there is a university faculty member involved in the supervision of the teacher candidate. They tend to defer to the university supervisor in matters of evaluation and concerns in

performance even though they spend more time actually observing and evaluating the intern's progress. In order for the internship to be successful for the teacher candidate, the cooperating teacher and the university should form a partnership to ensure that the intern is not getting mixed messages about his or her responsibilities from the cooperating teacher or the university faculty member.

This study focused on a collaborative relationship between public schools and a central Alabama university during an internship of elementary education teacher candidates. Internship is defined as the final semester of students seeking initial education certification completed in a school setting under the guidance of a master teacher. The study examined cooperating teachers' perceptions of the benefits and challenges of intern supervision with the university providing training and support, but with little university intervention in the supervision process.

The Mentor Teacher Intern Project

The Mentor Teacher Intern project began in 2003 as a pilot study in a childhood education department to address some of the difficulties encountered throughout the internship supervision process; it was modeled after similar programs at other state universities. The Mentor Teacher Intern project was established to (a) alleviate the high use of adjunct supervisors in the department, (b) alleviate the inadequate supervision of interns in the department, (c) give cooperating teachers a voice in the intern supervision process, and (d) forge school and university partnerships that allow joint selection of cooperating teachers. The program started with seven mentor teachers in two school systems and has grown to almost one hundred mentor teachers in five school systems. The participating interns

volunteered for the project that was open to all teacher candidates in the department. Interns who chose not to participate in the project were supervised by the traditional triad model.

Teachers interested in serving as mentors had to apply to be considered for the program. Mentor Teachers had to (a) have a master's degree, (b) be a tenured teacher, and (c) be recommended by their building principal and the university department faculty. Interns in the childhood education program were assigned two placements each semester. The interns were assigned one placement in grades 1-3 and also assigned another placement in grades 4-6.

The interns and Mentor Teachers were grouped together in the schools so that the Mentor Teachers could work as teams to supervise the interns. Each Mentor Teacher was assigned one intern for his or her classroom. The Mentor Teachers were given full responsibility for the supervision and evaluation of the interns. Each intern had a lead mentor teacher that supervised and mentored the intern on a daily basis in the classroom, but the other members of the mentor teacher team were also responsible for observing and mentoring the interns. Each lead mentor teacher also observed the intern in the second internship placement of the semester in a different grade level.

After the application and selection process was completed, mentor teachers were required to participate in a one-day summer training workshop at the university. The day was spent reviewing their responsibilities as mentor teachers in relation to evaluating and mentoring the interns. The workshop also involved recapping the successes and challenges of previous years and making suggestions for changes to the project in the next year.

The Mentor Teacher school team in each school placement met with the

INTERN SUPERVISION

coordinator of the Mentor Teacher Intern project on a bi-weekly basis to discuss the progress of the interns they were supervising. Specifically the coordinator's role was to (a) provide training for the evaluation of the university requirements during internship, (b) answer questions related to the supervision of the interns, and (c) serve as a connection between the university and each individual school in the project. The coordinator also observed as part of the evaluation team when requested to assess whether significant progress was being made by an intern.

Mentor Teachers were a critical part of the mentor teacher intern project. However, minimal formal research had been conducted on the project. It was essential for the continued success of the project to examine the mentor teachers' perceptions in relation to their assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the project. Through this research, the department could reassess the project and make it more successful for the teachers and the interns.

Method

An open-ended survey was given to each mentor teacher that participated over the year at the end of the spring semester. Ninety surveys were distributed and returned. The survey questions examined the Mentor Teachers' thoughts about the requirements of the program and changes that needed to be made to the program. Also, open-ended individual interviews were conducted using one teacher from all 11 schools that participated in the project. The participants were randomly selected. The interviews concentrated on the individual strengths and weaknesses of the program. According to Goodwin & Goodwin (1996), the interview gives the researcher insight into the perspectives of the respondents about the area of study.

Results

The surveys showed that the Mentor Teachers felt at ease in their role in the supervision process. The Mentor Teachers also expressed satisfaction with the requirement to cross observe other project interns in the school. No problems were identified in the surveys. A few teachers indicated they would like additional information concerning current best practices taught by professors in the methods courses, but indicated this was not believed to be problem.

The interviews also provided very important and more specific information about the strengths and weaknesses of the project. The Mentor Teachers believed one of the most important strengths of the program was their ability to have a voice in the internship process. One teacher stated that the fact that they were able to express their concerns about internship to university faculty and see changes in the program based on their views allowed them to feel like a real part of the university's preparation of the teacher candidates. Another teacher said, "The faculty really care what we think. It helps the Mentor Teachers believe that what we are doing out in the schools is meaningful and important."

Another strength cited in the interview by the Mentor Teachers was the idea that they have more control in their role as a supervisor in teacher education. The Mentor Teachers believed that it was very beneficial to the interns for the mentors to have control over the evaluations and the interns' final grade with minimal support from the university. One Mentor Teacher stated, "The intern knew that they had certain university requirements, but the fact that a third party did not evaluate them helped the interns feel more at ease when lessons or days did not progress as expected." Another Mentor Teacher

mentioned that the intern only had to listen to one person who was there every day for consistent feedback instead of one person that could not possibly be there every day.

A third strength from the interview was the opportunity that the Mentor Teachers had to work as a team with their colleagues at their individual schools. The Mentor Teachers collaborated with each other about evaluations, case studies of interns, procedures for lessons, and the university requirements. The teachers mentioned that they were able to work with other teachers and get support with any questions or problems that occurred with an intern. One Mentor Teacher said, "I was able to work with teachers that I would not normally be able to collaborate with on a project."

The final strength stated by the mentor teachers in the interview was that the project had one person that was in charge and available when they needed clarification about issues related to the interns or the internship process. The teachers talked about previous interns and the fact that they had to leave messages for supervisors and did not always get a response or answer to their questions in an expedient way. One teacher stated that she knew exactly which person to call, and that person was always available. "We did not have to ever wait for answers."

All of the teachers noted that the only weakness they saw in the project dealt with the evaluation forms used by the university when evaluating interns. They thought the intern evaluation forms were too lengthy, not well organized, and had a rating scale that did not allow the mentor teachers to give an adequate description of the progress an intern was making during the placement. They stated that the forms for formative evaluation were not specific for a single lesson and were very difficult to use to evaluate an intern's daily progress.

Discussion

Throughout the interviews, The Mentor Teachers overwhelmingly thought that through the program they became a vital part of the university faculty. They knew that their voices were valued and they were treated as members of the department by being invited to department faculty meetings and meetings involving the supervision of interns. They felt that they had moved to a new level in their profession.

The teachers also liked the fact that they had control over the everyday decisions that needed to be made regarding their interns. The Mentor Teachers thought the interns' progress benefited from getting coaching and feedback from one main person during their internship experience. They believed that they were able to see the entire progression of each intern's teaching ability in internship because they saw the daily lessons that were effective and the lessons that needed adjustments. They all took this responsibility very seriously and made sure that they were doing everything to reflect the high standards of the university.

The Mentor Teachers appreciated the collaboration that they had with other teachers in the building. The teachers believed that they learned things about their colleagues and themselves by working together as a team to supervise the interns. Through dialogue with other mentor teachers about their responsibilities and their evaluations of their interns, they established a supportive environment with each other which allowed them to collaborate on a project with teachers with whom they would never have had the opportunity to work.

The project was very beneficial to the Mentor Teachers and the Childhood Education department. The Mentor teachers grew professionally through the project as they took on a new role in their profession. Through the project, the Mentor Teachers

INTERN SUPERVISION

believed they were stakeholders in the education of teacher candidates, and university faculty members were able to assess and validate their work in the university classroom by the feedback provided by the mentor teachers about teaching methods the interns shared. According to Dever, Hager, & Klein (2003), sound university education departments know the value to their program of a partnership with public schools and how important cooperating teachers are to their teacher candidates' education. The stakeholders in The Mentor Teacher Intern Project believed that the project allowed for true collaboration between the public schools and the university.

References

- Andrews, L. O. (1965). *Action for improvement in teacher education*. Washington, DC: American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education.
- Bowman, N. (1979). College supervision of student teaching: A time to reconsider. *Journal of Teacher Education, 30*, 29-30.
- Dever, M., Hager, K., & Klein, K. (2003). Building the university/public school partnership: A workshop for mentor teachers. *The Teacher Educator, 38*, 245-255.
- Emans, R. (1983). Implementing the knowledge base: Redesigning the function of cooperating teachers and college supervisors. *Journal of Teacher Education, 34*, 14-18.
- Goodwin, W. L. & Goodwin, L.D. (1996). *Understanding quantitative and qualitative research in early childhood education*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Guerrier, D. (1976). Student teaching: A team concept. *The Balance Sheet, 57*, 300-302.
- Morris, J.R. (1974). The effects of the university supervisor on the performance and adjustment of student teachers. *The Journal of Educational Research, 67*, 358-362.
- Patty, A. H. (1973). Classroom teachers will replace college supervisors. *Contemporary Education, 44*, 179-183.
- Roberts, T., & Dyer, J. (2004). *Student teacher perceptions of the characteristics of effective cooperating teachers: A Delphi study*. Proceedings for the 2004 Southern Agricultural Education Research Conference, Tulsa, OK.
- Silberman, C.E. (1970). *Crisis in the Classroom*, New York: Random House.
- Yates, J. (1982). Student teaching: Results of a recent survey. *Educational Research, 24*, 212-215
- Yee, A. H. (1968). Interpersonal relationships in the student teaching triad. *Journal of Teacher Education, 19*, 95-112.
- Melissa Sullivan is Assistant Professor of Early Childhood Education in the College of Education and Health Professions at Columbus State University. Prior to receiving her doctorate from Auburn University, she taught third grade in Montgomery, Alabama. Dr. Sullivan's teaching and research interests include helping students become reflective practitioners, and connecting preservice teachers with outstanding public school teachers.