



*About
the
Author*

Jody M. Blohm, *Assistant Professor of Mathematics Education and Teacher Education at Rowan College, has a B.S. and an M.A. in Mathematics and Secondary Education from Saint Joseph's University, Philadelphia, and an Ed.D. from Temple University.*

Dr. Blohm was a mathematics teacher and an administrator in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, where she developed and coordinated mathematics programs for remedial and gifted K-12 students.

The diversity of her background enables her to publish articles and conduct presentations in a variety of areas, such as elementary school mathematics, gender issues, teacher education, and the psychology of learning.

Her interests in playing the piano and painting landscapes have provided relaxation and are integrated into her teaching.

Coaching Cooperative Teachers to Be Effective Supervisors of Student Teachers



Jody M. Blohm

Many of us are very familiar with the goals of *America 2000*. In the rural community of Glassboro, however, we have already reached many of those national goals. You might call our program *Rowan 1993*. Through collaborative efforts between the faculty of the School of Education and Related Professional Studies (SERPS) and the public school districts where Rowan students are placed for field assignments, the goals of the teacher education program are being achieved through training sessions for cooperating teachers who supervise student teachers. This author has designed a model which incorporates the three major skills necessary for effective supervision, in conjunction with the philosophy and goals of the teacher education program: conferencing, classroom observation, and evaluation.

Since the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, teachers have endeavored to revise or even reinvent education. The major focus of the Study of the Education of Educators (SEE) was the curriculum in teacher education: the experiences that higher education institutions deliberately provide for prospective teachers.

According to Edmundson (1990):

In only three of the 29 institutions in the SEE were teacher preparation programs based on a coherent, articulated, and commonly shared vision of what it means to be a teacher. At the other 26 institutions, ... statements [acknowledged] that the programs are not based on a common definition of the purposes of schooling and the role of the teachers. (p. 718.)

Higher education institutions must prepare prospective teachers to be active participants in their own training. To make this goal realistic, cooperating teachers must interact with each prospective teacher and college supervisor. A coherent student teaching experience requires coordinated preservice and in-service preparation, which includes acquisition and application of the philosophy and goals of the teacher education program. To make the transition between theory and practice, student teachers should be paired with cooperating teachers who can demonstrate effective teaching strategies in their respective disciplines. However, cooperating teachers often feel they lack the pedagogical skills necessary to guide student teachers through this essential field-based experience. Student teachers often become confused because of the difference between their understanding of pedagogy learned in the teacher education program and what they are actually encountering in the field. Sometimes, student teachers, who are usually a minority for change, are confronted with cooperating teachers who are reluctant to change. The result can be a disappointing experience for both student teachers and cooperating teachers. In the long run, the learners will suffer. How can this conflict be avoided?

Cooperating teachers should be empowered to use their best professional judgment when mentoring student teachers. However, if the cooperating teachers are not fully aware of their empowerment or how to use their power, then they must be informed and trained to do so. An earlier study provides an alternative.

In 1986, as the result of a study conducted on preservice education, Bush, Moss, and Seiler proposed an alternative to traditional student teaching. The authors' main criticism was that in the traditional mode of student teaching there is the assumption that all the answers can be found in one semester in the classroom. In essence, they proposed a collaborative movement achieved through professional development teams with two goals: to supervise prospective teachers from the college or university, and to design a professional development plan for participating teachers. A college educator would lead the resulting collaborative professional development teams. A number of circumstances made the study successful, particularly the stipends provided by school districts for supervision and continuing education. A chief measure of the program's success is that it is still underway (1991).

National educational goals will never materialize unless attention is given to preservice education of prospective teachers and inservice education of supervising teachers. A number of higher education institutions is moving in the direction of revising teacher education programs, while some institutions are discontinuing or reducing course offerings in teacher education. The fact is that expectations for student achievement have not been reached. If students are not learning, the problem may well rest with the teacher. A possible solution is to provide better teacher preparation programs. The pilot for the Cooperating Teacher Training Model was developed over a period of four years through informal discussions with cooperating teachers. As part of this author's supervision framework, she centered the discussions on informing the cooperating teachers and the public schools' administrators about the revised teacher education program and expectations for student teaching requirements. At this time, a number of cooperating teachers voiced their concerns, including the following:

- their lack of knowledge about the new Rowan teacher education program

- their desire to better guide the student teacher
- their lack of continuing education in teaching strategies
- their need for training in the supervision of student teachers

Responding to this information, the author developed and distributed a survey to cooperating teachers assigned a student teacher in spring semester 1993.

This author then designed a generic training model for SERPS, addressing the skills necessary for effective supervision of student teachers and incorporating the goals and philosophy of the teacher education program at Rowan. Awarded a Separately Budgeted Research (SBR) grant, the author developed and implemented a pilot program in spring semester 1993 for the Department of Secondary Education. The basic composition of the model was generic and would only become content specific in the small group phase of training. The schema included a developmental framework for establishing a team network among the three participants in the field experience: the college supervisor, the student teacher, and the cooperating teacher. Upon completion of training, cooperating teachers were expected:

- to be aware of the philosophy and goals of the Rowan teacher education program
- to improve their mentoring skills (that is, observation, evaluation and conferencing)
- to provide more meaningful understanding of team collaboration in discussing student teachers' teaching
- to increase their awareness of current pedagogical trends and strategies in their content areas
- to improve professional working relationships between public schools and Rowan College
- to provide more productive preservice preparation for student teachers

Ultimately, cooperating teachers would understand the scope of supervising and training student teachers in collaboration with college supervisors. Cooperating teachers, communicating with student teachers, would use the same concepts and terminology the students acquired in pedagogy courses at Rowan. This mutual understanding would facilitate a smooth transition from theory to practice for the student teacher.

Program Design

The program was designed specifically to improve communication concerning the teacher education program and to establish open and frequent collaboration among the college supervisor, student teacher, and the cooperating teacher. In developing the program, it was essential to include the college supervisor, as well as the cooperating teacher, to obtain a collaborative network. In the program's design, three sessions are held three weeks apart during the first half of the semester, the timing of the meetings paralleling the developmental stages of the student teacher and the learning phases of cooperating teachers in applying these skills. Each training session occurred three weeks apart to provide adequate time for the cooperating teacher to incorporate and practice newly acquired skills in conjunction with the development stage of the student teacher. To facilitate a comprehensive framework for the second half of the semester, it was important to schedule the training sessions during the first half of the semester and to consider the results of the midterm evaluation. At the beginning of each training session, cooperating teachers completed a ten-question survey, expressing their perceptions of how effective they were in adapting the skills learned in the program. The survey used a Likert rating scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The questions developed for each session survey were aligned with the expected objectives for each session.

One of the most important aspects of the model is the involvement of the Rowan College supervisor, whether full-time or adjunct faculty. In previous discussions, cooperating

teachers expressed concern about whether or not the college supervisors communicated with them. The college supervisor's participation was addressed as a key component of the training model for cooperating teachers.

Research Basis of the Program

Originally, the pilot program was conducted as an experimental research study with a pre-test, post-test, and control group design. This author used a time-series design to analyze the results of the study, and, after the first eight weeks, determined how the cooperating teachers responded to the program. Statistical tests included a correlation analysis and a Chi-Square contingency table.

A pre- and post-survey determined how cooperating teachers needed to improve their supervision. The survey asked questions in five areas, each directly related to a specific function of supervision. These areas were evaluated:

- pre- and post-conferences with the student teacher
- observation of student teaching
- evaluation of student teaching
- cooperating teachers' knowledge of current pedagogy
- cooperating teachers' additional comments

The same survey and format were used before and after the training sessions for purposes of comparison.

Evaluation of the Program

The program's evaluation was consistent. In addition to the pre- and post-survey to determine perceptions before and after training, two additional surveys provided immediate feedback. They measured the participants' effectiveness in applying skills and served as a means of self-evaluation. Both of the additional surveys indicated high success in the cooperating teachers' perceptions of improving their skills. Cooperating teachers felt they more effectively communicated with the student teacher and college supervisor.

Results of the Surveys

The results confirmed the idea that cooperating teachers favored training to improve their supervision skills and pedagogical knowledge in their content areas. Many of the cooperating teachers indicated some knowledge of observational skills but did not feel confident in the application of those skills.

Regarding conferencing, ninety percent of cooperating teachers indicated the need to become better communicators with student teachers but were uncertain how to achieve this. Cooperating teachers and college supervisors also desired better communication skills because they often misunderstood each other's roles and responsibilities.

The third major area of concern was the method of evaluating the student teacher at midterm and at the end of the semester. The process was not always made clear to the cooperating teacher, which often resulted in an inadequate analysis of the student teacher's teaching capabilities.

The cooperating teachers were positive about being able to express their desires to become better supervisors, and they were grateful for the opportunity to fulfill those desires through training sessions. Self-evaluation questionnaires, administered at the beginning of each training session, were significant in showing how the cooperating teachers effectively implemented their newly acquired skills. Ninety-four percent believed they were more effective at supervising student teachers.

These results support the recommendations of various national educational organizations, as well as the National Commission on Teacher Education.

Conclusion

As a result of the training sessions, cooperating teachers now feel like an integral part of the student teaching experience. The team collaboration—among student teachers, college supervisors, and cooperating teachers—has been accomplished, according to most cooperating teachers in the spring and fall 1993 training sessions. Through the training sessions, the cooperating teachers were also introduced to Rowan's teacher

education program and philosophy. This has had a positive impact on the cooperating teachers, who have exhibited more confidence as supervisors.

In fall 1993, the Office of Professional Laboratory Experiences became responsible for maintaining the training program for cooperating teachers in the School of Education and Related Professional Studies. Training sessions were offered on two consecutive evenings to accommodate the departments of secondary education, elementary education, special education, music, art, and physical education. Participants included department chairpersons, college supervisors, and cooperating teachers. Training sessions are slated to continue for each succeeding semester. Cooperating teachers who complete a training session are awarded a certificate of accomplishment.

Student teachers noted that lines of communication were "more open," and discussions were more focused on specific teaching strategies, rather than on classroom management.

Informing school district superintendents and principals involved in supervising Rowan students has provided administrators with a better understanding of the student teaching process. It has also provided cooperating teachers and the college supervisor with a common goal—equal educational opportunities for Rowan and public school students.

References

- Bush, W., Moss, M., & Seiler, M. (1991). An alternative to traditional student teaching. *The Mathematics Teacher*, 84(7), 533-537.
- Edmundson, P. (1990, May). A normative look at the curriculum in teacher education. *Phi Delta Kappan*, pp. 717-722.
- Goodlad, J. (1991, December). A study of the education of educators: One year later. *Phi Delta Kappan*, pp. 311-316.
- Natriello, G., & Zumwalt, K. (1992). Challenges to an alternative route for teacher education. *The Changing Contexts of Teaching*, National Society for the Study of Education, 91(1), 59-78.
- Shor, I. (1986). Equality is excellence: Transforming teacher education and the learning process. *Harvard Educational Review*, 56(4), 406-426.
- Zumwalt, K. (1988). Are we improving or undermining teaching? *Critical Issues in Curriculum*. National Society for the Study of Education, 87(1), 148-174.



Jessie Price, Sixth Grade, Elmer School