

A New University Supervisor: Their Experiences and Enrichment

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Abstract

For various reasons, graduate students often hold the position of university supervisor. Because this population graduates every few years, first time supervisors are relatively common. In this qualitative case study, I explore the experiences of one graduate student who has just completed a supervisory assignment for the first time. Instead of focusing on the interpersonal dynamics of the supervisor's experiences, the results of this study focus on the supervisor's experiences of being in a position of authority, applying academic knowledge to practice, and understanding and interpreting professional standards into the context of the classroom. Another aspect that is explored is how these experiences enriched the graduate student, preparing him to be a better teacher educator. The results indicate several benefits of the supervisory experience, and that these benefits could be promoted as incentives for taking the position.

Beck and Kosnik (2002) point out professors have little incentive in supervising student teachers. The financial compensation offered for this position is typically small, and it is expected that the supervisor meet with the student teacher on their own time, without any official release time or class-load reduction (Goodlad, 1990). Often times, there is a lack of recognition for full time faculty members who supervise student teachers because the supervisory time is spent outside of the university. Because of these and other factors, the position of university supervisor often falls to graduate teaching assistants or adjunct faculty (Wilson, 2006). These people often take the job for the experience of it, because they are interested in becoming teacher educators and they feel the experience will be enriching for them professionally.

There have been many suggestions in the research literature on how to improve the student teacher experience. However, more effort needs to be made in analyzing the process, especially in different contexts (Clark, 2002). In particular, it seems warranted to analyze the experience from the prospective of a new university supervisor, as a unique member of the student teaching triad (S. K. Slick, 1997). Although S. K. Slick (1997, 1998a, 1998b) and Borko and Mayfield (1995) have explored the interpersonal relationships which a university supervisor forms, an extended view would include other experiences of the supervisor and how they benefit the university supervisor. Some experiences not addressed in prior research include:

- Being in a position of authority,
- Applying academic knowledge to practice,
- Understanding and interpreting professional standards into the context of the classroom.

In this study, I explore these themes.

Literature Review

A traditional university supervisor is a liaison between the academic world from which the student teacher is about to graduate, and the actual public school classroom. Ideally, they have K-12 teaching experience as well as graduate-level course work in education. A traditional triad model at the University of Alabama, for example, requires a university supervisor to meet the following criteria: (a) hold a Master's degree, (b) be certified to teach in the content area/grade level in which they supervise, and (c) have previous teaching experience (Wilson, 2006, p. 25).

Supervisors should be able to discuss both learning theory and methods with a student teacher. They can give alternative teaching strategies and ideas for the teacher's future professional development (McNamara, 1995). The supervisor should be alert to problems or disagreements between the student teacher and the cooperating teacher and be an arbitrator, or perhaps recommend a transfer of the student teacher (Duffy, 1987).

There are many studies which describe the positive impact of the university supervisor in the field experience of preservice teachers (e.g. Balk & Heathington, 1987; Kahn, 2001; Silva & Dana, 2001). However, there is not universal agreement regarding the role of the university supervisor in the student teacher triad (Gimbert & Nolan, 2003). Researchers have pointed out that in general, the supervisor-student teacher relationship has little impact on the student teacher's teaching perspective and practice (S. K. Slick, 1997). Some say the supervisor is the least important member of the triad and should be taken out altogether (Guyton & McIntyre, 1990).

In discussing the university supervisor at Texas A & M, Sienty (1997) sums up their limited role:

The university supervisor's responsibility was to go to the school, observe the student, confer with the student teacher and the public school teacher(s), and at the end of the semester, assign a grade. In this arrangement, public school teachers and university supervisors operated somewhat independently. They spoke, but communicated at length only if there was a problem with a student. (p. 507)

Additionally, it is easy to characterize the university supervisor as a "disenfranchised outsider" because they do not work at the school in which they supervise, and they are not currently teaching at the K-12 level (S. K. Slick, 1998b). With the supervisor only making a few trips to the placement school over the course of the semester, both student

teachers and cooperating teachers believe the supervisor is somewhat uninformed and out of touch with the student's real abilities (Freeland, 1979).

Despite the weaknesses and flaws in the three-member student teacher practicum (e.g. Bowman, 1979; Hoy & Woolfolk, 1989; Koehler 1988), this type of supervision system has its benefits. Student teachers are able to gradually work into a full load of classes under supervised conditions. Cooperating teachers are able to pass their expertise on to a new generation (Hoover, O'Shea, & Carroll, 1998; Painter & Brown, 1979), and often learn new things from their younger counterparts, frequently in the area of technology and its application to teaching (Kiraz, 2004). University supervisors are given a chance to apply their academic knowledge and are exposed to real-life situations faced by beginning teachers (S. K. Slick, 1998a). The arrangement has the potential to improve new teachers, revive veteran ones, and enlighten current and future teacher educators.

There are three types of experiences which are typically encountered as a university supervisor and which would potentially enrich a teacher educator. The first is being in a position of authority. The supervisor is the one who grades the student teacher, and thus finds himself or herself in a position of power. The second is applying academic knowledge directing towards classroom teaching (Jyrhama, 2001). Through dialogue and the grading process, the supervisor has a chance to impart his or her academic knowledge to the student teacher and indirectly to the cooperating teacher. The third experience is reading, understanding, interpreting, and explaining professional standards. Because most universities have State guidelines which must be incorporated into the accreditation of preservice teachers, verbose policy standards must be understood and interpreted to the student teacher, and examples must be given of classroom activities which meet these standards.

A university supervisor in Wilson's (2006) research study characterized the power relationships often found in the student teacher practicum.

...The cooperating teacher and the student teacher consider me the outsider. The student teacher and the cooperating teacher often work together to perform a "dog and pony show" for me. Many cooperating teachers feel that college supervisors are viewed as holding more authority since we actually give the student teachers the final grade. (p. 8)

The "power of the grade" possessed by the university supervisor, as well as the title "university supervisor," often compels the student teacher to be in readiness to do anything, or say anything, to make the supervisor happy. Dialogues can be formal and student teachers can hedge or decline to open up about things in the classroom, thinking that it might reflect badly in the final evaluation.

Yee (1969) argues that groups of three are by nature unstable. If the student teacher forms a strong relationship with the cooperating teacher, the university supervisor can feel insecure, or visa versa. Some cooperating teachers feel that they are left out of important decisions, such as assigning the final grade (Veal & Rikard, 1998). When there are conflicting ideas between the cooperating teacher and supervisor, the student teacher

often feels they must take sides, and most usually side with the cooperating teacher in pedagogical matters (Palonsky & Jacobson, 1988). In the alternative student teacher triad model in Wilson's (2006) study, they found that students who received grades lower than they had expected noted in journals certain "personality conflicts" (p. 10) they had with the supervisor. They even said the grader was "power hungry" (p. 10).

After each observation, it is customary for the more experienced university supervisor to hold a short conference with the student teacher. The tone and direction of this conference is set by the supervisor, perhaps over the items on the grading instrument, or certain events which occurred during the classroom observation. The University of Iowa found that their students had great concerns during their student teaching experience. Handling disinterested students, tracking student growth, and dealing with disciplinary problems were areas where these student teachers needed advice and encouragement (Freeland, 1979). Although this study is decades old, it seems reasonable to assume these areas of concern have not disappeared. Huling (1998) notes, "student teachers need careful guidance and mediation" (p. 3) in order for the student's field experience to be a success. This guidance is usually given in the form of advice after the classroom observation. Morehead, Lyman, and Foyle (2003), in chapter four of their book, provide a list of dialogue questions that can be used by supervisors to make these sessions more fruitful. In addition, there are a host of supervisory methods which can be used by the supervisor, from rigidly structured to completely unstructured methods (Fritz & Miller, 2003). Some models of supervision even allow students to access their supervisors whenever they have a question or need help (Shiveley & Poetter, 2002) and attempt to be more responsive to student teachers who are working off campus (Stacey & Fountain, 2001).

Students value feedback from cooperating teachers and university supervisors whom they perceive as professionals in the field (Anderson & Radencich, 2001). However, this exchange of advice and pedagogical knowledge is somewhat tenuous. Theoretical advice consistent with recent research studies is often more difficult to enact in a classroom than more traditional forms of instruction and student assignments. A student teacher named Eric explains how he attempted to integrate the Internet and group learning into a lesson (Weisner & Salkeld, 2004). Because of some miscalculations on his part, the class period was a disaster. He comments in his journal:

Well, I had a moment after that lesson where I wanted to bag the whole integrating technology and student-centered collaborative learning thing and get back to the basics...After the experience of this lesson I was depressed and again questioned my decision to be an educator. I thought I had failed and had no business being a teacher. As a student teacher, it is hard to take risks and fail. (p. 14)

Not all students are as fragile as Eric. Talvitie, Peltokallio, and Mannisto (2000) found several of their student teachers report their supervisors "had a strong influence on the changes they experienced" (p. 83). One student wrote that they were "cleverly guided (by the university supervisor) to experiment with new solutions" (p. 83). Other students felt the post-lesson conference between the

supervisor and the teacher “insulting at the beginning of the practicum, but later on they were able to accept feedback and deal with concerns touching them personally” (p. 83). Some of their students referred to the dialogue between the university supervisor and themselves as “therapeutic,” giving them support, approval, and encouragement. Borko and Mayfield (1995) found that university supervisors who took a more active role in their student teacher’s learning by holding longer counseling sessions and giving extensive feedback were better able to significantly influence their student teacher’s teaching methods.

Traditionally, when grading student teachers, supervisors give some kind of a letter grade (St. Maurice & Yudchitz, 2003). Rubrics that are coordinated with professional standards are often used as guides in this process. Franco, Hendrick, Huston, and Kim (2004) note that most institutions which oversee teacher preparation are moving “...increasingly toward performance-based assessment and licensure of teachers” (p. 2). In the State of Colorado for example, a student teacher must meet ten professional standards, with proficiencies based on formal classroom observations (Colorado Department of Education, 2005).

Reading and understanding these performance-based standards, often written in lofty, verbose language, can be a challenging experience for a new supervisor. Not only are these rubrics to be understood by the supervisor, but they must be explained to the student teacher in light of pedagogy, lesson plans, and assignment choices.

Participant and Setting

The participant, whom we will call Spencer, was a graduate teaching assistant at a mid-sized university in the western United States. He was enrolled in the Mathematics Education doctoral program, and was in the beginning of his second year. He had three years of High School mathematics teaching experience as well as some experience teaching students at the elementary and middle school level. He had never supervised student teachers at this or any other university. Ned, the student teacher Spencer was to supervise, was placed at a medium sized urban middle school. Ned’s cooperating teacher was a middle-aged man who had taught mathematics for over a decade in this particular school. He had never trained a student teacher before.

Method

The researcher was interested in what the university supervisor had to say in relation to these four areas:

- Being in a position of authority,
- Applying academic knowledge to practice,
- Understanding and interpreting professional standards into the context of the classroom, and
- How these experiences enriched the graduate student, preparing him to be a better teacher educator.

These themes were of interest because they had not been adequately addressed in previous research studies. To obtain data directly addressing these topics, the university supervisor responded in writing to each of the themes shortly after finishing their supervising task. Thus, the university supervisor wrote a reflective essay on his experiences at the end of the supervisory assignment specifically oriented towards the themes of interest to the researcher. The journal was not part of the requirements for his position, but was done as an independent activity.

During each of the class periods Spencer observed, he took extensive field notes. The completed rubrics used for grading the student teacher were also available. The journal, classroom observations, and the rubrics were the three data sources used in this study. The data were analyzed by themes (Patton, 2000).

Results

Being in a Position of Authority

Spencer explains that he was not expecting to be in a position of authority when he took the job of university supervisor.

I guess I should have probably expected it, I mean university “supervisor” means I’ll have to supervise. I guess I somehow thought the experience would be more like when teachers observe each other in the classroom, where they just watch them teach, and then have a discussion about what occurred in the classroom, what could be improved, and what was done really well. And that was part of this whole thing. We did talk about what went right and wrong during the class I observed, but I had these rubrics, and the student teacher didn’t seem to get it that he had to be proficient in each category, under the standards, he had to do what the standard called for or I wasn’t going to sign off on it.

Spencer went on to explain how Ned seemed to view him as a professor from a methods class or as someone intimately involved in the workings of the Education Department within the University. When Spencer and Ned first met, Ned would bring up professor’s names and ask him questions like, “Do you know when the final coordination banquet is?” Spencer had not been told of any banquet, nor had he ever heard of the professors Ned was talking about. Spencer explains:

You see, I was approached just after the fall semester started and asked if I could supervise a student teacher who was working near my house (I live quite a way from campus, and so they were having trouble finding someone to drive that far). The professor who asked me had called me into his office, and it seemed he was looking for the information he needed to give me, papers and forms, etc. He would open one drawer and dig through some papers and pull one piece of paper out. Then he would roll back on his wheelie-office-chair and open his desk drawer and dig and find another packet, I think it was one of the rubrics or sample rubrics, a

rubric a previous supervisor had filled out for me to use as an example. During this whole time he was talking in bits and pieces, from what I could make out I was supposed to go supervise this guy four times and use these rubrics somehow and then write a report. I had to be sure to fill out my mileage form and it would take maybe six weeks to get reimbursed.

When Spencer went into the first meeting with Ned and his cooperating teacher, he felt somewhat unprepared. Ned and the middle school teacher were both new to this experience and they were waiting for Spencer to explain the whole process to them, seeing him as the authority—someone with knowledge and answers. The only thing Spencer knew was that he was here to observe the student teach and that he “had a pile of papers in his lap which had to be filled out.” We must note that this is not an unusual experience for a new university supervisor (Clark, 2002; G. A. Slick, 1995).

When the day came for the fourth and final classroom observation, Ned had not yet shown proficiency in several of the standards contained in the grading rubric.

It wasn't that he [Ned] wasn't able to do it, meet the standards—they were mostly literacy standards, and you know he was so involved in the math content stuff that he just wanted, I think, for me to let him coast by without having to “know comprehension strategies, understand comprehension of specific materials; know and use a variety of texts to gather information, motivate individual reading...” and all this literacy stuff contained in the rubrics. It seemed at this point that he would look across the table at me and say, his eyes seemed to say, “Come on, I'm so busy, do I have to do this silly reading stuff in a math class?” I really felt I was in the position of authority at that point, and I told him, “Look, I know it might seem kind of out of place to have your students read independently, when you got all this math to teach, but this standard is important and I have to see you just once try an assignment of this type. Who knows, maybe you'll learn something and find it worthwhile.”

Spencer went on to explain that Ned was so preoccupied with his daily teaching load that he would hardly even think ahead or plan specific lessons when Spencer was observing. “In a way, this is what I wanted, because I wanted him just to teach like he always does and not pretend to be something he's not just when I'm here.” But Spencer said that he still had to observe Ned incorporate specific assignments into the classroom, such as literacy and technology assignments, before marking him proficient on the rubric. Spencer finally had to give a mini-lecture, chiding Ned that he either had to plan a literacy assignment to be done the next time he was present or he would not pass. “Actually, I wasn't sure if Ned knew what would happen if he didn't ‘pass.’ I didn't either. I wasn't sure I had the authority to actually stop a student teacher from graduating if they didn't perform.” A few days after this exchange occurred, Spencer was talking with the mathematics department secretary about observing student teachers and she made the comment that one student teacher didn't “pass” last year. Spencer was curious, and went to his coordinator and asked him about it. The coordinator related to Spencer that the supervisor should not sign off on anything unless they have seen it in the classroom. If the student does not demonstrate it, then they do not pass the field

experience and they do not become a teacher. “Thankfully, Ned got it together and presented a very nicely done literacy assignment during the next observation. That would have been very awkward if I would have to fail him, or have to tell him again, like he’s in the first grade or something, that he wasn’t following directions.”

Transmission of Academic Knowledge

Spencer related several experiences regarding his dialogues with Ned. Spencer saw these post-observation chatting sessions as an opportunity for him to share with Ned some of his knowledge about the learning theory of constructivism and its accompanying pedagogy.

Here I am, a graduate student taking a bunch of classes about the best ways to teach math, and I see Ned teaching and then I’m supposed to give him advice. I’m supposed to grade him by the rubrics, but you know, I’m not there just because I want him to be all perfect in the eyes of the State of Colorado—I want him to teach like I’ve been learning is the best way to teach. I want him to teach in a reformed way, using group work and having students communicate with each other.

Spencer, however, noticed several things at the very start of the supervisory period. First of all, Spencer could tell that Ned, as a new teacher, was overwhelmed. Ned was typing out full lesson plans for each class period he taught, and was staying up late at night trying to finish. Ned also ran a very teacher-centered classroom, and so after the school day, Ned was completely exhausted from talking, writing at the overhead, and grading papers.

I knew I had to tread lightly. I think I began to scare him after our first session, because I recommended he do group work, and then I said he could have students do more class presentations, and then I said this, and that, and his eyes got real big—I know now I should probably have just picked out one or two things to comment on, and then let him open up about them and share his opinions. But you know, I didn’t have a real plan when I went in there. I didn’t know what the best way to approach him.

Spencer also noticed that Ned was somewhat resistant to pedagogical change. He noted that Ned would hear Spencer’s suggestions and advice on how to make his classroom more student-centered, and ways to utilize group work, and Ned would listen and nod his head. But when the next observation time came, it seemed that Ned’s teaching was identical to what it was before. “I knew I either had to spend more time with Ned, really hearing what he was thinking about my recommendations, or else I maybe was just taking to the wall. He was polite and everything but not really influenced by what I had to say enough to try it. I often wondered how the cooperating teacher taught, maybe Ned was copying his teaching after him.” At this point, Spencer ran into a dilemma. To really make an impact with Ned, he would have to spend more time with him and perhaps even talk with Ned and the cooperating teacher about pedagogy.

It was hard though, because we were right in the middle of the school day, back to back classes, or it was this poor guy's lunch break. How was I going to talk with him longer? Did he even want me to? Did I want to? Would it do any good? Did I really know what the best way to teach was? And sadly, I thought about how little I was getting paid for this whole thing and why should I spend hours here. I think I whimpered out and stuck with the short sessions, the after the class observation sessions when we talked.

Spencer felt that if he was more a part of the middle school or if he felt like his contribution at the field site was more recognized and important in the University's eyes, he might have done more to teach Ned. As it was, Spencer felt he offered valuable advice to Ned that was based on current research on learning theory and instruction, and that he made sure Ned taught in a way consistent with State standards.

Reading and Explaining the Professional Standards

Though Spencer had rubrics to use in grading Ned, it was not always clear what the wording meant on the rubrics. Spencer said he didn't know what half the standards meant, and doubted whether Ned did either. The following is a typical example from the Knowledge of Literacy Standard:

Beginning secondary teachers understand the use of cueing systems. In order to meet this standard, teacher candidates will understand: meaning (semantics); visual system (graphophonics); structure of English language (syntax).

Spencer was a mathematics instructor, he did not know what "graphophonics" meant. However, it seemed to Spencer that this particular standard meant that Ned understood the English language, and so he marked him proficient.

Spencer relates another example from the Knowledge of Classroom and Instructional Management standard:

We had to read that thing over several times because this was one of those that Ned had a real hard time, or I guess was just reluctant to incorporate in a lesson. It said, "Work in cooperation with library media and other resource specialists in providing student instruction on how to access..." and I wanted Ned to take his students to the library or at least have Ned go talk to the librarian about relevant books or materials that were available in the school library. But Ned, he nodded his head, but wouldn't go talk to him, or whoever the librarian was. He did do a nice lesson which had students access and retrieve, just like the standard said, information off the Internet in the school computer lab. But I wasn't really sure if "other resource specialists" meant computer lab, or Internet was okay—or was it just the library? Or did it really matter? I mean, should I be so picky?

Spencer had given Ned a copy of the rubric to study and if he had any questions, told him to feel free to ask. Spencer told him that this was what he was to be graded on. But Ned never had any questions. It seemed that Ned never consulted the rubric or cared what the verbiage on it really meant. “Ned was totally relying on me to interpret the rubric, and I suppose that’s okay, I mean, I was the one who was grading, but it just seemed like I could read it in many different ways. Was the lesson he just conducted in line with Standard 1.4? It was kind of up to me. I tried to be faithful to the wording of the rubric, and now that I re-read it, it’s not so scary. But I remember the first time I read it, I didn’t have a clue.”

Teacher Educator Enrichment

When Spencer explained why he agreed to be student supervisor, he noted: I had heard that being a student supervisor looked good on your resume. But there was more to it. I felt like it had been a while since I had been in a classroom. I had only been teaching in two schools and there are lots of schools out there, and it would be nice to see real graduates in their student teaching assignments. I always am thinking, when I teach preservice teachers in math content classes, am I really preparing them for their future classroom? I mean, do I have any idea what life will be like? I always try to give not only mathematics instruction, but weave in with it ideas about how they could really apply the knowledge in the classroom and offer some anecdotal stories which illustrate to them mistakes I’ve seen, and successes I’ve seen in real classrooms.

Spencer really wanted to supervise student teachers because he felt that in many ways, being aware of classroom life and being in touch with public schools, teachers, and graduating students, would make him a better instructor of undergraduate students. “Just being there reminded me about how these guys have to teach five or six classes a day, almost back-to-back, with a 30-minute lunch—and that it was a five-day-a-week deal. It’s so easy to forget this at the University. I mean, the students were noisy and they were so like kids instead of university students. It was a different atmosphere altogether.”

Spencer also felt that “the whole thing about reading those professional rubrics was pretty valuable. Now I know a little better what I can do as a college instructor to prepare them for the way they will be expected to teach by the State of Colorado.” In particular, Spencer felt like he should include more assignments in his preservice content classes which worked in literacy and technology.

It seems to be a common notion, the separation between math and literacy, and math and technology, where never the twain shall meet type of attitude. There’s those teachers who believe in calculators and computers and those that don’t. But now I can tell them, hey, I just supervised a teacher who thought that way, and he wasn’t able to pass his field training until he showed me he could incorporate technology with mathematics. Sometimes in the past I’ve felt recommendations I’ve made were not really taken seriously by students because they didn’t believe I really

knew what teachers faced. Here I am a previous high school and college teacher, and they are elementary teachers, going to be elementary teachers most of them, and middle school teachers. I think this really broadened my base as far as practical experience directly related to lower grades.

Spencer also felt that the experience of being an authority to the student teacher and in a sense the cooperating teacher, was a valuable experience. “It was definitely a confidence boost to me, that wow, I had something to share with these people in terms of teaching and learning, that they had to listen to me, because I was the one who was going to grade.” Spencer added that the experience made him bolder in sharing his knowledge about learning. Yet he also found that as an authority figure, “I had to watch out and remember that I was here to help this guy be a better teacher, and not just that, but to encourage him, work with him, and not put too much on him at one time.” Spencer felt that this aspect of the supervisory assignment enriched him professionally because it gave him confidence to share his own pedagogical knowledge, as well as how to be an effective leader. “I’ve been in authority before, like in the classroom, and I’ve come to realize that being in authority is a hard job. It’s a balancing act. I have to keep the students in line, have them toe the line, so to speak, and yet I have to be very careful of their feelings and perspectives, they can shut you out or tune you out so fast, and then, great, you’re in authority over people who don’t listen to you!” Spencer also said that he learned how to quickly make working relationships with the cooperating teacher and student teacher and how to delegate. “The cooperating teacher was new to this too, and I let him fill out his sections of the rubrics without me being all over him, in his face about things. I learned to let the student teacher pick his own assignments, things which he wanted to do and not try to give him some lesson I thought would be good to teach.” Overall, the authority inherent in the supervision is a wonderful learning experience for a teacher educator who will most likely assume the role of a course coordinator, committee leader, or doctoral advisor in the future.

Spencer also noted that the opportunity given him during this student teacher supervision to transmit and apply his academic pedagogical knowledge to classroom practice was a worthwhile experience. Spencer feels very strongly that students learn best when taught in a way consistent with constructivism. However, the student teacher, Ned, was teaching in “basically, a traditional way—direct instruction, a few students answering questions on the overhead here and there.” But after Spencer discussed this with Ned, he found that Ned felt like he was barely holding the class together in terms of classroom management. Ned was afraid. He was afraid if he had the students do more group work, he would lose control of the students and there would be more disciplinary problems.

And so this was a great practical experience for me, very enriching, because here I had all this learning theory knowledge, and had even applied in my college level classes, which I taught in a constructivist way, but this wasn’t college, this was middle school. And so I tried my best to have him do as I’ve learned in Education classes, don’t try to change everything about your teaching in a day, but just pick like one or two things. So I tried to get Ned to hold everything he was doing the same, just

try to do a group assignment once. Then I tried to get him to have the students present to the class some of their thinking, much more than just having them write an answer to a computation on the overhead.

Spencer saw these knowledge transmission attempts as enriching to a teacher educator because it was a real life situation. "It wasn't some theoretical classroom, this was real, with real students and a real teacher." Spencer said that teaching student teachers in the classroom brings up many challenges not normally encountered when teaching preservice teachers in a college class. "I think it keeps a college instructor on his toes. I think it will also make my instruction much more authentic and practical. It won't be so theoretical, but I will have watched and tested my pedagogy in the classroom."

Besides all these valuable experiences Spencer brought up, teacher educators could be enriched in several additional ways by their supervision assignment. Hopefully, they make friends and acquaintances within public schools and these contacts can be approached later, and their classrooms potentially open to future research studies. In Spencer's case, he even met the principal of the middle school one day while the principal was dribbling a soccer ball down the hallway, (it seemed the ball had escaped from the gymnasium and the principal was returning it). In the humor of the situation, they talked for a few minutes. This might be all that Spencer needs in order to call up this school in the future and ask for the principal's assistance in a research study, or the names of teachers who might be willing to participate. Secondly, a supervisor over the course of a few years can begin to know the different local schools, the teachers, the type of students, and their neighborhoods. These same K-12 students might themselves become preservice teachers at the university, and now the teacher educator is more knowledgeable about where they came from. The teacher educator now has some knowledge of the local schools and can be a resource for their preservice teachers who are intending to stay and teach somewhere nearby. In a word, this contact and familiarity with different schools can only help a teacher educator build better professional relationships with their students.

Conclusion

After analyzing Spencer's experiences, one can see how valuable such a supervisory experience would be for a future or current teacher educator. However, it seems odd that the University in this study offers so little guidance and incentive for supervisors to supervise student teachers. This has its advantages and disadvantages. A supervisor has considerable freedom and independence during the supervision, and can operate as a professional—making decisions and giving advice according to their own pedagogical perspectives and personal beliefs about teaching and learning. The disadvantages include low pay, variable quality of supervision (Zeichner, 1990), and a lack of accountability.

The purpose of this study was not to offer recommendations for the improvement of the student teacher practicum. However, it would appear that those looking for areas in which the triad could be improved might learn from this case study that the university supervisor is enriched by this experience and that these enrichments could be advertised

and promoted. This would give supervisors the acknowledgement they seem to need (Beck and Kosnik, 2002) and also increase the quantity and quality of persons within the pool of potential supervisors.

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