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# Analyzing Levels of Feedback Delivered By Cooperating Teachers and Supervisors in a Teacher Internship: A Case Study

## Abstract

This research analyzed the feedback delivered by cooperating teachers and university supervisors in an internship, and reports how student teachers perceived the feedback they received during debriefing sessions with their mentors. Hattie and Timperley's (2007) framework for conceptualizing effective feedback was used to analyze cooperating teachers' and field supervisor' assessment of the student teachers' classroom instruction. Findings from two surveys, documents, and interviews revealed a preponderance of feedback that was devoted to instruction and classroom management with a relative paucity of feedback dedicated to the processing of instruction, consideration of student learning, and development of self-reflection in the student teachers. Implications from this study inform the internship experience and the role systematic and focused feedback occupies in fostering the reflective practitioners' dispositions and deeper opportunities learning to teach.

## Keywords

Education, University, Teachers, Supervisors, Internship, Feedback, Mentoring, Beginning teachers

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## **ANALYZING LEVELS OF FEEDBACK DELIVERED BY COOPERATING TEACHERS AND SUPERVISORS IN A TEACHER INTERNSHIP: A CASE STUDY**

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**Abstract:** This research analyzed the feedback delivered by cooperating teachers and university supervisors in an internship, and reports how student teachers perceived the feedback they received during debriefing sessions with their mentors. Hattie and Timperley's (2007) framework for conceptualizing effective feedback was used to analyze cooperating teachers' and field supervisor' assessment of the student teachers' classroom instruction. Findings from two surveys, documents, and interviews revealed a preponderance of feedback that was devoted to instruction and classroom management with a relative paucity of feedback dedicated to the processing of instruction, consideration of student learning, and development of self-reflection in the student teachers. Implications from this study inform the internship experience and the role systematic and focused feedback occupies in fostering the reflective practitioners' dispositions and deeper opportunities learning to teach.

**Keywords:** internship, feedback, mentoring, beginning teachers

The internship, apprenticeship, or clinical experience is an essential component in the training and preparation required in many professions – including medicine, architecture, psychology, accounting, engineering, and education, to name a few. Inherent in the teacher internship experience is the beginning teachers' classroom application. Under the supervision of mentors, knowledge and skills accumulated from course work develop the beginning teacher's decision-making skills, foster critically thinking abilities, and instill self-reflective abilities in the classroom (Bransford et al., 2005; Danielson, 1996; Jenlink & Jenlink, 2005). It is understood that upon successful completion of an internship, a novice educator has acquired the knowledge, abilities, and dispositions to competently enter the teaching profession.

The teacher internship has been studied from multiple perspectives to reveal the complex interactions that impact and influence the individual's experience and professional development (Borko & Mayfield, 1995). Upheld as central to the good preparation of future educators and the improvement of schools, the internship experience is viewed as a fundamental element of a teacher education program yet contested, at the same time, over the degree of influence that an internship has on prospective teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and practices (Clift & Brady, 2005; Lortie, 1975). The internship has been described as an experience to learn *from* teaching as well as learn *for* teaching to be "reflective practitioners who can be proactive in their own professional teaching" (Darling-Hammond, 2006, pp. 109-110; Schön, 1983, c.f.). It is the guidance, modeling, coaching, mentorship, and feedback offered by expert educators or mentors

during regular debriefing sessions that are critically important in the development of student teachers' ability to navigate complex classroom dynamics (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2005; Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, Grossman, Rust, & Shulman, 2005; Glickman, 1990; Haggard & McIntyre, 2006; Killian & Wilkins, 2009; Shulman, 2004b). Contingent upon this claim, however, is the assumption that mentors – cooperating teachers and university supervisors – provide critical feedback that contributes to the novice teacher's understanding about his or her instruction, subject matter, and student learning.

My study contributes to the growing body of research on student teaching that considered the complex and multiple conversations between the student teacher and his or her cooperating teacher and supervisor that shaped the student teacher's knowledge of learning how to teach (Feiman-Nemser, 2008; Valencia, Martin, Place, & Grossman, 2009). With few exceptions, there is a relative silence in the literature not only to the vital role that mentors' critical feedback occupies in developing novice teachers' pedagogical content knowledge but how a deeper and more rigorous level of feedback might contribute to advancing the import of and quality in teacher education internship programs. Interview, survey, and document data in my study revealed a preponderance of low-level feedback from mentors that eclipsed a deeper discussion of educational assumptions and teaching procedures. To that end, four questions framed this investigation:

1. After lessons have been observed, what feedback is communicated by mentors to the student teachers?
2. How does the feedback inform the student teachers' knowledge of pedagogy, subject matter, and principles of student learning?
3. How does the feedback identified by mentors change over the internship?
4. How are student teachers interpreting and integrating the feedback advanced by their mentors?

Answers to these questions contribute to a deeper understanding of how student teachers may modify their instruction, reflect upon their classroom instruction, and learn to teach. I begin with a review of literature explicating the practices endemic to teacher internship programs before describing Hattie and Timperley's (2007) model for conceptualizing effective feedback. The research design adopted in this study is then explained and findings collected from surveys, interviews, and documents analyzed. The conclusion advances recommendations for teacher education programs to (a) include more rigorous training programs for mentors that include deeper levels of feedback to foster the development of pedagogical content knowledge in student teachers, and (b) develop transparent teacher observation and evaluation instruments that impact the beginning teachers' thinking about instruction and student learning – with each measure contributing to the educators' professional training and advancing the quality of teacher education internship programs.

### The Internship Experience

The value of an internship is held to be the single most important experience for beginning teachers to reflect on, evaluate, and learn how to teach under the mentorship and evaluation of a cooperating teacher and university supervisor (Gardiner, 2009; Glickman, 1990; Gordon, 1991;

Shulman, 2004c). One outcome for the internship program is to cultivate the development of a professional, reflective practitioner who possesses deeper, nuanced knowledge of instruction, content, and student learning gained through classroom teaching. Internships vary, however, both within and across programs. From less than eight weeks to more than thirty weeks, some teacher education programs have different ideas about what the internship experience ought to accomplish, how cooperating teachers are recruited, how many different settings a student teacher should experience, and when and where the programs should occur and over what period of time (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Zeichner & Conklin, 2008). It is assumed, nevertheless, that the internship experience is the best place to discover – through trial and error – the complexities of classroom teaching and “the best people from whom to learn about these complexities” (Haggard & McIntyre, 2006, p. 17). The internship experience allows opportunities to guide all or part of the student teachers’ instruction, occasions to implement activities, develop a cognitive map of the key elements of the classroom and school environment, and receive feedback about how far they are getting instruction right and in what respects they are getting it wrong (Clift & Brady, 2005; Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 1999).

The assessment of the student teachers’ performance in an internship is fraught with questions of standardization and subjectivity (Darling-Hammond, Wise, & Klein, 1999). This extends to broader questions asked about the purpose of teacher education (Darling-Hammond, 2006, 2008; Hansen, 2008; Zeichner & Conklin, 2008) and teacher knowledge (Howard & Aleman, 2008). Research has investigated the internship and student teachers’ conceptions of teaching and learning. It has also identified characteristics of expert teachers’ thinking frequently in direct comparison with novice teachers’ thinking (Brown & McIntyre, 1993; Tom, 1984; Wang & Odell, 2002) and revealed the understandings, skills, attitudes, and habits student teachers who need to engage systematically in reflexive self-examination of their developing knowledge (Haggard & McIntyre, 2006).

Concomitant with the mentors’ assessment of student teachers’ classroom practices is a recognition that beginning teachers move through cognitive and social stages of development to become a teacher (Fuller, 1969; Gordon, 1991; Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 1996). At least four stages of learning to become a teacher have been identified: learning to think like a teacher, learning to know like a teacher, learning to feel like a teacher, and learning to act like a teacher (Feiman-Nemser, 2008). Individuals at the earliest stage possess survival concerns such as perceived adequacy as a teacher, class control, being liked by students, and preoccupation with supervisors’ opinions as pertaining to a passing grade for the course (Fuller & Brown, 1975). In the second stage, issues related to the teaching environment and teaching responsibilities are paramount: working with too many students, time pressures, and trying to perform well. At this stage, student teachers report feelings of inadequacy when the cooperating teacher altered or criticized their activity “however sensitively it might have been done” (Furlong & Maynard, 1995, p. 84). The highest stage of learning to become a teacher relates to the social and emotional needs of the students as well as concerns about the students’ development, determining curriculum material, and response to feedback (Fuller & Brown, 1975). Academic concerns at this stage include diagnosing and meeting individual needs, sparking unmotivated students, and facilitating students’ intellectual and emotional development.

### *Mentors and Supervision*

Mentoring student teachers is a complex, contextualized, and dynamic process requiring a specialized body of knowledge (Gardiner, 2009). The student teacher often works under the mentorship of a cooperating teacher and a supervisor for an extended period of time, receiving feedback on classroom instruction as well as information about a school culture. While graduate-level preparation of supervision focuses on systematic observation and feedback as well as conferencing skills that contribute to effective supervision, Killian and Wilkins (2009) found little evidence that supervisors were using the tools learned in a mentoring workshop. Furlong and Maynard (1995) queried whether mentors' questions that ask student teachers to reflect on deeper and more profound issues about their teaching – moving from routine thinking to reflection-on-action thinking (Schön, 1983) – will produce either a better teacher or whether reflection is something that only occurs when one asks particular sorts of questions about the nature of pedagogy and how children learn. Further, the same authors (Furlong & Maynard, 1995) claimed that feedback was inadequate if it caricatured teaching as transmitting knowledge or following simple rules without also involving a discussion of educational and moral assumptions of teaching and learning.

Mentors can impact the professional growth of student teachers' teaching styles and strategies. For instance, mentors help student teachers solve problems and provide social, emotional, and moral support (Gordon, 1991), inform methods and approaches to improve instruction (Glickman, 1990), connect knowledge with learners by being assessment-centered (Bransford et al., 2005), and highlight the relationship between teaching and how children learn (Bransford et al., 1999). Mentoring models typically reflect two general frameworks: process – reflection and inquiry, and product – apprenticeship and observation (Gardiner, 2009). With careful scaffolding and feedback, student teachers can move from simplistic perspectives about the causes of classroom events to much more expert understandings of how aspects of teaching and student development influence learning.

Through formal and informal discussions, mentors engage student teachers' thinking about the complexity of teaching and multiple decisions confronting a classroom teacher (Gordon, 1991; Shulman, 2004b). Mentors also highlight the student teachers' decision-making process, underscoring an organic approach that rarely follows a clinical, linear method adopted by many physicians, for example (Groopman, 2007). Glickman (1990) conceptualized supervision into three interpersonal approaches when delivering feedback: directive, collaborative, and nondirective. While claiming there was no single best interpersonal model to use when supervising teachers, Glickman called for mentors, or instructional leaders, to develop a repertoire of approaches when providing feedback, and to match the method with the student teacher's developmental characteristics to cultivate a receptive relationship that will positively impact the student teacher's decision-making abilities. This is achieved by gradually shifting from either a directive to a collaborative approach or from a collaborative to a nondirective approach.

If teaching is "so subtle, so complex, so individual, and so context-related that it can only adequately be understood in relation to particular practice, not in general" (Hagger & McIntyre, 2006, p. 33), how does the mentor's feedback acknowledge the complexities of classroom life,

underscore the importance of student learning, and mediate the development of the student teacher's pedagogical content knowledge? The following sections address these questions by first describing the conceptual framework adopted in this study before outlining the methodological design implemented and interpretation of data collected from surveys, interviews, and document data.

### Conceptual Framework

Hattie and Timperley (2007) identified four levels of feedback, with each successive level related to its effectiveness: feedback about the self as a person (FS), feedback about the task (FT), feedback about the processing of the task (FP), and feedback about self-regulation (FR). The adoption of this framework for conceptualizing effective feedback was used to systematically code and interpret the feedback communicated by cooperating teachers and field supervisors during lesson debriefing sessions as reported in interviews, documents, and mid- and post-internship survey data.

Personal feedback (FS) that expresses positive – and sometimes negative – evaluations about the individual “contains little task-related information and is rarely converted into more engagement, commitment to learning goals, enhanced self-efficacy, or understanding about the task” (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 96). Personal feedback (FS) can impact learning only if it leads to “changes in students’ effort, engagement, or feelings of efficacy in relation to the learning or to the strategies they use when they are attempting to understand tasks” (p. 96). In this context, for example, mentor’s feedback may praise the individual’s instructional abilities to bolster the student teacher’s level of confidence.

In contrast, feedback about the task (FT) focuses on how well a task is being accomplished or performed. A concern with feedback at the task level is that it does not generalize to other areas and may encourage learners to focus on the immediate goal and not the strategies to attain a goal. This type of feedback is most effective when it moves the learner from task to processing, and then from processing to regulation consideration. That is, when feedback aids in “building cues and information regarding erroneous hypothesis and ideas, and then leads to the development of more effective and efficient strategies for processing and understanding” (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p.102). Task feedback (FT) would relate, for example, to mentors’ observations of how the student teacher’s instruction was delivered to the students, or to comments concerned with classroom management, or to the pacing of a lesson.

The most effective forms of feedback identified by Hattie and Timperley (2007) related to the processing and mastery of tasks. Processing of the task (FP) is concerned with the procedures underlying, relating, and extending a task. Feedback about processing identifies strategies for error detection. Feedback is most beneficial when it helps students “reject erroneous hypotheses and provides cues to directions for searching and strategizing” (Hattie & Timperley, p.102). At this level, a deeper understanding is developed in the learner for it involves the construction of meaning and relates to understanding relationships, cognitive processes, and transference to other more difficult or untried tasks. Thus, mentors in an internship may ask student teachers to consider integrating higher-order questioning strategies or differentiating instruction to underscore the relationship between student learning and teaching.

Feedback about self-regulation (FR) connects the individual's ability to monitor, direct, and regulate actions toward a learning goal. At this level, self-assessment is a self-regulatory mechanism that selects and interprets information in ways that provide feedback. Hattie and Timperley (2007) identified six major aspects of self-regulation that mediated effective feedback: the capacity to create internal feedback and to self-assess, the willingness to invest effort into seeking and dealing with feedback information, the degree of confidence or certainty in the correctness of the response, the attributions about success or failure, and the level of proficiency at seeking assistance. Mentors may, for instance, ask the student teacher to not only reflect upon his or her teaching through self-assessment of instruction, student learning, and delivery of subject matter, but seek additional feedback from other mentors or colleagues. The following sections analyze surveys, interviews, and documents collected from cooperating teachers, supervisors, and student teachers through Hattie and Timpersley's four levels of feedback.

### Methodology

A 15-week internship experience was required for teacher certification through a college of education in the southeast of the United States where this study was conducted. Two anonymous surveys were distributed in a spring semester to cooperating teachers and field supervisors of student teachers placed in 67 primary and secondary schools; all student teachers were provided with the survey as well. The survey questions were developed with three colleagues from the college of education where I was employed and pilot tested with a small sample of cooperating teachers, supervisors, and student teachers for validity and reliability.

In week seven of the internship, 47 student teachers responded to the first online survey. Student teachers were asked to provide some demographic information, identify their primary area of instruction, and describe what feedback was identified by the cooperating teacher and field supervisor in the most recent debriefing meeting. Student teachers were also asked in the survey to assess the cooperating teacher's and field supervisor's analysis of their teaching and to identify what elements, if any, of the mentors' feedback were integrated into their instruction. Similarly, 36 cooperating teachers and 24 field supervisors provided information on the first online survey about their primary area of instruction, years of experience mentoring, and frequency providing feedback during the internship. Participating cooperating teachers and field supervisors also identified specific feedback that they targeted for the student teachers in the most recent debriefing session and reflected upon whether the student teachers incorporated the suggested feedback in subsequent taught lessons.

Student teachers received the second survey at the end of the internship in a face-to-face plenary session conducted by college of education faculty. The second online survey was distributed to cooperating teachers and field supervisors at the end of the internship. Of the 170 student teachers who completed the surveys, 150 were females between the ages of 18 and 24 years. More than half of the student teachers completed their internship in an elementary school, with the remaining equally distributed in a middle or high school.



While the second survey to mentors and student teachers included the same demographic and background questions as identified in the first survey, the open-ended questions in the second survey asked mentors and student teachers to identify and reflect on the targeted feedback delivered in the latter weeks of the internship. In addition, mentors were asked to describe whether student teachers incorporated the suggested feedback in their instruction while student teachers were asked to consider how the mentors' feedback changed their instruction or informed their perceptions of teaching. For comparison and validity purposes, responses in the first survey were related to the second to determine changes over time in the mentors' feedback and to analyze levels of feedback identified through Hattie and Timperley's (2007) framework.

Semi-structured interviews supplemented surveys to gain a deeper understanding of the conversation between mentors and student teachers (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The interviews with cooperating teachers and field supervisors sought to explore and develop the levels of feedback delivered to student teachers as identified on the survey data. Interviews with student teachers probed their perceptions and declared adoption of the feedback advanced by the cooperating teacher and field supervisor during debriefing sessions. Protecting confidentiality for each interviewee, the interviews were conducted with student teachers (n=15), cooperating teachers (n=8), and field supervisors (n=6), all of whom self-selected themselves on the second survey over a two-week period immediately following the internship. To achieve triangulation of the data, additional data were collected through program survey documents distributed during the same period: (a) EBI (Educational Benchmarking, Inc., 2006) report, (b) Teacher Education Exit Assessment, and (c) the College of Education's exit surveys from the student teachers' evaluation of the teacher education program, the internship experience, and their cooperating teacher and field supervisor.

### Data Analysis

Five reoccurring themes emerged from the survey, interview, and document data that were also analyzed by two colleagues for inter-rater reliability using Hattie and Timpersley's (2007) four levels of feedback described above. The first theme – support – was related to the cooperating teachers' and field supervisors' claim that it was important to motivate and provide encouragement to the student teacher after an observed lesson, while at the same time maintaining a positive rapport with the beginning teachers. In these instances, the mentors communicated to the student teachers the importance of developing their confidence and poise in the classroom, as well as identified the need to improve one's voice, projection, tone, and inflection while speaking in class. As a form of feedback, this theme related to Hattie and Timperley's personal feedback (FS) for it impacted feelings of efficacy, but rarely related to the student teachers' deeper understanding about instruction or student learning.

Cooperating teachers' and supervisors' feedback also underscored the need to adopt better classroom management strategies. This second theme – control – called attention to the student teachers' absence of controlling their learners and highlighted the dynamics of improper learner behaviors. Elements that framed the mentors' feedback of classroom management were concerned with developing control of learners' behavior, maintaining assertive discipline, circulating around the classroom, monitoring inappropriate or off-task learner actions, and integrating non-verbal cues to gain learners' attention.

The third theme – instruction – received an inordinate amount of attention from the mentors in the lesson debriefing sessions. In this category, feedback on instruction was connected with monitoring the pacing of a lesson, integrating effective transitions, developing effective lesson opening and closing strategies, incorporating longer wait-time, selecting and organizing the sequence of activities in a lesson, connecting material, improving direct instructional strategies, infusing available technology, and creating small groups or student pairs to disrupt the initiate-respond-evaluate (IRE) pattern of interactions and develop collaborative learning. Feedback related to the second and third themes connect to Hattie and Timperley's task feedback (TF) as it underscored greater attention to effective and efficient strategies for understanding and developing classroom management and instruction.

The fourth theme – processing – asked student teachers to develop strategies that extended their instruction through an interactive approach, and consider approaches to integrate the participation of a greater number of students in a lesson. Cooperating teachers and field supervisors framed the debriefing sessions by suggesting that student teachers develop higher-order questions as well as paraphrase directions for ELLs (English Language Learners). In addition, mentors asked student teachers to reflect on the integration of alternative assessments, provide immediate and specific feedback, differentiate instruction, provide a greater number of examples during instruction, develop simple explanations, integrate real-life examples related to the content, interact more often with special needs students, and monitor the flow of a discussion. This form of feedback, relating to Hattie and Timpersley's processing of the task (FP), approaches a deeper conceptualization of pedagogical content knowledge in contrast to the previous levels of feedback for student teachers are asked to consider a more nuanced understanding of instruction that impacts students' learning.

Reflection was the fifth theme identified in lesson debriefings. At this level of feedback, mentors asked student teachers to self-assess their instruction and to ruminate on how a lesson impacted student learning. Student teachers were also asked to critically assess a taught lesson by identifying the strengths, weaknesses, and changes they would implement to positively impact their instruction and student learning. In addition, cooperating teachers and field supervisors queried the relationship between assessment and instruction, as well as how to integrate different teaching styles to impact multiple student learning styles. This feedback paralleled Hattie and Timperley's level of self-reflection (FR), as mentors challenged student teachers to cogitate on their instruction and queried on how to effectively assess students. The next section categorizes the five themes according to the feedback advanced by the mentors' and student teachers' perception of the same feedback. The results section also determines a frequency of feedback themes reported by the student teachers and mentors, and considers possible consequences for the disparate weighting of feedback according to Hattie and Timperley's framework.

## Results

### *Feedback Reported by Cooperating Teachers*

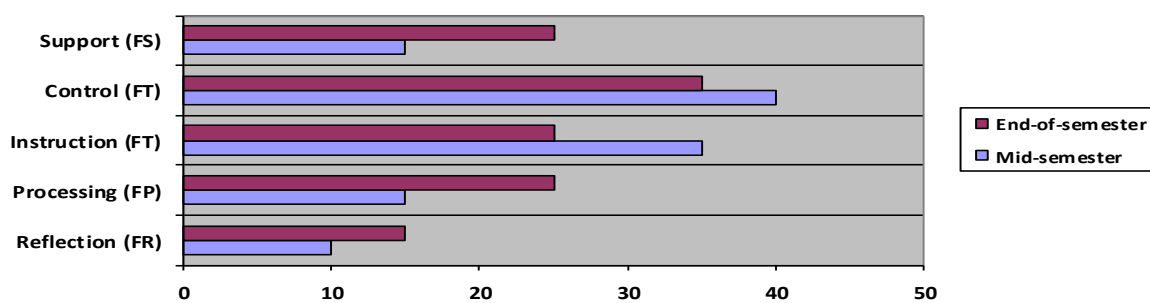
Of the 42 public school cooperating teachers who responded to the online surveys, 34 were female, two-thirds of the respondents possessed a master's degree, and three-quarters taught for

at least six years. Approximately 58% of the cooperating teachers supervised a student teacher in an elementary school, 17% in a middle school, and 25% in a high school. Half of the cooperating teachers claimed experience mentoring student teachers for at least six years, and a larger percentage acknowledged using the college of education's lesson evaluation form as an instrument to collect observation data of the student teachers' classroom instruction. All cooperating teachers declared conducting pre- and post-observations. The vast majority stated that evaluative feedback was provided immediately after the student teacher taught a lesson, at the end of the school day, or the following day or later in the week. According to one interviewed student teacher, feedback was delivered on one occasion by a cooperating teacher during a lesson through the discrete passing of a sheet of paper identifying an incorrect mathematical explanation.

For some cooperating teachers, student teachers were judged to possess dispositional qualities of openness and flexibility that fostered a reciprocal relationship. For instance, the student teachers' integration of technology or incorporation of a creative classroom activity was cited as instances that positively informed the cooperating teachers' instruction. Cooperating teachers also identified the responses to and implementation of suggested feedback offered to the student teacher during the debriefing sessions: some claimed that student teachers were "very receptive and open to my suggestions" and "utilized many of my suggestions." A few, however, noted that either "change [in the student teacher's teaching] was not forthcoming" or "[she] did not correct her instructional practices to include my suggestions."

Cooperating teachers reported that the debriefing sessions focused on identifying the strengths and shortcomings of a student teachers' instruction. Further, cooperating teachers underscored the student teachers' level of confidence and assertiveness when interacting with learners, as well as highlighting the importance of classroom management. Questioning strategies and using assessment to drive instruction were also communicated in the debriefing conversations, but not to the same regularity as issues related to classroom management concerns. Figure 1 categorizes the frequency of themes communicated by cooperating teachers in debriefing sessions with student teachers.

Figure 1  
Frequency of Cooperating Teachers' Feedback Communicated in an Internship



The weighted feedback from cooperating teachers toward issues concerning classroom control and instructional strategies remained relatively consistent throughout the debriefing sessions. While there was an increase from the cooperating teachers' feedback reported during the end-of-semester survey data related to the student teachers' processing (FP) and reflection (FR), the cooperating teachers' analysis remained focused on evaluating the student teachers' instruction (FT) and addressing issues related to the control of student behavior (FT). The slight amplification of the cooperating teachers' FP and FR feedback from the mid- to end-of-semester may be reflective of the student teachers' greater confidence and integration of varied strategies received from their mentors. Cooperating teachers explained the emphasis on instruction and classroom management as contingent on the student teachers' relative inexperience:

Generally by the time they get to me, they are pretty adept at the teaching part. A lot of time it is classroom management because usually that is what they are the weakest in because they haven't had the experience and they haven't been released to have that kind of experience. (Elementary school teacher, I)

The emphasis on developing instructional strategies is in contrast to feedback offered about the processing of instruction and assessment of student learning. Some cooperating teachers also asked student teachers to consider "higher-level questions to foster more higher order thinking [in students]", to self-reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of a lesson, and to consider how students were learning:

[I will] give them suggestions of how they could improve what they did wrong. Then I wait for them to say how the lesson went. Maybe [they] have something better to offer. I will ask, „How do you think you could have solved it?“ At least they know the direction they could begin to solve the problem. (Female elementary school teacher)

I would say, „This is not so good“ and „why?“ Or I would say, „Why do you think this won't work with this particular group – with some advanced, gifted, and regular education students?“ (Female high school teacher)

Debriefing conversations between the student teachers and cooperating teachers revealed a relative dearth of attention to issues of differentiating instruction, integrating higher-order questioning strategies, or probing why a teaching strategy or activity was integrated. Absence of feedback at this higher level failed to move the student teachers' learning to an evaluative or processing component (FP). This limited a deeper understanding of pedagogical content knowledge and procedures underlying the fundamental connection between teaching and learning.

### *Feedback Reported by Field Supervisors*

Twenty of the 24 field supervisors who responded to the online surveys were female. Half of the supervisors had more than 20 years experience teaching K-12, while the other half were employed in higher education. Their experience ranged from classroom teacher (13%), school

administrator (21%), university professor (21%), adjunct professor (30%), para-professional (6%), or other (9%). The supervisors possessed a master's degree, a specialist degree, or a doctorate.

The policy of the college of education required supervisors to observe a student teacher at minimum four times during the fifteen-week internship and to use the college's lesson evaluation rubric to collect observation data. All supervisors acknowledged conducting at least three formal observations, sometimes before class to discuss the lesson, but more commonly debriefing immediately after a class, later in the same day, or, infrequently, through e-mail or by telephone. Supervisors claimed to maintain a cordial relationship so as to reduce anxiety during observations and to develop a positive rapport with the student teachers. Some supervisors reported supplementing the college's evaluation form with narrative notes that were given to the student teacher after a debriefing session. Most of the supervisors stated they were responsible for observing at least four student teachers, with more than two-thirds of the supervisions occurring in elementary schools and the remaining one-third taking place in middle and high schools.

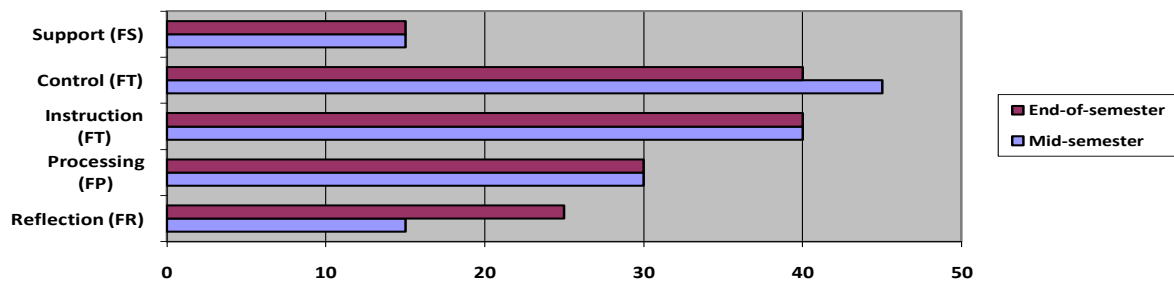
The supervisors' feedback in the debriefing meetings largely echoed the cooperating teachers': student teachers were not only open to feedback offered during the debriefing conversations, but were "appreciative of [the] constructive criticism" and "made efforts to incorporate changes" or "tried to implement one idea at a time", however, some supervisors noted a few student teachers were "a little defensive in the discussion" toward the feedback offered. Almost half of the supervisors' comments related to instructional strategies that emphasized issues related to the student teachers' circumscribed classroom organization. The attention to classroom control was described by supervisors as "mistakes common to beginning teachers" and offered alternative approaches for the student teachers to consider implementing:

I like to start it off by giving them encouragement and positive remarks about what I did like to see – never really negative. I would give constructive criticism in terms of different ideas of „maybe you could have done this and it might have been more effective" or „just think of different things for the next time you might teach the lesson" or „the next lesson you might want to try another approach for behavior issues". (University supervisor, V)

The supervisors' identification of instructional strategies during debriefing sessions imparted an explicit emphasis on the immediate goal of teaching in contrast to a consideration of the procedures underlying instruction and approaches to cultivate student learning. Also absent from the supervisors' evaluations of the student teachers' instruction was an assessment of the content taught in the lesson, thus narrowing a deeper level of student teachers' critical reflection and application of content knowledge. Figure 2 categorizes the frequency of themes communicated by supervisors in debriefing sessions with student teachers.

Figure 2

Frequency of Field Supervisors' Feedback Communicated in an Internship



Interview and survey data revealed the relative consistent feedback delivered from supervisors to elementary and secondary student teachers on classroom management issues and instructional approaches, without a greater emphasis during the debriefing conferences to processing (FP) or self-reflection (FR). At a processing stage, however, supervisors' comments focused interns' attention on incorporating higher-order questioning strategies, differentiating instruction, and creating more student-centered activities. The shift to the reflective level occurred when the student teachers were asked to consider alternative instructional approaches and to reflect on how their teaching could be modified so that it positively impacted student learning:

I would ask if they had any questions, or what would they do differently if they were going to do the lesson again. A lot of times, they come up with what I had identified as a fault in their lesson. (University supervisor, II)

I usually ask, „How did you think the lesson went“? [The student teachers wanted to know] how they can improve – specific things that they might consider doing. (University supervisor, III)

While the student teachers were asked to ruminate on their instruction and strategies to engage students' learning, a disproportionate amount of attention from the supervisors was focused on issues related to classroom management and instructional strategies. In addition, a conversation about subject matter knowledge was noticeably absent from the supervisors' debriefing conversations as were connections to methods courses or exchanges about good teaching practices.

### *Student Teachers' Perception of Feedback*

Student teachers reported that lesson debriefings were conducted in person and occasionally by e-mail and telephone. In a few instances, student teachers stated they sought additional feedback on their instruction from classmates, a university department head, questioning students in their classroom, or school administrators. Student teachers claimed that the feedback provided a very valuable perspective that contributed to their understanding of teaching. It was perceived as “detailed and constructive,” “helpful, informative, and meaningful,” and “insightful, relevant,

and correct.” The student teachers stated that once integrated, the feedback from their mentors led to successful modifications in their instruction:

I took them [the comments] very seriously and tried the new things she suggested.  
I integrated the change with much success.  
I change my instruction by having the focus on the students.  
[The feedback] made me more sensitive to various learning styles and, therefore, different teaching styles.

For a small number of the student teachers, the mentors’ observations and suggestions were viewed skeptically. The misgivings were described as a difference in style or philosophy, viewed as irrelevant, or proposals of which the student teacher claimed he or she was already aware. During the debriefing conversations, one student teacher stated that he was “filtering” the comments and listening for observations from his mentors to inform and improve his teaching that were either not always forthcoming or to his satisfaction. Eager for the cooperating teacher and field supervisor to articulate constructive and specific feedback, a number of student teachers were desirous of input that included an identification of instructional processes underlying their teaching and that challenged them to reflect on their taught lessons:

My cooperating teacher is very encouraging of my teaching, though it is not always specific. She reassures me that the lesson went well, but does not provide things to improve on or to continue doing. (Traditional female student teacher, IV)  
What I thought was great is [the supervisor] asked a lot of questions about how I felt: “How do you feel you’re doing?” “What are you comfortable with?” “Do you feel like you’re getting enough support?” (Nontraditional male student teacher, VII)

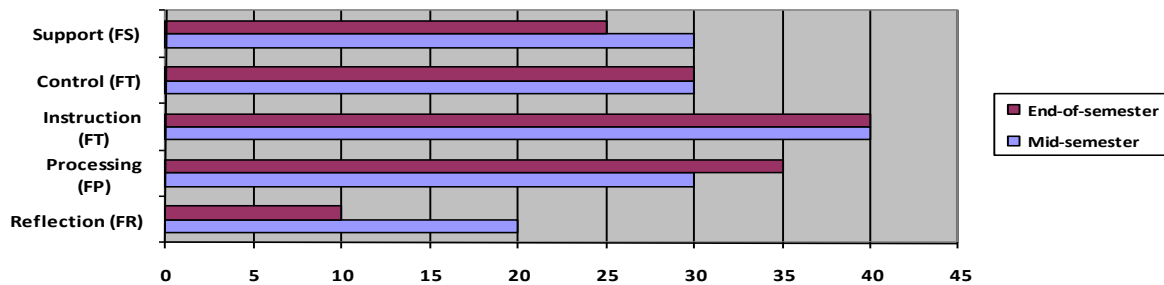
Feedback can inform instruction and may impact student learning while at the same time foster elements of self-reflection in the student teachers’ instruction. However, some student teachers viewed their mentors’ feedback negatively or with a measured degree of skepticism if praise and a positive assessment were not balanced with constructive criticism:

I wanted to know how I could get better. At the end of a long day, she [the cooperating teacher] would say, “that was a great job with that,” but I was thinking, “that was a bad day.” Next door is the Milken teacher-of-the-year winner and I’m no way near her and I want to know how I can get like that. There wasn’t any constructive criticism that I could use...All my performances were a 5 out of 5. There wasn’t anything to improve on. I would rather have at least one 4 with something I can improve on instead of all 5s. I know all 5s is to be our goal or something, but at least something to improve on. You can’t tell me that every lesson is perfect. (Traditional female student teacher, II)

Mentors’ feedback that assess student teachers’ performance as consistently favorable, i.e. the female above receiving 5/5 on an observation rubric, or fail to address deeper questions about teaching, student learning, and content, i.e. the same student teacher expressing frustration with the absence of “constructive criticism,” reveal as much about the quality of evaluations from the mentors as the student teachers’ performance (Donaldson, 2009; Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, &

Keeling, 2009). Figure 3 categorizes the frequency of themes reported by student teachers in debriefing sessions with cooperating teachers and field supervisors.

Figure 3  
Frequency of Student Teachers' Perceived Feedback Communicated in an Internship



The student teachers' identification of feedback delivered by cooperating teachers and field supervisors inform some of the formative processes and structures of how new teachers begin to conceptualize and think about teaching. The prevalence of attention to classroom management issues and instructional strategies (FT) – eclipsing analysis devoted to processing (FP) or reflection (FR) – substantiate the cooperating teachers' and supervisors' reported lesson analysis from mid- to end-of-semester. At the same time, however, mentors' analyses were described by several student teachers as instilling deeper reflective pedagogical practices and raising specific elements of instruction directed toward teaching for and assessment of student learning.

### Discussion

The internship has the potential to play a major role in helping student teachers learn to teach by providing opportunities for constructive feedback from mentors on lessons taught. Cooperating teachers and field supervisors occupy an important role developing the student teachers' self-reflective thinking skills through debriefing sessions that address pedagogical issues and emphasize the important relationship between instruction and student learning. Hattie and Timperley's (2007) model provided a conceptual framework to systematically categorize the levels of feedback reported by cooperating teachers and field supervisors. This study found a preponderance of comments from the mentors devoted to fostering the student teachers' level of confidence (FS) coupled with developing the individuals' instructional strategies and classroom management skills (FT). Findings from survey and interview data also identified the relative paucity dedicated to processing of instruction, consideration of student learning in the classroom (FP), and discussions that fostered the development of self-reflection (FR) in student teachers. The prevalence of feedback directed toward the student teachers' instruction and classroom management skills may be explained as (a) perceived mentoring training and practices that focused on instruction and management at the expense of addressing critical, nuanced observations, (b) gaps in teacher education programs that failed to address multiple levels of analysis for mentors to incorporate in debriefing sessions with student teachers, and (c)



observation evaluation instruments that were silent to higher levels of feedback that contribute to the student teachers' understanding of pedagogical content knowledge.

Mentors attempted to positively impact the student teachers' growth and effectiveness through multiple levels of feedback. As a form of evaluation, however, mentors' assessment of students' performance has problems with standardization and subjectivity. The interplay between a lesson taught and its subsequent analysis by a mentor informed the beginning teachers' knowledge of how to effectively teach. This research revealed that student teachers: valued the supportive observations of their instruction, appreciated constructive comments that identified content knowledge lacking in their teaching, or identified gaps in their abilities to differentiate instruction or integrate formative assessments.

My investigation highlighted the need for mentors to consider in their assessment of student teachers' instruction questions related to the *what*, *how*, and *why* of instruction. Further, mentors should integrate in their feedback some of the salient issues and themes from university methods courses to foster integrative, self-reflective thinking in beginning teachers. While determining the appropriate level of feedback may be contingent on the mentor's assessment of the student teacher's cognitive and social development, this does not diminish the mentor's comments targeted at deeper levels associated with the processing of instruction and critical self-reflection. Indeed, the mentor's feedback may reveal as much about the quality of observation assessments as the student teacher's performance. The implications from this research calls for colleges of education to (a) incorporate a more rigorous training program of cooperating teachers and field supervisors that progressively moves feedback from low-level FS/FT comments to deeper, critically constructive observations at the processing and self-reflection FP/FR levels, and (b) implement an evaluation observation instrument that reflects feedback categories weighted in processing and self-reflection (Fallona & Canniff, 2010).

In debriefing sessions, mentors should address instructional strategies and issues related to classroom management, but also underscore student teachers' developing integration of content knowledge and culturally responsive pedagogy. In addition, mentors should address with beginning teachers the underlying principles of teaching and learning, and consider the relationship between classroom instruction, on one hand, and theory and content from university methods courses, on the other hand (Valencia et al., 2009). While reflection-on-action thinking is cultivated in beginning teachers through mentors' questioning strategies informed by established professional principles (Furlong & Maynard, 1995), the development of student teachers' professional action can also be encouraged through mentors' regular queries that ask how students are learning in the classroom and why a lesson was organized or developed in the manner the novice teacher planned. To do so moves beginning teachers' conceptualizations of classroom instruction to thinking that systematically integrates understandings about the complexities of classroom pedagogy and student learning. Moreover, debriefing conferences should question student teachers' existing beliefs and pedagogical practices. For not to do so may lead to superficial conferences in which student teachers are praised, yet unlikely to take future risks that are an inevitable part of trying to teach in different ways (Borko & Mayfield, 1995; Valencia et al., 2009).

The mentor's feedback may be informed from an observation evaluation instrument with multiple evidence-based categories, such as processing and reflection of instruction as well as classroom management abilities. Categories in the observation instrument would identify qualities of teacher excellence and classify attributes or outcomes for a student teacher to consider incorporating in his or her teaching. Topics in the debriefing conference might ask student teachers to reflect upon influences that impacted the lesson planned, consider expectations for a particular student in a class, cogitate how a student's approach to learning varies from day to day, challenge (Thaler & Sulstein, 2008) the beginning teacher to consider the most important decisions made during a lesson, and probe areas of continued professional development (Hattie, 2003). Mentors may ask twenty-first century educators how to conceptualize the organization of classroom activities in which teachers as inquirers develop learners who are critical, creative, and problem solvers (Wells, 2002).

The training of cooperating teachers and field supervisors, combined with an improved student teacher evaluation instrument which is inclusive of student learning categories and nuanced instructional procedures, should shift student teachers' novice thinking to expert levels of thinking about pedagogical content knowledge and student learning. The consequences from this level of feedback, in regular conferences between mentors and novice teachers, may be to address misconceptions about student learning that is based on the transmission of specific bodies of knowledge and skills from teacher and text to students, as well as foster beginning teachers' critical thinking, decision-making, and reflective skills (Danielson, 1996; Darling-Hammond et al., 2005). The beneficiaries from mentors' multiple levels of feedback informing novice teachers of the complexities of teaching and best instructional practices that foster engagement and learning are students. Finally, positively impacting the mentors' observations and analysis during debriefing conferences also advances the rigor and importance of the internship experience for concerned stakeholders in the training and development of future educators.

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