Mar 8th, 3:00 PM - 3:45 PM

Ways for Cooperating Teachers to Build a Positive Relationship with Student Teachers

Hsiu-Lien Lu
Georgia Southern University, hllu@mx.nthu.edu.tw

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Recommended Citation
Lu, Hsiu-Lien, "Ways for Cooperating Teachers to Build a Positive Relationship with Student Teachers" (2012). SoTL Commons Conference. 52.
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Cooperating Teachers’ Building a Positive Relationship with Student Teachers

Hsiu-Lien Lu
Teaching and Learning
College of Education, GSU
hlu@georgiasouthern.edu

Presented in 2012 annual SoTL Commons
The teacher mentor and student teacher relationship is a very strange relationship: you take two people who don't know each other at all and put them together all day long. We see each other at our best, hopefully. We also see each other at our worst. Yet you have to continue to work with and to learn from each other. (CT: Dorothy)
Questions

• How many of you have been a student teacher, a cooperating teacher, or a university supervisor?
In groups

• How important is the relationship between CT/ST for the student teaching experience?
• How could a CT better build a relationship to enhance the experience?
CT’s critical attitudes

(Korth & Baum, 2011)

1. To recognize their potential impact on the experience,
2. to develop a positive and supportive relationship,
3. to provide meaningful feedback,
4. to model continuous and collaborative learning, and
5. to participate in a partnership
A Positive Relationship

(Awaya, McEwan, Heyler, & Linsky, 2003)

- Mutual trust,
- open and honest communication,
- a commitment to mutual growth and professional development,
- mutual respect,
- when it is equal and nonthreatening
Important qualities of cooperating teachers

• being thoughtful, sympathetic, supportive, open, and trustful

• pedagogical support, guidance, material support, the sharing of ideas and experiences, respect, and availability (Caires & Almeida, 2007)

• a professional peer (Ross, 2002)
a negative relationship

• impacts on the student teaching experience through the feedback given, the summative evaluation, the degree of mentoring provided, and the degree of autonomy given (Shantz & Brown, 1999)

• Not as a good role model in classroom practice (Tok, 2011)

• being mistreated and not receiving guidance and feedback (Anderson, 2007)
Further literature on negative relationships

• 5.5% of the total problems in the field are related to cooperating teachers

• the cooperating teacher’s absence from the classroom, interference teaching, disruptive behavior, and perception of student teacher’s role (MerÇ, 2010)
Purpose of the presentation

• To explore what cooperating teachers can do to build a positive relationship with student teachers
research question

• How can cooperating teachers better build a positive relationship with the student teacher to help foster a successful internship?
Methods

• A phenomenological study
• 23 participants: 7 CTs, 8 STs, & 8 PSs.
• 2 semi-in-depth interviews, 90 mins
• a fifth-year P-6 teacher education program in a research-based university in New England
• grounded theory; applied thematic analysis
Five themes

1. Having effective communication
2. Being collegial
3. Being flexible to difference
4. Being respectful
5. Being understanding
1. Maintaining Effective Communications

1) **Clearly Communicating Expectations**

I give interns a sheet that says these are my expectations... I expect you to be here and you turn your cell phone off. You are going to be writing lesson plans and don't make doctor or dentist appointments during the school day. (CT: Dorothy)

I would discuss what my expectations are and how I would define the student intern's role. And would also ask the intern to define what they saw their role was and what their expectations were for the semester. (PS: Dee)

2) **Facilitating Communication Opportunity**

I'd sit down and have a conversation about how we would communicate daily, weekly, if we would communicate by email... if like what brought the intern to this field of education and just we would have phone hours... when I had time for us to sit down discussing [about] personal goals that you set for yourself in this classroom, where you see yourself. (PS: Dee)

(PS: Lacy)
1. Maintaining Effective Communications

3) Communicating Skillfully

Rule of thumb is try to focus on three positive things you can say to someone before you look at one area that needs improvement... So all the people involved in the process... look to what's going well and finding it in a positive way (CT: Pail)

4) Being Conscientious about Ways of Communication

One of them, I was just honest with... saying, ‘I don't like it.’ And I think that kind of hurt. I apologized afterwards and said, ‘Maybe I shouldn't have done it the way.’ Afterwards... we could come back and talk about what we could have done to make it better. (CT: Carol)
2. Being Collegial

• I treat the student teacher like a colleague. I enjoy having someone to talk about the children with as a colleague, a friend. And we talk about things other than school. (CT: Dorothy)

• I am looking to develop a collegial relationship... more so than me being in charge and giving direction...(CT: Pail)

• It's a friendly relationship but at the same time someone who's professional, who's not going to water down things (PS: Amy).
3. Being Flexible to Difference

- You have to recognize that there are different learning styles among these graduates... Certain amount of flexibility is needed, [although] you still want professionalism for your teaching. (PS: Rose)

- It's professional but also somebody who's willing to listen (PS: Amy)

- It’s important that they both are open in their thinking and listen to what each other have to say. They don't just say this is the way you are going to do it. You can't as a mentor teacher dictate (CT: Sally)

- You adjust to each person who comes and you got to develop a relationship because you are working really closely. (CT: Pail)
4. Being Respectful

• The mentor teacher has to... acknowledge that there is going to be another adult in the room. (PS: Lacy)

• There's a fine line of the intern getting the opportunity to explore teaching... also meeting the requirements... for the students. (PS: Annie)

• You have to trust and to leave her a short period of time in the early on, so that the children... make this same respect go to the student teacher (PS: Missy)

• You have to allow them to experiment (CT: Sally)
5. Being Understanding

- Some of the younger people are still growing as individual, someone who is twenty-one, twenty-two. And their life usually is kind of figuring out who they are. So there is that whole process of holding as well (CT: Pail)

- They are...young, novice people, many lacking confidence, many filled with insecurities, many having personal issues... with relationships and dying grandparents (PS: Rose)

- mentoring relationship...is developing where you learn the background of this person (PS: Lacy)
Discussion

• The mentor teacher has the upper hand. It's her classroom. She’s familiar with the curriculum and knows what's going on and she's the one who's going to pass off the okay to take part in the classroom to the intern. (PS: Tara)

The supreme power of the cooperating teacher

The cooperating teacher inherently possesses a supreme position and authority to influence the development of the relationship and the learning outcome of the student teacher. (Korth & Baum, 2011)
Discussion – Five Characteristics of CT Tasks

- being collegial
- being flexible to difference
- being understanding
- being respectful
- maintaining effective communication

• What do you think the five characteristics of CT tasks would work?
• If you could pick, which characteristic could be most critical? Why?
Interaction and interdependence of the task characteristics

- Effective Communication
- Being Collegial
- Being Understanding
- Being Respectful
- Being Open to Difference
Assumption

• All cooperating teachers are well selected, trained, experienced, and well performing in the classroom in terms of instruction as well as management

• points to aspects for future study
Significance

1. Examines the characteristics of the cooperating teacher’s tasks

2. Justifies the relationship of each task characteristic

3. Empirical evidence for CTs to positively develop the mentor/student relationship and in turn to effectively pass on their experience to future teachers