

## The Evolving Roles of Classroom Teachers in Pre-Service Teacher Education: A Review of Literature

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**Abstract:** Driven by calls for change in teacher education, the university has involved classroom teachers in working with student teachers in various ways. This review examined the role changes of classroom teachers in preservice field endeavors using most prominent labels: the cooperating teacher, mentor teacher, and supervising teacher. The changes in labels attached to the roles of classroom teachers reflect changing trends in student teaching within a historical span of approximately 40 years. This review also examined levels of classroom teacher involvement with the university that were analyzed and synthesized into three categories: cooperative, collaborative, and symbiotic relationships. The various levels of classroom teacher involvement reflect the levels of classroom teacher preparation provided by the university as well as classroom teachers' responsibilities as expected by the university.

### Introduction

In order to respond to the increasing requests for education reform to meet the learning needs of progressively diverse young generations and for alignment with national standards, there have been calls for change in preservice teacher preparation (The Holmes Group, 1986; 1990). The calls demanded that teacher education programs enhance field experiences to strengthen future teachers' professional development. One way that the university has responded to these calls is to involve the classroom teacher, also known as the cooperating teacher, in different working relationships with student teachers (Cornell, 2003; Gray, 1999; Nolan, 2000; Page Jr., Page, Workentin, & Dickinson, 1994).

Traditionally, the classroom teacher accepted the student teacher in an authentic instructional context and facilitated opportunities for student teachers to integrate theory with classroom teaching (Boudreau, 1999; Koskela & Ganser, 1998). This experience constituted a critical period for the transformation of student teachers' professional development and helped student teachers form their perspectives regarding what education is like and what they could do in education. Because of the importance of this experience for student teachers, the classroom teacher has always been deemed the most essential and influential support component for student teaching (Clement, 2002; Dever, Hager, & Klein, 2003; Morgan, 1999; Vesseil & Daane, 2000). Regardless of how important their role was, however, the classroom teacher was customarily the one that cooperatively followed the requirements of the teacher education program. Therefore, as opposed to the model of engaging classroom teachers in a passive and cooperative manner, there has been a trend toward getting classroom teachers into more active and involved partnerships.

In light of these changing relationships, in this literature review I focused on the evolving roles of the classroom teacher in student teaching. Furthermore, I concentrated on two areas: (a) labeling of the classroom teacher's role over the course of its evolution and (b) levels of classroom teacher involvement in the field endeavor. The purposes of the literature review were twofold: (a) to examine how the university has responded to the calls for change and (b) to describe the role shifts of classroom teachers in their field efforts.

### Labeling of the Changing Roles of Classroom Teachers

The changes in labels for classroom teachers' roles reflect the changes in preservice teacher education within a historical span of approximately 40 years. Labeling varies from program to program and from expectation to expectation. In this review, I selected three most prominent labels to examine these changes (see Table 1 below).

Table 1

#### *Labeling of the Roles of Classroom Teachers*

Label	Period	Role
Cooperating Teacher	Since 1960s	Fulfilling a set of imposed duties
Mentor Teacher	Since late 1980s	Mentoring and nurturing student teachers
Supervising Teacher	Since 1990s	Supervising student teachers

*Cooperating teacher* was the earliest and most prevalent label for the role of the classroom teacher who worked with student teachers. She was one component of the student teaching triad in the early 1960s when supervision in future teacher preparation expanded (Yee, 1967). This label is still in use today (Clement, 2002; Ganser, 2002) and connotes its function of cooperating with the university to fulfill a set of prescribed duties (Awaya, McEwan, Heyler, & Linsky, 2003).

Additional terms have emerged since the late 1980s in response to the call for change in teacher education (The Holmes Group, 1986; 1990). Among them is *mentor teacher*. *Mentor* derives from the name of a wise and learned person in Homer's *Odyssey*. In Greek mythology, Odysseus entrusted the education and guidance of his son to his old, trusted friend *Mentor* when Odysseus set off to fight the Trojan War for 10 years (Galvez-Hjornevik, 1986; Gray & Gray, 1985; Homer, 1999; Merriam, 1983). Since then, mentor denotes a person who guides, nurtures, and models.

The label *Mentor teacher* has gradually replaced *cooperating teacher* in some teacher education programs (Cornell, 2003; Dever et al., 2003; Duquette, 1998; Morgan, 1999; Power & Perry, 2002; Wyatt, Meditz, Reeves, & Carr, 1999; Yendol-Hoppey, 2007). Given the importance of the student teaching experience on future teachers, the role of a cooperating teacher shifted from fulfilling a set of prescribed duties (i.e., allowing time for student teachers to practice teaching) to mentoring and nurturing

student teachers in their journey from student to teacher (Awaya et al., 2003). Levinson (1978) compared “poor mentoring in early adulthood” to “poor parenting in childhood” (p. 338). Levinson believed that the better the mentoring process, the more propitious the development of the neophyte.

Finally, driven by a call to align preservice teacher education to the standards put forth by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (Richardson, 1994; Schmidt, 1993; Sutton, 1993), universities have involved classroom teachers at a different level. Among the various labels the university created for this purpose, the term of *supervising teacher* stands out. The term *supervising teacher* suggests that the major expectation of the role is to supervise student teachers (Daane & Latham, 1998; Nolan, 2000; Shantz & Brown, 1999; Zheng & Webb, 2000). It also suggests that classroom teachers replace university supervisors and take on the responsibility for supervising student teachers on a regular basis (Gray, 1999; Nolan, 2000; Page Jr., Page, Workentin, & Dickinson, 1994; Zheng & Webb, 2000). This label indicates the university’s belief that regular supervision by the classroom teacher will help ensure quality in student teachers that is required by the national standards.

The literature indicated that the roles of classroom teachers have experienced several types of change and have been labeled differently so as to reflect the changing expectations and needs of teacher education programs.

#### *The Levels of Classroom Teacher Involvement in Student Teaching*

The level of the classroom teacher’s involvement with the university is another avenue to illustrate the developmental stages of her role. The extent to which universities involve classroom teachers in developing student teachers varies widely. These varying levels of involvement demonstrate the extent of preparation that classroom teachers receive from the university as well as the universities’ expectations of their roles in training student teachers. Ranging from more passive to more active participation in teacher preparation efforts, the levels of classroom teacher participation are analyzed and synthesized into three categories: cooperative, collaborative, and symbiotic relationships.

*Cooperative Relationship.* In the cooperative relationship, classroom teachers take student teachers into their classrooms and cooperate with the university after negotiating student teaching time and practice areas (Hynes-Dusel, 1999). Oftentimes, classroom teachers in this working relationship receive minimal information about the expectations of their role (Hynes-Dusel, 1999). One assumption embedded in this relationship is that cooperating teachers are capable of handling the different levels of their interns’ abilities without any training. Another embedded assumption is that mentoring ability comes naturally, even though teaching elementary students is different from mentoring adult student teachers (Ganser, 2002). Hence, in this partnership, cooperating teachers are minimally prepared and usually unclear about what the university expects from them (Hynes-Dusel, 1999).

*Collaborative Relationship.* Classroom teachers, thought to be in a collaborative relationship, are expected to collaborate with the university to help student teachers grow professionally. To enhance the partnership with classroom teachers, the university

provides preparation to classroom teachers with the expectation that the preparation will strengthen classroom teachers' abilities to work with student teachers (Dever et al., 2003; Kent, 2001). At the same time, the university expects classroom teachers to take on supervising tasks (Dever et al., 2003; Kent, 2001; Vessel & Daane, 2000). Collaborative relationships show that teacher education programs value field experiences in schools and are making an effort to develop classroom teachers professionally, so that they can help student teachers in a collaborative and effective manner.

Typical training that the university designs to support this relationship are workshops or courses for classroom teachers. Dever et al. (2003) reported that the teacher education program at Utah State University built the university and public school partnership by offering classroom teachers a supervision workshop on giving feedback to student teachers. To accommodate the teachers, the workshop was held in one of the participating schools. Using a Likert-scale survey with an 84% response rate, the authors reported that the classroom teachers trained in this workshop were more able to collect objective data and provide specific feedback based on their interns' performances. Kent (2001) reported on a teacher preparation program that offered a course in clinical supervision to prospective supervising teachers. Kent, the instructor of the course, inquired about the adequacy of preparation and found that classroom teachers were able to implement clinical supervision of student teachers, but they were not able to find time for pre- and post- conferences.

The involvement of classroom teachers in a collaborative relationship can take various forms. Two studies reveal some distinctions. In the first study, the roles of experienced teachers and their work structures were shifted in an attempt to change the traditional triad (Hastings & Squires, 2002). Each experienced teacher was assigned at least four student teachers in at least two different schools and took up a supervisory and mentoring role. The teachers were provided with sufficient relief days and visited each student teacher twice in a 3-week period. In the second study, a teacher education program adopted a new model of student teacher supervision and classroom teachers were given full responsibility of student teacher supervision (Zheng & Webb, 2000). Classroom teachers also assigned the final grade for student teaching. They also reported that they experienced an increase in their status as the result of working as adjunct university faculty.

*Symbiotic Relationship.* A symbiotic relationship requires that two conditions be met. First, the university works extensively within the school to prepare it for student teachers by teaching the classroom teachers how to be mentor teachers and by working with the administration to provide the necessary support. Second, classroom teachers are heavily involved in preparing student teachers in the field experience and work closely with university faculty to connect academic learning with the field experience (Cornell, 2003; Ross, 2002; Schlechty, Ingwerson, & Brooks, 1988). This close relationship between the school and the university where both parties contribute to, and benefit from, the relationship, creates a symbiosis. Foundational to this relationship is the notion that student teaching sites are critical to the quality of teacher preparation. Another critical component of this relationship is that the university provide training sessions to the classroom teachers and administrators on an on-going basis to ensure quality of mentoring (Sienty, 1997).

Professional Development Schools (PDS) are typical examples wherein universities underscore the significant role of mentor teachers by keeping a close tie with public schools. A PDS was once regarded as “a new paradigm” (Schlechty et al., 1988, p. 29) and emerged in the late 1980s to explore innovative practices in teacher preparation (Darling-Hammond, 1989; The Holmes Group, 1990; Schlechty et al., 1988). The PDS model intends to deliver professional development to both preservice teachers and to classroom teachers. In the case of one PDS, the university provided classroom teachers with courses to help examine their beliefs and to apply the principles of learning theory and strategies of supervision to their practice. This type of involvement in both parties is designed so as to prepare the classroom teacher to effectively guide, monitor, and assess the progress of the student teachers’ practice (Ross, 2002).

Research on student teaching revealed that the number of classroom teachers participating at the symbiotic level of teacher preparation with the university is on the rise. For instance, in a field-based program, classroom teachers provided hands-on practice instruction, lesson planning, teaching techniques, and classroom management strategies to student teachers, after they had received classroom instruction from university faculty (Cornell, 2003). In other programs classroom teachers assigned to teams engaged student teachers actively in planning teaching, guided formative feedback, and provided self-reflection opportunities (Kyle, Moore, & Sanders, 1999; Wyatt et al., 1999). In this field-based partnership, classroom teachers provided all the major field support for preparing the future teachers.

### Discussion

This review indicates that the university has responded to public calls for changes in student teaching over the years. The response is reflected in the involvement of the university with the classroom teacher in distinct working relationships, namely, cooperative, collaborative, and symbiotic relationships. These distinctions reveal that some teacher education programs tend to be more progressive and active in building their relationships with classroom teachers, while others pursue a more traditional model. In order to establish such relationships, the efforts that the universities have made are as follows. First, the university has recognized the importance of classroom teachers’ roles in the education of student teachers. In order to create effective school teachers, the universities have shared power as well as responsibility with classroom teachers in varied partnerships as stated above. Second, the university has attempted to illustrate the designated roles of the classroom teacher by using various labels, such as cooperating teacher, mentor teachers, and supervising teachers. Such labeling, as indicated by the literature reviewed, reflects the extent of expectation that teacher education programs set for classroom teachers. Finally, in order to enable the classroom teacher to fulfill the designated purpose, teacher educators have undertaken equivalent commitment in the preparation of the classroom teacher. The extent of that preparation reflects the degree of commitment and the relationship agreed upon by the university and the schools.

For their part classroom teachers have demonstrated their willingness to join the adventure of educating future teachers in addition to their own work of teaching young children. The literature reviewed in this paper demonstrates how classroom teachers have shifted their roles from strictly cooperating with the university (as a *cooperating teacher*),

or mentoring the student teacher (as a *mentor teacher*), to actually supervising the student teacher and providing more input and feedback to the university than they had traditionally done in previous relationships (as a *supervising teacher*). Along with the evolving roles, classroom teachers have demonstrated that they not only have the capability to nurture their own students, but they also have the capacity to support future teachers in various ways.

The evolving roles of the mentor teacher portray a trail of how the university has responded to public calls for changes in the field experience component of teacher education. The university deserves praise for putting a considerable amount of deliberation in the creation of new relationships that work for both the university and public schools. However, some concerns and questions emerged as I reviewed the literature. First, the literature indicated that the change was oftentimes prompted and urged by societal requests and needs of state requirements, which may be legitimate and essential. However, teacher educators are a knowledgeable population of professionals who take change seriously and generally try to ground change in research-based evidence. This literature review has not explored the literature related to the evidence teacher educators used to support changing the language and consequent roles of classroom teachers in the student teaching field experience. I do recommend that universities document the reasons behind changing language in established teacher preparation programs.

Second, there are concerns regarding benefits and choices for student teachers. For example, what is more beneficial for a student teacher, to involve the classroom teacher in a cooperative, collaborative, or symbiotic manner? Do student teachers prefer to have a cooperating teacher, a supervising teacher, or a mentor teacher? What about experienced classroom teachers' preferences if they have experienced different relationships with the university? These are just a few of the questions that current literature on student teaching does not tackle, but that need to be explored.

Finally, while little was directly mentioned in the literature reviewed, an underlying assumption that was present was that the restructured power, responsibility, and knowledge exchange in all the discussed partnerships were mutually consented and logically accepted. My concern, nonetheless, is on the lack of scholarship support regarding the equity and reasonability of the relationships to all stakeholders (i.e., student teachers, classroom teachers, children, and teacher educators). The results indicated that the classroom teacher has always been the one who shoulders additional responsibility as the role is evolving. Is the level of classroom teacher involvement equitable and reasonable for public schools as well as the university? Who has benefited from the relationship and who has not? These are the questions that could be intriguing for future researchers or reviewers to further examine.

In the 21st century where people live in a global community and cyber world, there is an increasing demand for qualified teachers who can provide future generations with the quality education that children need to face rapid global changes. Calls for such change on both national and global levels are getting louder (Darling-Hammond, 2005; Kirby, McCombs, Barney, & Naftel, 2006). In answering the call, the university faces a pressing need to create feasible avenues to involve classroom teachers in contributing to the enterprise of educating future teachers. It is certainly important and beneficial for classroom teachers to have an extra pair of hands and for student teachers to have

mentors in the field (Lu, 2005; 2007). Nonetheless, how to create a meaningful and rewarding working relationships in this ever-changing century for all extensive stakeholders (i.e., student teachers, classroom teachers, children, and teacher educators) appears to be a burning goal for the university to attain in the years to come.

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