

Preservice Teachers' Observations of Cooperating Teachers and Peers While Participating in an Early Field Experience

By Nancy A. Anderson, Mary Alice Barksdale, & Clare E. Hite

Because of the value of authentic classroom experiences, teacher education programs in the United States typically include one or more early field experiences prior to final full-time student teaching. These early field experiences play a crucial role in the preparation of teachers (Guyton & McIntyre, 1990). In an early field experience, cooperating teachers serve as models who guide prospective teachers in the application of theory and instructional approaches introduced in university methods courses. The goal of such apprenticeship experiences is for preservice teachers to develop and practice their pedagogical skills, in part through close observation of the cooperating teacher. However, such field experiences “do not always lead to analysis, reflection, and growth on the part of the novice teacher” (McIntyre, Byrd, & Foxx, 1996, p. 171).

In early field experiences, prospective teachers typically observe the cooperating teachers and as-

Nancy A. Anderson is a professor with the College of Education at the University of South Florida, Tampa; Mary Alice Barksdale is a professor with the College of Education at Virginia Tech University, Blacksburg; and Clare E. Hite is a professor with the College of Education at the University of South Florida, Lakeland.

Preservice Teachers' Observations

sume increasingly higher levels of responsibility, from tutoring individual pupils to teaching small groups, and then to teaching whole-class lessons. Observation of cooperating teachers often continues in the final full-time student teaching experience, as preservice teachers observe while grading papers, helping pupils with seatwork, and performing other clerical tasks for cooperating teachers.

Throughout their preservice training, students may spend many days in observation; however, little research has focused on preservice teachers' observation of teaching, particularly in early field experiences. Ben-Peretz and Rumney (1991) maintain that merely sitting in the classroom observing how experienced teachers teach does not necessarily help preservice teachers learn to teach. Dewey (1974) believed that observing teaching was necessary to the professional development of teachers, but he cautioned that the observer had to recognize the interaction of the minds of the teacher and the pupils they were observing. We questioned how we could provide for preservice teachers' observations that would lead to greater understanding of effective instruction.

One approach to sharpening observations and making them more meaningful is through peer observation and coaching in field settings. In this approach, preservice teachers observe a peer at the same level of training. In addition to sharpening observation, this experience can provide more frequent, on-site feedback to the preservice teacher and reduce the sense of unease that often accompanies observations by the cooperating teacher or university supervisor, whose comments tend to be primarily evaluative. It can also develop mutually supportive bonds as the peers progress in their development. We hypothesized that peer observation in a situation where the preservice teacher had frequent opportunities to teach and observe peers teach might increase reflection and provide more feedback to improve instruction.

Related Literature

Peer Coaching

To inform this study, we examined research both on peer coaching observations and on the approaches to observing teachers' instruction, targeting studies conducted during early field experiences. Peer coaching is a system whereby peers assist each other in developing skill or expertise in some aspect of teaching. It developed, in part, from clinical supervision, a professional development technique of the 1960s with emphasis on detailed observation data and specific teacher behavior (Munson, 1998). A variety of different models have developed over the years, traditionally sharing three characteristics: direct observation with constructive feedback, nonevaluation, and goal setting for further self-improvement (Ackland, 1991). The typical format includes three stages. First, the peer teacher holds a preobservation conference in which she or he shares concerns and targets a focused behavior or skill for improvement. Next, the peer observes, using some method of collecting data on the targeted behaviors. Finally, in a postobservation conference,

the peer coach shares what he or she has observed (generally in nonevaluative terms), and the peer teacher establishes new goals.

Joyce and Showers (1980, 1982, 1985), pioneers of peer coaching, maintain that it is a necessary element in school improvement. It moves away from the traditional linking of observation of teaching to evaluation and toward observation as a method of improving teaching and learning. Joyce and Showers' newest model of peer coaching differs markedly both from how they originally conceived it and from how others currently view peer coaching. It calls for voluntary participation, eliminates verbal feedback, and designates the person teaching, rather than the observer, as the coach. Further, the newer model encourages the use of both structured and open-ended feedback, with the observer noting what he or she has learned, not simply emphasizing a specific focus for observation as in the earlier model (Showers & Joyce, 1996).

Although earlier studies on peer coaching were primarily descriptive, later studies include research on the effects of peer coaching. Peer Coaching can increase preservice and inservice teachers' sense of professionalism, reduce teacher burnout, and improve retention (Kurtts & Levin, 2000; Odell & Ferraro, 1992). It also has resulted in teachers' increased ability to reflect on their own teaching and its effectiveness (Kromrey & Wynn, 1999; Kurtts, 1997; Kurtts & Levin, 2000; Lignuris/Kraft & Marchand-Martella, 1993; Mallette, Maheady, & Harper, 1999; McAllister & Neubert, 1995; Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993; Wynn, 1995).

Peer coaching has a number of additional positive effects: (1) participants have increased their effective teaching behaviors while simultaneously reducing ineffective ones (Bowman & McCormick, 2000; Hudson, Miller, Salzburg, & Morgan, 1994; Kromrey & Wynn, 1999; Kurtts, 1997; Lignuris/Kraft & Marchand-Martella, 1993; Mallette, Maheady, & Harper, 1999; Miller, 1994; Miller, Harris, & Watanabe, 1991; Pierce and Miller, 1994; Rooney, 1993); (2) pupils' learning has been positively affected (Joyce & Showers, 1985; Mallette, Maheady, & Harper, 1999; Showers, 1985); and (3) preservice teachers have developed the collegiality that will contribute to their success as new teachers (Kromrey & Wynn, 1999; Kurtts, 1997; Kurtts & Levin, 2000; McAllister & Neubert, 1995; Wynn, 1995).

Preservice teachers tend to rate the peer-coaching experience positively (Hasbrouck, 1997; Kurtts & Levin, 2000; Rausch & Whittaker, 1999; Wynn & Kromrey, 2000) and express the belief that it contributes to their development as teachers (Anderson & Radencich, 2001; Rausch & Whittaker, 1999). Researchers, however, have identified some problems, including competitiveness—evidenced when one peer outperforms the other (Kurtts & Levin, 2000; McAllister & Neubert, 1995)—and difficulty of the peer in giving feedback (Kurtts & Levin, 2000; McAllister & Neubert, 1995).

Two experimental studies have compared preservice teachers in a typical supervision model with those in peer coaching. Pierce and Miller (1994) found no difference between the two groups on teaching behaviors as measured by a modified

Preservice Teachers' Observations

version of the Florida Performance Measurement System (Florida Coalition, 1983), with both groups showing increases in effective behaviors and decreases in ineffective behaviors. However, the peer-coaching group showed more thorough and detailed lesson planning and looked forward to their observations, while the traditional group did not. Yet, in another study comparing a peer-coaching group with a traditionally supervised group, Bowman and McCormick (2000) found greater evidence of growth in the peer-coaching group of seven behaviors that contribute to instructional clarity.

Guided and Unguided Observation in Field Experiences

The literature revealed two methods of observing teaching by early field-experience students. In the unguided approach, preservice teachers have little or no direction in what to observe. In the guided (also called focused) approach, preservice teachers observe preidentified types of teacher and pupil behaviors. In actuality, these categories are continuous rather than discrete. In the unguided situation, observers simply observe for anything of interest in the classroom, or they may have only general foci, such as looking for effective teaching behaviors or the strengths and weaknesses of a lesson. In guided observation, the observers may look for any number of specific teaching or classroom behaviors. For example, they may be encouraged to note how the teacher handles transitions, whether the teacher gives clear directions, or how equitably the teacher asks questions of pupils. Bowman and McCormick (2000) used this approach to direct preservice teachers to observe peers to identify seven specific aspects of instructional clarity. Wynn and Kromrey's (2000) participants observed peers for 21 different behaviors related to a structured lesson model. In another study, researchers trained preservice teachers to observe peers on an instrument containing 51 indicators of effective and ineffective teaching behaviors (Hasbrouck, 1997).

Formal observation systems provide the most structured form of guided observation. Examples include Interaction Analysis (Flanders, 1970), the Classroom Observation Rating Schedule (Waxman, Rodriguez, Padron, & Knight, 1988), and the Florida Performance Measurement System (Florida Coalition, 1983). These types of systematic observation often require tallying (usually in a specific time period) of multiple variables.

One of the early studies we reviewed on preservice teachers compared one group of observers trained on the use of a structured observation system with another group that had to design their own system of recording teacher and pupil behaviors (Englert & Sugai, 1983). Both groups received instruction in behavior management and direct instruction skills. Results indicated no difference between groups in behavior management skills. The group using the structured observation, however, had a higher level of pupil accuracy on a classroom achievement test, and they used feedback that was more effective during instruction. Generally, the literature leans toward encouraging the preparation of

preservice teachers to observe using guided approaches (Artzt & Armour-Thomas, 2002; Florio-Ruane, 1990; Mills, 1980).

The majority of the research on peer coaching with preservice teachers employed guided observation (Hasbrouck, 1997; Kromrey & Wynn, 1999; McAllister & Neubert, 1995; Miller, 1994; Morgan, Menlove, Salzberg, & Hudson 1994; Wynn & Kromrey, 2000; Yopp & Guillaume, 1999). The specific behaviors on which to focus guide the subsequent observation, but need not limit its scope. In university courses, peer observation can be a means of reinforcing specific methods; consequently, guided observations would be appropriate.

Guided observation with structured support helps preservice teachers become more aware of the social reality of teaching from the teacher's perspective (Waxman, et al., 1988). However, guided observations may limit the range of behaviors observed. Barrett, Allison, and Bell (1987) found that in guided observation reports, preservice teachers virtually excluded statements about personal characteristics of pupils, classroom climate, and lesson elements that were apparent in an earlier unguided observation study by the same researchers (Bell, Barrett, & Allison, 1985). Thus, the conclusion to their second study was that unguided observation has potential as a valuable tool for continued learning because it requires observers to organize their thoughts in relation to their own devised framework.

In their earlier work on peer coaching with inservice teachers, Joyce and Showers (1980) cited the value of regular and consistent structured feedback based on guided observation over unstructured feedback. However, in their newest model of peer coaching, they recommend the use of both structured and unstructured feedback (Showers & Joyce, 1996), finding benefits to both.

Both guided and unguided observations have advantages and disadvantages. Guided observations allow preservice teachers to identify and focus on a single aspect of teaching or learning. When preservice teachers view classrooms through this lens, it may provide them opportunities to draw conclusions that result in improved teaching practices. Yet, in viewing classrooms through a single lens, preservice teachers may not see the larger context.

Unguided observations have the opposite effect. Preservice teachers in unguided observation settings see classrooms through many lenses and get valid understandings of the complexities and realities of teaching. Yet, the views from multiple lenses may not provide solid data that could result in improved teaching practices. Preservice teachers may leave such observations with a general picture of teaching, but with little understanding of individual strategies and concepts. We believe it is helpful for preservice teachers to develop both single-lens and multiple-lens perspectives. Accordingly, we see both guided and unguided observations as beneficial in early field experiences.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate the value of early field experience

Preservice Teachers' Observations

students' observations of both peers and cooperating teachers in elementary classrooms where they had daily instructional duties.

We posed four research questions:

1. From the perspective of preservice teachers, what was the value of observing cooperating teachers in the early field experience?
2. From the perspective of preservice teachers, what was the value of observing peers in the early field experience?
3. What behaviors did preservice teachers ask their peer observers to target?
4. What was the nature of preservice teachers' reflections on the experience of observing cooperating teachers and peers?

Method

Participants and Setting

The participants in this study were 34 elementary education students enrolled in their last semester of coursework before the final student teaching experience. The group consisted of 25 Caucasian females, 3 Latina females, 2 African American females, 3 Caucasian males, and 1 African American male. We trained the participants in peer-coaching methods (see Anderson, Caswell, & Hayes, 1994) during their first field experience, where they had participated in four coaching sessions, two each as presenter and observer. We conducted this study during their second of two early field experiences.

The preservice teachers (PSTs) interned in elementary school classrooms for four mornings a week in a suburban school where about 30% of the pupils were bussed from inner-city neighborhoods. In the afternoons, the preservice teachers attended courses at the university, including a weekly 50-minute seminar conducted by the first author, who served as the university supervisor for both early field experiences.

The supervisor paired PSTs for classroom placements to facilitate observing one another's teaching and offering suggestions for improving practice. She took into account PSTs' requests for partners as well as their performance in the previous field experience, pairing the few weaker PSTs with stronger peers. She then assigned each dyad to one cooperating teacher for a 12-week field experience.

We structured this study to provide a variety of observation experiences:

1. PSTs formally (i.e., by appointment) observed their cooperating teachers weekly.
2. PSTs participated in peer-coaching sessions weekly, alternating roles of presenter and observer.
3. Cooperating teachers observed each PST weekly and provided feedback.

4. The university supervisor completed three 45-minute observations of each PST and provided feedback in an immediate postconference (see Anderson, 1998; Anderson & Radencich, 2001).

Procedures

During the first week of the semester, the university supervisor conducted an orientation session for the 17 cooperating teachers. She asked them to observe and provide feedback to both of their PSTs at least once a week and to set aside time each week for their PSTs to observe them teaching. We asked that the PSTs be free of other responsibilities such as grading, tutoring, or preparing lessons while observing their cooperating teachers. To counteract the common correlation of observation and evaluation (see Lam, 2001), we employed only unguided observations of the cooperating teachers. We asked the PSTs to “note effective techniques used by your cooperating teacher and discuss them in your weekly dialogue journal entries.”

All PSTs taught two whole-class lessons each morning and tutored individual pupils and small groups. Peers participated in guided observations (i.e., using a data form with specific questions during the preconference, observation, and postconference sequence) of one another during weekly sessions. In the preconference, the PST presenting the lesson designated which behaviors to observe. Then the peers jointly determined how they would collect the observation data. PSTs used data forms to record information about the observations.

Data Sources

Data sources included dialogue journals each PST wrote with the university supervisor and a packet of data forms completed by the dyads for each peer observation session. We triangulated these data with the university supervisor’s observations.

Dialogue Journals: For each of the 12 weeks in the field experience, PSTs wrote one to two pages in a private dialogue journal they kept with the university supervisor. The purpose of the journal was to provide a framework for encouraging reflective thinking about the field experience (Radencich & Laframboise, 1997); therefore, we did not provide specific guidelines on what to include in their entries. PSTs reflected on a broad range of topics, including the peer-observation sessions, their observations of the cooperating teachers, and their own teaching. The university supervisor read and responded to all entries weekly. Her responses primarily addressed PSTs’ questions or concerns. At the end of the study, the researchers reread each journal and identified all remarks referring to observations of cooperating teachers and peers.

Data Form Packets: For each weekly peer-observation session, PSTs compiled a packet of three items:

Preservice Teachers' Observations

1. A one-page outline of the lesson that concluded with a sentence identifying the behavior(s) the observer should target (i.e., "What specifically do you want your peer to look for during your lesson?")
2. A form completed by the peer observer, containing the following three questions:
 - ◆ During the preconference, what helpful suggestions did you provide for your peer's lesson?
 - ◆ In the postconference, what advice did you give your peer?
 - ◆ What did you learn from this session that you could apply in your future lessons?
3. One or more pages of data the observer collected during the observation.

The purpose of the packet was to guide PSTs through the typical observation and feedback process following the Mills (1980) model. First, the PSTs met in a preconference and the presenter informed the observer what she or he would be teaching and what behaviors the observer should target. The peers then jointly selected the method of collecting data. Second, the presenter taught the lesson, and the observer recorded the data. Third, the peers conducted a postconference (either immediately after the observation or at the end of the day) in which the observer provided feedback to the presenter. Then, the peers analyzed the data and discussed the findings.

During the previous field experience, the university supervisor demonstrated how to collect data using both anecdotal accounts and checklists. In this study, PSTs were encouraged to use these methods in addition to tallying any targeted behaviors the presenters requested. However, they were not restricted to these methods.

Data Analysis

The dialogue journals and data forms were the primary data sources. The first step in the data analysis procedure was to identify relevant comments from the dialogue journals that referred to observations of cooperating teachers and peers. We segmented these comments into units of meaning as described by Hycner (1985), giving careful attention to the preservation of context. We defined units of meaning as statements that centered on a single idea or thought, for instance, "I observed my second graders in their art class. I was very disappointed with the art teacher's demeanor." We considered this comment a single unit of meaning because further segmentation would not provide for a full understanding of the meaning.

After segmenting the texts of the dialogue journals, we grouped units of meaning into categories sharing common themes or characteristics using the guidelines provided by Bogdan and Biklen (1998). We used an inductive process in which we first physically grouped small numbers of units of meaning that were similar in nature as subcategories, and then examined subcategories with like

characteristics to identify major categories or themes. For example, we grouped the following statements, "I also confirmed the power of stories to captivate children" and "Use of the overhead (so that children could see as well as hear the examples) helped the children understand," into the subcategory, "Ideas for teaching, including teaching specific content ideas." This subcategory was later included within the major theme of Pedagogy.

After completing analysis of dialogue journals, we examined the data form packets. In completing the data forms, PSTs provided responses to specific questions posed by the researchers. Thus, these data were qualitatively different from the dialogue journals, which PSTs wrote as conversations with the university supervisor (following no specific format). In our analysis of the data forms, the questions served as cues for responses, and in order to preserve contextual understandings (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998), we analyzed responses to each question separately (i.e., we examined all responses to question one, then question two, etc.). We segmented the PSTs' responses to each question into separate units of meaning (in the same manner as the dialogue journals) and matched like units into emergent themes.

As a part of the analysis process, we examined the lesson outlines and the actual data collected by the peer observers to determine which methods they had selected for the data collection. We used the outlines and the observation data as secondary data sources, consulting them when it was necessary for understanding the dialogue journals and data forms. We conducted no formal analyses of these data in this study.

Results

Because of the separate analyses of the dialogue journals and data forms as qualitatively different data sources, we have reported the findings of the study separately as well. We report first on our findings related to research question one about the PSTs' observations of their cooperating teachers based on their dialogue journals. Then we report on their responses to observing peers, research question two, through the data forms.

Observing Cooperating Teachers

These PSTs were prolific in writing comments in their journals about observations of their cooperating teachers. From analysis of the journal entries, we identified three major themes (classroom discipline/management, pedagogy, and general positive influence) and three minor themes (self-reflection/action, questioning strategies, and observations about pupils).

Classroom Discipline/Management: The most commonly occurring theme among the responses involved statements about the cooperating teachers' classroom management techniques. Examples are, "It was helpful for me to see how another person handled the whole class during a time when they are especially tempted to talk with their groups," and "I learned how easily children can get off

Preservice Teachers' Observations

task when you are passing out materials or they are done with their assignments. We have to have something ready at all times.” These PSTs saw that things did not go perfectly for their cooperating teachers and that there were constant management problems with which to deal.

They made note of what seemed to work well when their cooperating teachers addressed these problems. The solutions included (a) providing positive feedback to on-task pupils, (b) circulating around the classroom, (c) having “eyes on all sides of your head,” (d) calling on pupils who are not paying attention, (e) staying calm, (f) correcting off-task behaviors, (g) changing activities to handle behavior problems, (h) using wait time after questions, (i) asking pupils to raise their hands to reduce calling out, (j) keeping pupils busy, and (k) carefully monitoring pupils in the back of the room.

These PSTs made positive comments about their cooperating teachers' ability to manage their classrooms, and their implied definition of good classroom management was “a classroom in which pupils are quiet and busy.” Yet, this perspective of classroom management conflicts with the methods that were stressed in their preparation program—in particular, the value of cooperative learning. None of the PSTs made statements that reflected appreciation of teacher management of activities in which they expected pupils to be verbal and active. It is possible that these PSTs did not observe their teachers when they were conducting active learning experiences. Perhaps the cooperating teachers selected the lessons for the PSTs to observe when they were standing in front of the classroom, engaged in traditional instruction. It may also be possible that these particular teachers did not use cooperative learning.

Pedagogy: The second major theme within the dialogue journal data was that of pedagogy. There were four subcategories: (a) voice in teaching, (b) confidence and enthusiasm, (c) providing clear instructions to pupils, and (d) ideas for teaching, including teaching specific content.

Several PSTs paid careful attention to ways in which their cooperating teachers used oral presentation skills. For example, one PST said, “Voice inflection/intonation really helps your lesson and your children's involvement.” Other PSTs commented on assuring that all pupils could hear, for example, “I learned the importance of speaking slowly and clearly.” In a similar fashion, the PSTs noted the importance of having confidence (or at least the appearance of confidence) when standing before the pupils and displaying enthusiasm for the content. One PST reflected, “Watching her do her math lesson on Monday was also very helpful. It showed me the importance of looking and feeling self-confident about the material you are going to teach. She wasn't, and the kids picked up on it really fast.”

These PSTs indicated they gained both specific and general ideas about teaching content. We identified general pedagogical ideas in statements such as, “I also confirmed the power of stories to captivate children,” and, “I learned a

different style of teaching. She had a very unique introduction.” The pedagogical ideas that were more specific included, “It was helpful for me to see her tell the story of ‘Mother Vowel’ in a fun and enjoyable way for the children.”

The pedagogical ideas included in the dialogue journals represented general guidelines for teaching that involved oral presentations, the appearance of confidence, displaying enthusiasm, ways of captivating pupils’ attention, and ways of making learning pleasant. All these components are powerful tools that can enhance teaching; however, three of them are not typically a major focus of teacher preparation coursework. For instance, the use of one’s voice when teaching was not an objective in any of the courses taken by these PSTs. Likewise, most courses do not stress appearing confident. Although teacher educators may tell their students that the display of enthusiasm is important in teaching, there is little focus on its development. On the other hand, most methods courses do address the importance of gaining and maintaining pupils’ attention in teaching, as well as making learning pleasant.

Thus, it appears that when PSTs in early field experiences engage in unguided observations of cooperating teachers, they may identify and analyze pedagogical skills not addressed in their teacher preparation programs. It may be that they focus on characteristics that they see themselves lacking, such as a strong voice or self-confidence. This would be in line with the developmental stages of beginning teachers (Fuller, 1974) that suggest they demonstrate more concern about themselves than about instruction or their pupils. Perhaps, too, they may have chosen not to reflect on pedagogical content presented within their courses, thinking that seminar discussions and activities had already provided that opportunity.

Positive Influence: A third major theme within these data involved statements reflecting that cooperating teacher observations had a positive impact. Often, comments were nonspecific, such as, “Watching her was very helpful. I really think that her method was very effective. I will surely use this in my future teaching career.” A few of these general statements were in reference to problems cooperating teachers had encountered. One PST noted, for example, “I saw her mistakes and *faux pas* and hopefully will learn from them.”

Negative Teacher Behaviors: Although comments about negative teacher behaviors were relatively few, they did reveal some significant concerns. Following are statements PSTs wrote in their journals that identify these concerns.

- ◆ “The way he teaches goes against everything we have learned in our courses.”
- ◆ “I observed my second graders in their art class. I was very disappointed with the art teacher’s demeanor.”
- ◆ “One thing that I don’t like about my teacher is that she teaches everything out of the book. She doesn’t seem to be very creative.”

Preservice Teachers' Observations

- ◆ “Time on task is virtually nonexistent. But the students are very well behaved. I am grateful for that. They just don’t listen to her lessons, and she doesn’t seem to notice (or care).”
- ◆ “On Thursday, we observed our new teacher the whole morning. I have mixed feelings because she is extremely strict with the students, and I don’t like that type of teaching style.”
- ◆ “Miranda’s teacher is next door, and she is a screamer! I’ve learned what I don’t want for my classroom atmosphere through just having to listen to her.”
- ◆ “I have compared her teaching techniques with some of those that I learned in my education courses. My teacher has good control of her classroom. She has very few discipline problems. However, when she does have a problem with a student, I feel like she could use different measures in handling them. The students appear to have a very comfortable relationship with her, even though she embarrasses them quite often . . .”

Minor Themes: In addition to the major themes, there were three minor themes: self-reflection/action, questioning strategies, and observations about pupils. Many of the ideas within the self-reflection/action category related to the PSTs’ self-reflections about their *own* teaching, rather than of the cooperating teacher’s lessons. Representative examples are, “I notice that I do many of the same things,” and, “It made me more aware of myself and what I do and what I’ve learned.” In addition, PSTs indicated actions or planned actions in the self-reflections. For instance, there were comments such as, “I have adopted several of her skills,” and, “I will concentrate on this while doing lessons.” These provide examples of how the observations influenced PSTs’ beliefs and practices.

The university supervisor had devoted one seminar to effective strategies for asking questions, and some PSTs attended carefully to their cooperating teachers’ questioning techniques. Representative comments included, “I realize how important it is to help children when asked or called on to answer,” and, “I will be more aware of who I call on. Norma and I plan on doing this often for the both of us.”

PSTs made few comments about specific pupils. They appeared to focus their attention on the cooperating teachers and on themselves as developing teachers. This was likely because of the directive to observe the cooperating teacher for effective teaching behaviors. However, there were a number of general statements such as, “It also showed me that children will react differently in new situations; and also to expect the kids to feel a little disoriented when a daily routine is broken.”

The data reflect that these PSTs were egocentric on their foci when they engaged in unguided observations of their cooperating teachers. They attended to how their teachers (a) managed the class, (b) delivered instruction and assignments, and (c)

used questioning strategies. The PSTs made general statements about the effectiveness of teachers' methods. In addition, they considered how they could develop and integrate the methods utilized by the cooperating teachers. Learning to use teacher behaviors, control pupils' behaviors, and keep the class quiet emerged as the foci of PSTs' reflections.

PSTs' journal reflections relating to the experience of observing their cooperating teachers overwhelmingly focused on how helpful the experiences were. The nature of these reflections took the form of accolades on how much they were learning about specific teaching techniques and classroom management. Representative comments were, "I really learned a lot by observing her"; "I will be able to use many of this teacher's techniques in the future after observing and utilizing them in this classroom"; "Every time I watch her teach a lesson, I learn something new and creative to work into my lesson"; and "I cannot get over how much I am learning." They also reported how they enjoyed the observations, for example, "I enjoyed watching her work," and "It was very interesting . . . I enjoyed watching her." Because we did not ask PSTs to reflect on the experience of observing but to reflect on *what* they were observing, it is understandable that their journals focused more on actions, rather than reflecting on the experience. However, one response did indicate further reflection. The PST wrote that teacher observations are "very important and more time needs to be set aside for it."

Observing Peers

Data on PSTs' responses to observing their peers and their peers observing them, research question two, came from two sources—dialogue journals and data forms.

Dialogue Journals: In their weekly journal entries, PSTs named a variety of benefits from the targeted observations of peers. However, the number of comments about observing peers was less than one-third of those about observing cooperating teachers. The PSTs may have believed the comments recorded on the data forms made it unnecessary for further discussion of the peer observations in their journals. The themes identified from the dialogue journal data about peer observations included (a) praise for the experience, (b) specific pedagogical learning, and (c) specific management skills learned.

Praise for experience. There were numerous comments praising the experience of observing peers. One PST wrote, "Peer coaching this week was a wonderful experience for me because I knew that while I watched Linda teach, I was not just listening to her teach, but helping her to evaluate her lesson, which was superb!" Another said, "I really like this type of observation and find it more valuable; I can get what I personally need to find in classrooms and peers in a much freer way than our traditional method."

Pedagogical learning. Another theme within the peer observation data was about specific pedagogical learning. These data provide evidence of the careful

Preservice Teachers' Observations

observation of specific teaching methods in the peer observations. "I observed my peer during an English lesson. She is very good with her questioning skills. I paid close attention to how she enabled the children to answer successfully. She also gave them plenty of time to come up with the answer." These PSTs reflected on what they observed and made related changes in their own teaching. One PST reflected,

Sheila had targeted gender responses for me to tally. Halfway through the lesson, I found out that she had called on twice as many boys as girls. This is something I had heard, but not really believed. By the end of the lesson, the ratio was almost even. My peer had realized the lopsided ratio in the middle of her lesson and she evened it up. I learned to pay close attention to who you call on, not just the boys. It goes further than that. You can't call on those who always know the answer. It is helping no one.

Management skills learned. In accord with observations of the cooperating teachers, the PSTs attended to specific classroom-management techniques, and there is evidence they learned from what they observed: "By watching Janet, I learned how sometimes just a movement of your hand can help stop misbehavior before it begins." Likewise, they noted areas such as confidence and enthusiasm as being important.

A few of the PSTs wrote about the logistics of the observations and revealed that, as the semester progressed, some of the dyads were attending to each other's teaching and providing feedback on a daily basis instead of just during the required weekly session. This is an extremely powerful finding, and it lends a great deal of credence to the value of peer coaching in early field experiences. An example follows: "Usually we will take a few notes every day just to let each other know what we thought of the other's lesson," and "Sarah and I give feedback daily, and I think it is to both of our benefits. We usually talk over lunch."

This source of data on peer observations provided evidence that the project was successful in many ways. The PSTs indicated that peer observations led to learning specific pedagogical methods as well as specific management skills. Statements about the logistics indicated that they easily arranged for the weekly sessions, and several of the dyads independently expanded their weekly observations to provide daily feedback.

Data Forms: Unlike the dialogue journals that provided a forum for spontaneous remarks about observing both cooperating teachers and peers, the data forms required responses to structured questions pertaining only to the logistics and value of peer observations. For the first two questions on the data forms, "What helpful suggestions did you provide for your peer's lesson plan?" and, "What advice did you give your peer?" we refer the reader to the article by Anderson & Radencich (2001) for a thorough discussion of the feedback provided in this early field experience.

The focus of this article is the third question of the data forms, "What did you learn from this session that you can apply in your future lessons?" The value of this information is documented in Showers and Joyce's (1996) revised model of peer

coaching, in which the observer notes what he or she has learned, not simply emphasizing a specific focus for observation as in their earlier model.

PSTs attached to each data form the observation data they had collected. By far, the most commonly used method was anecdotal recordings, and an example appears in Box 1. An unexpected finding was that the PSTs spontaneously employed six of the seven methods of recording data identified by Mills (1980), including tallying, listing, coding, verbatim recording, anecdotal recording, and combined techniques. The only method proposed by Mills that they did not use was “timing,” a highly structured method in which a watch is used to determine the exact times at which certain behaviors or events occurred. PSTs also used methods beyond those identified by Mills and recorded data using questions and answers (see Box 2), schematics, and checklists devised for a specific purpose (e.g., recording the number of responses each pupil made during a class discussion).

The behaviors identified by the presenters for peer observations, our third research question, were of particular interest. Targeted behaviors included general classroom discipline/management ($N=47$); pupils’ engagement in the task ($N=31$); presentation of the lesson ($N=28$); flow, sequence, and pacing ($N=19$); questioning strategies ($N=18$); and use of praise ($N=11$). The university supervisor reported that these behaviors were also the focus of much of the feedback she gave the PSTs after her observations.

In addition to collecting data as requested by peer teachers, peer observers also answered questions on the data forms. Observers responded to, “What did you learn from this session that you can apply in your future lessons?” We grouped responses in five categories that closely matched the themes identified from the dialogue journals.

1. *Classroom discipline/management* (e.g., “I felt that watching her practice ‘withitness’ while teaching was helpful.”)

Box 1

Preservice teacher’s anecdotal notes on a peer’s manuscript handwriting lesson

- ◆ Reminded students to sit in handwriting position
- ◆ Clear directions for beginning & materials needed
- ◆ Reviewed rule for capitalizing proper nouns (names)
- ◆ Very specific on letter height & spacing
- ◆ Involved students in choosing the # of each letter (this helped class management)
- ◆ Circulated while students were writing & corrected formations immediately
- ◆ Good explanation of lowercase g’s tail
- ◆ Self corrected in front of students, helped the class to see mistakes are OK
- ◆ Allowed quiet interaction during writing, quieted group for instruction
- ◆ Reminded students where the letters sit on the paper (the red line)

Preservice Teachers' Observations

2. *Specific pedagogical suggestions* related either to the teaching process (e.g., "Being prepared is vital") or to the content of instruction (e.g., "I confirmed the power of stories to captivate children"). Within the latter subcategory, the most frequently occurring comments related to questioning strategies.

3. *Nonspecific learning* (e.g., "I got to actually observe her good teaching techniques.")

4. *Self-reflection or plans for personal action* resulting from the observation (e.g., "I will make myself conscious to show good examples.")

5. *The process of observing* (e.g., "I learned to be more comfortable about sharing my ideas and giving advice.")

Comments on the observers' data forms were primarily general; however, most contained some information on classroom management. Similarly, there was a strong tendency toward management issues within the actual data the PSTs collected, particularly in the anecdotal recordings. Commonly, the observers included notes on management that were in addition to, or instead of, the data requested by the peer teacher. It appears that they believed this information was significant and worthy of comment. The university supervisor's observation notes always contained feedback on classroom management, which ranged from being the primary focus of the feedback to a single comment such as, "Your management

Box 2

Preservice teacher's data using a question/answer format for a targeted observation of her peer's questioning strategies

1. Did I provide good think time?
Yes, they were given a few minutes to answer the question on their paper.
2. Did I ask the question first before calling on a student?
Yes, good job!
3. Did I ask only one question at a time?
Very good, very specific questions
4. Did I probe or give hints in order to get a good answer from a student who is having difficulty?
*Excellent! "Try to think about it Justin."
Gave Juan hints so he could answer. See, you waited & he answered!*
5. Did I provide good feedback for correct or incorrect answers?
*Yes, asked them to explain/spell word
Specific praise: "You kept on task."
General praise: "Very good."*

skills were excellent today!” Cooperating teachers also reported giving frequent feedback on management, and it appears the PSTs modeled their feedback after that of the supervisor’s and teachers’—whether or not their peer asked for such feedback.

Discussion

Limitations of the Study

The first author served as the university supervisor of the field experience, and she read and responded weekly to the participants’ dialogue journals from which we obtained much of the data. Any words of praise for the experience might have been to please the university supervisor. Additionally, we acknowledge the challenges, limitations, and presumptuousness of describing others’ behaviors, and representing others’ points of view and realities mediated through our own experiences and perceptions. Therefore, we cannot generalize our conclusions to other teaching contexts or PSTs because each teaching context is unique.

Significant Findings

These findings revealed that participants in this study perceived the experience of observing both cooperating teachers and peers—our fourth research question—to be both beneficial and enjoyable, as detailed in the preceding sections on *Positive Influence* (under *Observing Teachers*) and *Praise for Experience* (under *Observing Peers*).

Though some studies have revealed preservice teachers’ dismay at cooperating teachers’ undesirable behaviors (e.g., McDevitt, 1996), with few exceptions this was not the case in this study. Perhaps this was because we told the PSTs to “note effective techniques used by your cooperating teacher and discuss them in your weekly dialogue journal entries.” They may have believed this prohibited them from mentioning what they considered ineffective behaviors.

The few negative comments about cooperating teachers addressed both teaching styles and classroom management techniques. However, in at least one case, the situation improved as the semester progressed. After the first week, one PST wrote, “Time on task is virtually nonexistent . . . [Pupils] just don’t listen to her lessons, and she doesn’t seem to notice (or care).” However, six weeks into the experience, this same PST reflected, “I saw how well the class pays attention. She gave a lot of positive feedback on behavior. She also stuck to her word with warnings and card pulling. The children respect her for this.”

These PSTs often commented on their learning in generalities such as, “I learned to use more praise.” When they were specific, their comments most often related to pedagogy or classroom management, areas that continue to be critical for novice teachers (Hollingsworth, 1994; Kagan & Tippins, 1991).

All the PSTs had positive comments about their professional growth from the observations. In some cases, PSTs learned that while developing advice for a peer

Preservice Teachers' Observations

on specific problems, they could begin to solve their own teaching problems or think of ways to overcome their bad habits. One PST wrote, "As I focused on one or more aspects of Lydia's lesson, it caused me to reflect on my own style of class management," and from another, "It really helps me see things and want to correct my own mistakes that are similar." Another PST commented on her peer's improvement when she wrote, "Nell did a wonderful job. She had been calling on the majority of boys on a certain side of the room. I brought this to her attention one day, and since that day, she has concentrated on changing for the better."

Results of this study suggest that these PSTs are operating at Level 2 of Fuller's (1974) Continuum of Concerns in teacher development (concern for survival and self) or Level 3 (concern for what and how they teach). We recognize that, since Fuller's pioneering work in teacher development, some writers have substantiated her findings (Moore, 2003; Runyan, White, Hazel, & Hedges, 1999; Kromrey & Wynn, 1999; Sandlin, Young, & Karge, 1998), while others have found different patterns of development (Pigge & Marso, 1987). Kagan (1992) revised the model so that beginning teachers' focus on self is a positive and necessary stage where their self-image is adapted and reconstructed. Thus, we believe these PSTs were operating at an appropriate level because they were in the second of three required internships.

Differences in views of teacher development may stem from personal, program, and context variations. For example, Sandlin, Young, and Karge (1998) compared the development of traditionally prepared teachers with those in alternative preparation, finding differences in the rate at which they moved through the concerns, although demonstrating the same concerns. A constructivist education program may affect the development of its teachers differently than would a more traditional program. In addition, a program that emphasizes reflection may accelerate teacher development, as suggested by Bullough (1990). Also, preservice teachers of traditional age, such as in our study, may develop differently than more mature students, such as those in Pigge and Marso's (1987) and Guillaume and Rudney's (2000) investigations.

We did not design our study to assess the effects of guided and unguided observations on the teaching beliefs and practices of these preservice teachers. However, we plan future investigation of this question through use of self-report data and through triangulation with cooperating teachers' and supervisors' viewpoints.

Conclusions

The combination of guided observations of peers and unguided observations of cooperating teachers during an early field experience had great value for these preservice teachers. We posit that training in guided observation techniques may provide a foundation that could make this experience profitable for future teachers. Because the preservice teachers valued the peer-observation experience, we hope it will lead them to seek additional observation opportunities as inservice teachers.

We also hope they will remember the reflectivity and cooperation modeled through this experience and that they view it as critical to successful teaching careers.

References

- Ackland, R. (1991). A review of the peer coaching literature. *Journal of Staff Development*, 12(1), 22-27.
- Artzt, A. F., & Armour-Thomas, E. (2002). *Becoming a reflective mathematics teacher: A guide for observations and self-assessment. Studies in mathematical thinking and learning series*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Anderson, N. A. (1998). Providing feedback to preservice teachers of reading in field settings. *Reading Research and Instruction*, 37, 123-136.
- Anderson, N. A., Caswell, I. J., & Hayes, M. E. (1994). Using peer coaching to provide additional feedback to preservice teachers of reading in an early field experience. In E. G. Sturtevant & W. M. Linek (Eds.), *Pathways for literacy: Learners teach and teachers learn* (pp. 211-221). College Reading Association.
- Anderson, N. A., & Radencich, M. C. (2001). The value of feedback in an early field experience: Peer, teacher, and supervisor coaching. *Action in Teacher Education*, 23, 66-74.
- Barrett, K. R., Allison, P. C., & Bell, R. (1987). What preservice physical education teachers see in an unguided field experience: A follow-up study. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 7, 12-21.
- Bell, R., Barrett, K. R., & Allison, P. C. (1985). What preservice physical education teachers see in an unguided, early field experience. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 4, 81-90.
- Ben-Peretz, M., & Rumney, S. (1991). Professional thinking in guided practice. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 7, 517-530.
- Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K., (1998). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods* (3rd ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Bowman, C. L., & McCormick, S. (2000). Comparison of peer coaching versus traditional supervision effects. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 93(4), 256-261.
- Bullough, R. V., Jr. (1990, April). *Personal history and teaching metaphors in preservice teacher education*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Boston.
- Dewey, J. (1974). The relation of theory to practice in education. In R. Archambault (Ed.), *John Dewey on education: Selected writings*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Englert, C. S., & Sugai, G. (1983). Teacher training: Improving trainee performance through peer observation and observation system technology. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 6, 7-17.
- Flanders, N. (1970). *Analyzing teaching behavior*. Reading, MA: Addison Wesley.
- Florida Coalition for the Development of a Performance Measurement System. (1983). *Florida Performance Measurement System*. Tallahassee, FL: Bureau of Teacher Education, Florida Department of Education.
- Florio-Ruane, S. (1990). Creating your own case studies: A guide for early field experience. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 17(1), 29-41.
- Fuller, F. F. (1974). A conceptual framework for a personalized teacher education program. *American Educational Research Journal*, 13(2), 112-122.
- Guillaume, A. M. & Rudney, G. L. (2000). Student teachers' growth toward independence: An

Preservice Teachers' Observations

- analysis of their changing concerns. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 9(1), 65-80.
- Guyton, E., & McIntyre, D. J. (1990). Student teaching and school experiences. In W.R. Houston (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teacher education*. New York: Macmillan.
- Hasbrouck, J. E. (1997). Mediated peer coaching for training preservice teachers. *The Journal of Special Education*, 31(2), 251-271.
- Hollingsworth, S. (1994). *Teacher research and urban literacy education: Lessons and conversations in a feminist key*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Hudson, P., Miller, S., Salzburg, C., & Morgan, R. (1994). The role of peer coaching in teacher education programs. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 17, 224-235.
- Hycner, R. H. (1985). Some guidelines for the phenomenological analysis of interview data. *Human Studies*, 8, 279-303.
- Joyce, B., & Showers, B. (1980). Improving inservice training: The messages of research. *Educational Leadership*, 37, 379-385.
- Joyce, B., & Showers, B. (1982). The coaching of teaching. *Educational Leadership*, 40, 4-10.
- Joyce, B., & Showers, B. (1985). *Student achievement through staff development: Fundamentals of school renewal* (2nd ed.). White Plains, NY: Longman.
- Kagan, D. (1992). Professional growth among preservice and beginning teachers. *Review of Educational Research*, 62(2), 129-169.
- Kagan, D., & Tippins, D. (1991). How teachers' classroom cases express their pedagogical beliefs. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 42(4), 281-291.
- Kromrey, J. & Wynn, M. J. (1999). Paired peer placement with peer coaching in early field experiences: Results of a four-year study. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 26(1), 21-38.
- Kurtts, S. A. (1997). *Peer coaching and the development of reflective practice in preservice teachers*. Paper presented at the annual conference of the Eastern Educational Research Association, Hilton Head, SC.
- Kurtts, S. A., & Levin, B. B. (2000). Using peer coaching with preservice teachers to develop reflective practice and collegial support. *Teaching Education*, 11(3), 297-310.
- Lam, S. F. (2001). Educators' opinions on classroom observation as a practice of staff development and appraisal. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 17, 161-173.
- Lignuris/Kraft, B., & Marchand-Martella, N. (1993). Evaluation of preservice teachers' interactive teaching skills in a direct instruction practicum using student teachers as supervisors. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 16, 309-318.
- Mallette, B., Maheady, L., & Harper, G. F. (1999). The effects of reciprocal peer coaching on preservice general educators' instruction of students with special learning needs. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 22(4), 201-216.
- McAllister, E. A., & Neubert, G. A. (1995). *New teachers helping new teachers: Preservice peer coaching*. Bloomington, IN: EDINFO Press.
- McDevitt, M. A. (1996). A virtual view: Classroom observations at a distance. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 47, 191-195.
- McIntyre, D., Byrd, D., & Foxx, S. (1996). Field and laboratory experiences. In J. Sikula, T. Buttery, & E. Guyton, (Eds.) *Handbook of research on teacher education* (pp. 171-193). New York: Macmillan.
- Miller, S. P., Harris, C., & Watanabe, A. (1991). Professional coaching: A method for increasing effective and decreasing ineffective teacher behaviors. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 14, 183-191.
- Miller, S. P. (1994). Peer coaching within an early childhood interdisciplinary setting.

- Intervention in School and Clinic*, 30(2), 109-113.
- Mills, J. R. (1980). A guide for teaching systematic observation to student teachers. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 31(6), 5-9.
- Moore, R. (2003). Reexamining the field experiences of preservice teachers. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 54 (1), 31-42.
- Morgan, R. L., Menlove, R., Salzberg, C. L., & Hudson, P. (1994). Effects of peer coaching on the acquisition of direct instruction skills by low-performing preservice teachers. *The Journal of Special Education*, 28, 59-76.
- Munson, B. (1998). Peers observing peers: The better way to observe teachers. *Contemporary Education*, 69(2), 108-110.
- Odell, S., & Ferraro, D. (1992). Teacher mentoring and teacher retention. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 43(3), 200-204.
- Osterman, K. F., & Kottkamp, R. B. (1993). *Reflective practice for teachers*. Newbury Park, CA: Corwin Press.
- Pierce, T. & Miller, S. P. (1994). Using peer coaching in preservice practica. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 17(4), 215-223.
- Pigge, F. L., & Marso, R. N. (1987, April). *The influence of preservice training and teaching experience upon attitudes and concerns about teaching*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Washington, DC.
- Radencich, M. C., & Laframboise, K. (1997). *Student journals—Informing the professor*. Unpublished manuscript. University of South Florida.
- Rausch, K., & Whittaker, C. R. (1999). Observation and feedback during student teaching: Learning from peers. *Action in Teacher Education*, 21, 67-78.
- Rooney, J. (1993). Teacher evaluation: No more “Super” vision. *Educational Leadership*, 51(2), 43-44.
- Runyan, C. K., White, V., Hazel, L., & Hedges, D. (1999, February). *A seamless system of professional development from preservice to tenured teaching*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. New Orleans, LA. (Education Document Reproduction Service ED 417 167)
- Sandlin, R., Young, B., & Karge, B. (1998, April). *Traditionally and alternatively credentialed teachers: A 5-year analysis*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego, CA.
- Showers, B. (1985). Teachers coaching teachers. *Educational Leadership*, 42, 43-48.
- Showers, B., & Joyce, B. (1996). The evolution of peer coaching. *Educational Leadership*, 53, p. 12-16.
- Waxman, H. C., Rodriguez, J. I., Padron, Y. N., & Knight, S. L. (1988). The use of systematic classroom observations during field experience components of teacher education programs. *College Student Journal*, 22, 199-202.
- Wynn, M. J. (1995). *Paired peer placement, peer coaching, and transfer of training in early elementary field experiences*. Paper presented at the annual conference of the Eastern Educational Research Association, Hilton Head, SC.
- Wynn, M. J., & Kromrey, J. (2000). Paired peer placement with peer coaching to enhance prospective teachers’ professional growth in early field experience. *Action in Teacher Education*, 22, 73-83.
- Yopp, H. K., & Guillaume, A. M. (1999). Preparing preservice teachers for collaboration. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 26, 5-19.