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**TEACHING AND LEARNING
RESEARCH EXCHANGE**

Professional
Growth for
Cooperating
Teachers

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Introduction

Internship is regarded by many as the most important aspect of current teacher education programs. In Saskatchewan, interns are placed in schools for 16 weeks. During this period, the assistance of a cooperating teacher is required. The cooperating teacher works with the intern in bridging the gap between university classrooms and the professional world. Internship provides the setting for putting theory into practice.

I have personally assumed the role of cooperating teacher for five interns. Each of my experiences as a cooperating teacher has been unique because of what the intern brought to the classroom, the dynamics that existed amongst the students we were teaching, and my own stage of personal and professional development at that time.

My own experiences as a cooperating teacher have been pooled in this document along with the feedback that I have received from other cooperating teachers. During the winter of 2002-03, I interviewed a number of teachers about their experiences supervising interns. The interview questions I used have been attached as Appendix 2.

My purpose in creating this document is not to dwell on the mechanics of the internship program, but to concentrate on the role of the cooperating teacher. I intend to offer my colleagues some suggestions for preparing to be a cooperating teacher and providing an authentic, enjoyable experience for the intern. Primarily, however, I want to focus on the role of the cooperating teacher as a learner. I will also voice some concerns that we may have as cooperating teachers, understanding that those are overshadowed by the many benefits and professional gains that have been realized by myself and other teachers whom I have interviewed.

I do not expect people to read my research in its entirety. In fact, this document is likely to seem repetitive if studied from beginning to end. Instead, I suggest that the sections of greatest interest or relevance be read by prospective cooperating teachers, school administrators, or future interns.

Should I or Shouldn't I?

The decision to accept an intern into your classroom is a major one. For some teachers, it is a responsibility they assume on a regular basis – perhaps every second, third, or fourth year. For others, the decision is based upon how many other commitments they have already made to their profession or their families. Also, there are teachers who choose never to take on the role of cooperating teacher. The timing and situation must be right to do justice to the task.

I try to serve as a cooperating teacher every third year. I apply early in the spring, when the request comes from the university; then I look forward to receiving a brief biography of the intern who has been selected to come to my rural, elementary classroom. I am filled with anticipation and excitement as I think about what the two of us will accomplish together for our students and ourselves.

Later in 2002, I asked teachers from around the province to tell me what factors influenced them to take interns. Their most frequent responses are summarized below:

- Teachers recognize that in the past, someone served as a cooperating teacher for each of them. Now it is only fair that they should do their part to help interns become competent professionals. As teachers, we should return the favor during our careers.
- Teachers who are parents of College of Education students sometimes take interns because they recognize that other professionals will serve as cooperating teachers for their children.
- Cooperating teachers recognize the merits of their own teaching and believe that interning in their classrooms would be a beneficial experience for a teacher in training. This belief is often the determining factor in accepting the role of cooperating teacher. Teachers have to feel confident that their skills, experiences, and expertise are worth sharing.
- Colleagues and administrators are sometimes helpful in building professional self-esteem and confidence in practising teachers. Some teachers are “shoulder-tapped” by administrators who recognize what a wonderful experience they could provide for an intern.
- Teachers often hear from their colleagues about positive experiences in supervising interns. They may also see teachers and interns working together, enjoying the experience, and learning from one another. After observing the process, many choose to participate as a cooperating teacher, hoping for the same positive results.
- Teachers may realize that being a cooperating teacher provides them with an opportunity to see new and exciting ideas tried out in their classrooms. The ideas may or may not be successful, but they are likely to bring about some degree of change in teaching practices.

- Some colleagues would claim that they take interns for “selfish reasons” because they can use their experiences as cooperating teachers, as part of their professional growth plan, which most teachers are required to provide. However, it is debatable whether their reasons are really selfish.
- Teachers know that they have something to offer interns on a professional level, and they want to have a positive impact on their schools and their profession in addition to the contribution they make by teaching children. Acting as a cooperating teacher is their way of providing leadership without going into administration.

Preparing for Sharing

As teachers, we need to prepare for our supervisory role just as we do for our teaching role. We do not become a cooperating teacher on the day that an intern is placed in our classroom. Thought and planning are a necessary part of the role, and they need to be carried out ahead of time. To guide teachers in their role from the beginning to the end of an internship placement, a manual has been prepared that is especially helpful for those working with an intern for the first time.

My own approach is to meet with my interns in advance so that we can learn about each other professionally and at least become familiar with one another on a personal level. I have found that it is wise to share the year plan at this time and perhaps have the interns think about what they will be teaching initially. During this meeting, I talk briefly about management, routines, assessment, and philosophy. However, one must be cautious not to overwhelm the intern or dictate how things should be done.

In establishing a potentially successful teacher-intern relationship, it is the teacher's task to create a welcoming climate. The intern must immediately recognize that he/she is a valued part of the classroom and the school. If you have created space for the intern, and made simple welcoming gestures, such as providing a name sign, a teacher mug or school supplies on the intern's desk, your new colleague will recognize that you are enthusiastic, cooperative, and ready for this experience. Cooperating teachers should also be proactive about introducing the intern to staff, showing him/her around the school, and familiarizing him/her with expectations, procedures, and school rules. The rule is to do what you can to create a shared, positive, helpful atmosphere.

Cooperating teachers may want to do some studying ahead of time to ensure that they are keenly aware of school division policies and protocols, and the current situation in the province or the school division. Familiarity with the context for teaching in your school will benefit both you and your intern.

A vital component of preparing to be a good cooperating teacher is to ensure that you are willing to share your skills, knowledge, resources, and most importantly, your students, with the intern. The intern is not a guest or a visitor to the classroom. You must be prepared to share the space and the responsibilities so that both the students and the intern recognize from the beginning that authority is attached to the role of intern. This is sometimes a very difficult thing to do because teachers are used to being in total control of what happens in their classrooms. Nevertheless, keep in mind that our goal as cooperating teachers is to witness the interns' development of a personal teaching style. If we focus on building a collaborative environment with clear, honest communication, we will best serve the needs of everyone in the classroom.

Interns assume a greater or lesser role in the classroom according to their own developmental pace. I believe that as soon as they feel ready to expand their experiences or responsibilities, we must step back and allow them to grow. They need an opportunity to practice new behaviours, experiment with teaching methodologies, try questioning techniques, and so on. Our role as cooperating

teachers is to provide guidance in pre- and post-teaching conferences and allow the interns to take risks that include the possibility that they will make mistakes. If we are not prepared for this shift in control, we limit the development of the intern. Moreover, when we are able to act as observers, we have an opportunity to experience our classrooms from a new perspective.

Our Students are Our Priority

Like most new teachers, an intern tends to concentrate initially on his or her own work and progress rather than that of the students. It is important for the cooperating teacher to help the intern balance his or her focus on learning to teach with attention to the needs of the students. I have witnessed interns who felt successful because a lesson went smoothly and they experienced no management problems, even though the learning objectives were not met by many of the students in the class. In this situation, our role as cooperating teachers is to point out the problem to the oblivious intern and have him or her think of a way to re-teach the same concept before moving on to new material.

When a teacher-intern pair meet for pre-teaching conferences, it is essential that they discuss what the students will be doing throughout the lesson. Both adults must be confident that the lesson is meaningful, appropriate to the age and grade level of the students, accurate, and curriculum-based.

Having an intern should be an enjoyable and valuable experience for the teacher and the students alike. The children should regard the intern in the same way they regard the teacher, as a professional in a position of authority, with an appropriate knowledge base and a set of teaching skills. If, for some reason, this is not the case, a problem exists for everyone involved. This problem is addressed in the section of this document entitled "Concerns Voiced".

Nurturing the Intern/Developing a Teacher

When interns come to share my classroom, I assign them tasks immediately. In that way, I have an opportunity to observe them right away and determine if they know how to “act like a teacher” and “think like a teacher”. Some interns seem to be able to do this instinctively; others need time to develop the “teacher-persona” and will proceed to do so along a continuum of development.

“Withitness” is a characteristic of teachers that is assessed in the internship program. It involves being in tune with whatever requires the teacher’s attention. Again, some interns naturally possess this characteristic, while others need to develop “withitness” through experience. They learn what needs their attention from being in the classroom and witnessing the importance of time management, keeping students on-task, and maintaining momentum.

Many of the teachers surveyed for this study acknowledged that at times, it is difficult to step back and give up the classroom. It is not at all easy for a teacher to allow someone else to take control of what has been their domain. It can be a challenge to observe quietly without interrupting or interjecting in some way. Often it seems easier to do something ourselves, the way we have always done it.

In fairness to the interns, however, cooperating teachers must learn to observe quietly while the interns conduct their lessons and take charge of the classroom. As cooperating teachers we have to recognize that the internship is not an apprenticeship program designed to make an intern learn “our way”; it is a chance for the interns to develop their own ways and their own unique styles. The cooperating teacher should offer suggestions and allow the interns to make choices for themselves. We can advise and guide, but we cannot expect our interns to adopt our style as their own. By providing opportunities, we are facilitating the development of a new teacher, with his or her own style.

In a study referred to in the Summer, 1993, *CAHPER Journal*, teachers named the development of self-confidence as the most important outcome of the field experience component of teacher education. The self confidence they referred to may have been a development that they recognized in themselves and/or in the interns. The most notable outcome identified by interns was increased comfort level with experimentation. By being paired with a teacher who allowed them the freedom to try new approaches to teaching, these protégés developed their creativity and expanded their repertoire of methodologies.

As the facilitator of the internship, the cooperating teacher does a tremendous service for the intern by encouraging, arranging, and/or sanctioning a great variety of experiences. Having interns observe other classes, teach with other teachers, interact with children of different ages, and undertake challenges beyond their comfort zone are all good ways for them to develop. Getting interns to become involved in the broader life of the school, staff, and community is valuable, too. In particular, it is wise to initiate the involvement of beginning teachers in the business and activities of the Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation on a local or provincial level. These exercises and activities may serve to enhance risk-taking behaviours, develop a more professional perspective, and encourage creativity. They also provide interns with exposure to new influences, which increases their learning.

Within our own classrooms, we as teachers need to demonstrate and discuss novel or alternative methods of teaching. By being creative, we encourage our interns to look at methods beyond personal preference or convenience. We are modeling professional practice in order to raise levels of professional competency. We must also be prepared to show our interns how theory influences our thoughts and actions so that they, too, will recognize the importance of relating the content of their university classes to their practices in the classroom.

Cooperating teachers must model ethical behaviour and make specific reference to the Code of Ethics governing the teaching profession in Saskatchewan. All interns should be highly familiar with the guidelines in the Code before they begin to teach independently. Understanding ethical responsibility and conduct is important in a successful start to a teaching career.

Interns need a diversity of skills for teaching in the new millennium. Topics that must be addressed and skills that require practice during the internship include the use of technology, ability to adapt curriculum to teach students with diverse needs, sensitivity to issues such as race, class, gender, or sexual orientation, and awareness of global issues relating to the environment. Some interns come equipped to deal with all of these topics and needs, and they are often able to assist the teacher who is not as current or as comfortable with new trends and issues.

It is important that teachers impress upon the intern the possible impact that they may have during their placement. Interns may not appreciate the magnitude of their impact or realize how much they can affect a child, influence a class, or contribute to an entire school. By ensuring the membership of interns in the classroom and on the staff, we are allowing them to influence the climate of the school.

The Relationship

The relationship that develops between an intern and cooperating teacher is crucial to the success of the experience. I do not mean that a friendship must form over the four-month internship, but it is important that both parties invest the time and energy needed to get to know one another well enough to be comfortable working together. There should be a certain level of mutual respect coming from open communication and the fulfillment of commitments on both sides. Cooperation is essential; companionship is not.

As the intern takes over more classroom responsibilities and the teacher becomes a guide, the pair may work toward a relationship that is based upon sharing strategies, insights, and concerns. Both will benefit from the exchange of management ideas, assessment tools, and good resources.

A positive teacher-intern relationship is desirable from the point of view of the students, too. They need the classroom to operate smoothly in order to learn. They may detect and appreciate the heightened morale in the classroom when a partnership of educational leadership exists.

Opportunities for Teachers

Since my main goal in writing this document is to offer encouragement for teachers to participate in the internship program, it seems appropriate to explain the opportunities that come from working with interns. Given below are five opportunities that I experienced as a cooperating teacher:

- 1) The nature of the internship program requires that teachers and interns meet daily for a formal pre-conference and post-conference. The pre-conference is essential to ensure that the intern is properly prepared to teach a lesson; the post-conference provides a forum for talking about strengths and weaknesses of the lesson. Any time a teacher and intern sit down together, whether the context is formal or informal, there is an opportunity for professional dialogue. This is the appropriate time and place to talk about the day, to do some collegial sharing, and to collaborate as classroom leaders. Too often in the course of a busy teaching day, I do not take the time to really discuss with my colleagues the issues pertaining to education, but when I have an intern, these discussions are part of my daily routine. We can share our opinions, express our frustrations, or even question our own actions.
- 2) As the cooperating teacher, I am perfectly situated to learn from another person's strengths. As my intern teaches and I observe, I may gain new knowledge, see a new way to present a concept, or even expand my management tactics. Teachers must not view themselves as experts, but always be open to learning from their interns. Sometimes we may not even be immediately aware of the positive impact that they have had on our teaching.
- 3) Teachers are also able to learn from the weaknesses of interns. When I recognize an area that needs improvement, such as the intern's questioning techniques or language usage, I work diligently to strengthen it by my own modeling. I am motivated to improve my own ability in the area in order to set a stronger example for the intern. Usually, I discover that I had the same weakness and did not realize it until I observed another person. In any mentor/mentee relationship, both parties learn, grow, and change.
- 4) When I have an intern, I am motivated to experiment with new materials, try alternative teaching methods, and get creative with grouping arrangements. The experience provides a good opportunity to be a risk-taker, and model for the intern that innovation is rewarding. We can experiment together and reflect on what happened from a platform of shared interest.
- 5) Once a certain level of trust exists, the intern and I may occasionally team teach. Having an extra set of hands, eyes, and ears makes onerous tasks easier to manage. We can design the lessons so each of us is capitalizing on our strengths. We can complement one another and share the success. If our working relationship has become very comfortable, we may also be able to flip roles completely. In that case, I do the planning and teaching while my intern observes and evaluates my practice. This is an insightful exercise for both of us.

Refreshing and Revitalizing

As cooperating teachers strive to provide the best guidance, supervision, and evaluation of their interns, they are involved in an exercise in self-improvement. As cooperating teachers, we agree to open up our practice to the scrutiny of another person, rather than close the door and teach in isolation. Simply by allowing ourselves to be observed, we are more cognizant of our habitual behaviours, whether we see them as positive or negative.

Also, in order to enlighten our interns, we must reacquaint ourselves with the mechanics of teaching. For example, I might need to review what is known about good practices in order to recall the levels of questioning, appropriate wait time, and proper use of directed and redirected questions. I always require a reminder about different lesson and unit planning formats, presentation skills, and current assessment and evaluation strategies.

Being a cooperating teacher reminds us to conduct ourselves as honourable members of the teaching profession. Even if we have slipped into some undesirable habits, this role requires that we model traits such as punctuality, preparedness, creativity, and dependability. It is necessary to demonstrate initiative, display a positive attitude, and exude enthusiasm. Our pride in the profession is rejuvenated.

As we participate in daily conferences with our interns, we look back at theory and relate it to practice. I also have learned the value of reflecting, engaging in professional talk, and receiving frequent feedback. Keeping a journal while serving as a cooperating teacher is something I recommend because it provides a valuable record of personal professional growth. We need to think about, talk about, and write about how we teach. Analyzing ourselves leads to professional growth.

Almost every cooperating teacher with whom I have spoken has identified a substantial increase in creativity as the greatest impact that their experience had on them. By viewing programs, student behaviour, and curriculum from a new perspective and regularly reflecting upon common practice, we judge ourselves and we make changes.

While observing the intern, we see the use of innovative approaches to achieving curriculum objectives. Influenced by the enthusiasm of the intern, we add new ideas to old projects or discard the old and replace it with something better. The risk-taking of the intern is contagious. The intern can stir up the creative energy of the cooperating teacher and influence him or her to experiment with new teaching methods, management techniques, or assessment tools. The new ideas that are generated bring a new vitality to the classroom long after the intern has finished the placement and is gone. By watching a creative, resourceful, dedicated individual teach, we find that our energy level has been given a boost that will benefit our students in following years.

Learning About Ourselves

Being a cooperating teacher provides the time and the opportunity for self-discovery. Immediately after meeting my most recent intern for the first time, I began to think about how I have developed my own teaching identity. I considered how much I have changed, and how I continue to evolve as a teacher.

Interns are placed in my classroom during the fall term. I believe that this is the optimum time, because the intern can then be an integral part of the class from day one. The interns are key participants in the creation of our classroom community. Together, my interns and I discuss the establishment of classroom routines, rules, and desirable climate. These conversations are important to me because they lead me to revisit my own beliefs about learning environments, the role of the teacher, and expectations of students. I am also required to express my philosophy of education. Although I have a firm philosophy, I seldom have the need to verbalize it. Discussing educational philosophy helps me to reinforce my beliefs, or to alter what I once held as true.

As I pre-conference and post-conference with my interns, I find that I not only critique their lessons, but look critically at myself. I wonder how effectively I have modeled teaching, if my questioning skills were admirable and if my presentation was dynamic. I do not begin to doubt my abilities, but I engage in reflection that motivates me to improve what I am doing in the classroom.

Through my daily interactions with an intern, I consider my own strengths and weaknesses. I talk openly with him or her about areas in which I believe I need practice or guidance, and areas in which I may be able to offer some level of expertise. I do not dwell on my own teaching, but I make references to it so that the intern knows that I do not pretend to be a master teacher, and I do not expect perfection from an intern either.

While observing an intern in action, I can sit on the sidelines and think about teaching and learning. I have the time to consider carefully my beliefs about education, my suitability for the profession, and what I do for my students. As I watch another person teach, I challenge myself to reflect upon my methods and my style of classroom management. I look for ways to optimize the learning that occurs in my classroom. I also take the opportunity to analyze what I enjoy about being a teacher and what concerns me about teaching. I set goals for myself and try to build a personal professional development plan based on what I am learning about myself through my experience with the intern.

Teachers whom I surveyed said that they also learned about themselves while they worked cooperatively with interns. Some clarified their philosophies of education and their management styles. Some recognized that they are highly organized and flexible, yet appreciative of routine. The teachers learned that they are using a great variety of teaching methods in their classrooms as well as relating content to real life experiences. There was a realization that so much of the science and the art of teaching has been internalized by an experienced teacher. Being a cooperating teacher reminds us that teaching is a highly demanding, complex task and that we must be proud of how well we are doing.

Professional Development

Sometimes people think professional development and in-service are synonymous. In-service is usually a one- or two-day session that focuses on a single topic. An “expert” lectures while participants sit and listen. When it is over, teachers may have a few practical ideas to take back and try in their classrooms. Often, the in-service was costly to the individual or the school division, it removed the teacher from the classroom, and it did not meet personal expectations.

True professional development is not simply an in-service. It relates to an interest or a need identified by a teacher. It is usually an on-going process with short-term and long-term goals. Professional development is unique to an individual or an interest group.

I believe strongly that the greatest professional development I have experienced during my career is my work as a cooperating teacher. It is my choice whether or not I have an intern. I consider the timing of the opportunity in relationship to what is happening in my personal life, the students I will be responsible for, and my ability to make the necessary commitment to an intern. Once I make the decision to be a cooperating teacher, I set my own learning objectives and determine what I will focus on throughout the working relationship. Keeping as priorities the success and happiness of the students and the quality of the intern’s field experience, I then design a path of learning for myself.

The most valuable lessons come from the daily dialogue with my interns. When they question me, I am forced to examine my instructional practices, articulate my beliefs about education, and clarify my knowledge about teaching and learning. When the intern genuinely wonders about something, I am led to question my personal assumptions or provide reasons for pedagogical decisions. Paula Stanovich (1998) calls this encouraging mindfulness because we free ourselves from automatic thought patterns and begin to question ourselves.

As I mentor, I usually reassess my vision and readjust my goals. By passing on whatever knowledge and skills I have accumulated, I am able to question what I think and what I do during teaching and learning. Together, the intern and I judge the merits of alternative approaches and analyze our teaching practice. As I redefine my purpose, the intern establishes his or her own beliefs and goals. The professional exchange is mutually beneficial.

The workshop days facilitated by the university can also offer professional development. Time is allotted for peer sharing. This opportunity to share insights about teaching and learning develops a feeling of connectedness to colleagues, and to the profession as well. We are participating in a common experience; therefore, we may have similar successes or challenges. Our time together has the potential to be a rewarding networking among professionals.

Other ways that being a cooperating teacher contributes to professional growth are the practical aspects of teaching that you learn from your intern, and the resources that you gain. Teachers always appreciate make-and-take workshops in which they collect a new supply of hands-on ideas to use with their students.

This expansion of ideas and resources happens daily as an intern teaches once a day, or twice a day, then for half-days and eventually takes over full-time.

Time spent observing our students helps us to become better teachers. While observing my intern, I have the chance to study my class too. I can consider multiple intelligences and learning styles. I can closely examine learners to discover what it is that they find difficult. I can listen and make generalizations about language development. I can even observe social interactions without ever interfering with what is happening in the class. The time I spend watching the children provides rich data for anecdotal records and information to be shared at interviews with parents. It also allows me to be more completely familiar with the students when I begin teaching them full-time again.

Learning the technique of clinical supervision has contributed to my professional growth. I appreciate the guided-discovery process that recommends personal reflection. Familiarity with the process may serve teachers well in other contexts, e.g., mentoring roles, peer coaching situations, or undertaking supervision and evaluation as an administrator.

Reflective practice is regarded as an important aim of educational reform (Ralph: 1994). It is recognized as being vitally connected to problem-solving and decision-making skills. Reflection is a mechanism for helping teachers become thoughtful and self-directed in their professional development. Structures and expectations for reflection exist for teachers and interns when they dialogue, analyze feedback, and engage in joint problem-solving.

The most potent tool for developing self-awareness and steering our own professional development may be the creation of a journal. As cooperating teachers, journal-writing is something that we can do at school while observing an intern or after we have left the classroom to permit the intern to be completely in charge of the teaching and learning. I use my journal to record my own teaching experiences, reflect on current issues in education (local or provincial), and record my thinking about my profession. I do not find time for journaling except when I have an intern.

Students Reap the Benefits

The most important factor to consider when doing anything in a school is how it will affect the students. Being taught by an intern and cooperating teacher offers students numerous possible benefits:

- Good interns bring fresh ideas and new approaches into the classroom. They use a variety of teaching strategies that make learning more fun for children. Observing the current teaching practices that interns bring may also stimulate the teacher's creativity, so that the students have two fresh leaders.
- Having a second adult in the classroom allows each student to receive more time and attention. At the beginning of the internship, when I am still doing most of the teaching, the intern circulates through the room, helping children get organized, assisting them with more instructions, or checking their understanding of the lesson. Later in the internship, I assume this role as an assistant to the intern. Since there are two of us, we are also more inclined to undertake messy projects and large-scale tasks because the workload can be shared or the class can be split into two more easily managed groups.
- In their desire to be great role models for interns, teachers tend to recognize the bad habits they have formed over time and try to cure them. We put more time into planning lessons and pay attention to details, such as building excitement through a fantastic motivational set, using appealing teacher language, and creating a novel assessment tool. Some teachers told me that they learned from their interns to allow more student discovery rather than rely on direct teaching methods. This change has made their classrooms more interesting for the students and the teachers.
- I create my year plan so that my interns have the opportunity to bring their true talents into the classroom. Each of these people comes with unique experiences and skills, so if their knowledge and abilities correspond with the curriculum, we capitalize on them. This adaptation would be more difficult in a high school situation, but in an elementary classroom, where it is common for every subject to be taught by a homeroom teacher, and any theme can be used to teach skills, there is more flexibility. My students have been fortunate to learn about macramé in visual arts, jazz in dance class, and the Jamaican culture in social studies. All of these wonderful experiences occurred because interns came to the classroom with their own special gifts to offer.

Concerns Voiced

There are various reasons why some teachers seldom accept an intern and why others never take on the responsibility. Knowing that high quality supervision is of critical importance to the field experience, some educators are not confident that they can offer what the intern will require. It is an especially daunting prospect for a first-time cooperating teacher and for teachers who are relatively young or inexperienced in their current teaching roles. Sometimes, it takes the encouragement of a colleague or an administrator to help teachers realize that they are highly capable educators who have much to offer an intern.

I agree with the teachers who have expressed an interest in the creation of a short course that would thoroughly explain the role, provide tips about observing and offering feedback, and generally help them feel comfortable in becoming a cooperating teacher. I also concur with the idea of having a formal meeting day before the beginning of the internship so that interns and cooperating teachers can get to know each other and work through some exercises designed to put the two of them at ease. Once the school year officially begins, intern and cooperating teacher will concentrate on the students, not themselves.

Time is another concern in becoming a cooperating teacher. There is no doubt that the role requires a huge time commitment. Cooperating teachers must plan for the involvement of interns in the classroom, meet with them for daily pre-conferences and post-conferences, and complete the final evaluation of their interns. All these tasks are time-consuming. Moreover, it is difficult for teachers to fit the daily conferences into their supervision and extra-curricular schedules. The teacher and intern must select a time when they are both available to meet, yet be flexible when their plans are interrupted.

Preparing for parent-teacher interviews and completing report cards also take more time when an intern is involved. In this situation, you cannot divide the work and each do half, nor can you exclude the intern from such an important part of the teacher's job. You must work together to determine marks and decide what needs to be said to parents. When the teacher and intern disagree, they may arrive at a compromise, but ultimately, it is the teacher's responsibility to make decisions about reporting.

Overall, I do not feel that the time element involves a huge sacrifice from the teacher because as the internship progresses, I find that I have more free time to do what I need to do. During the school day, I am required to formally observe two lessons. Beyond those periods, if I feel confident about what I see happening in the classroom, I can plan units, search for resources, read professional material, or observe or collaborate with peers. I am usually able to complete the final evaluation for the university during school time. The non-teaching time that interns provide is a huge reward for me.

Some concern has been expressed to me about the issue of compatibility between the teacher and the intern. There is no mechanism for ensuring that they will enjoy each other on a personal level, but in such a situation, we must try to be professional. If both parties focus on the task of teaching children, the internship should still be successful. You may not form a friendship, but you still help in the development of a teacher and, in all likelihood, you have learned from the

experience. If it is evident that the issue of incompatibility cannot be overcome, the university will step in to make a necessary change. The intern may be moved to another teaching assignment or the internship may be postponed until the intern possesses the skills to be successful. It is recognized that there is no value in preserving a process that is not good for students, educational for interns, or enjoyable for teachers.

Teachers admit that they worry about their own relationship with students as the intern takes over as the primary educator in the classroom. Teachers are highly possessive of their students and are not comfortable handing them over to another person. I know that this has been an issue for me, but I have had to focus on the true purpose of being a cooperating teacher, which is to “provide for the socialization and enculturation of an intern into a school context” (Boudreau: 1994). My students usually do enjoy their time with interns who are new, excited, fresh, eager risk-takers. However, after the intern has finished his or her field experience and I have the students back full-time, I feel like they are very much my class again.

There are two other concerns to be aware of in taking an intern:

- Units may take longer to teach when the intern is responsible for them. Most interns are very thorough. Therefore, in providing rich experiences for children, more class time is consumed. You may need to alter future units to make up for time lost. I try to have them keep up momentum, but student understanding is ultimately the determining factor in deciding when to move on.
- Teachers may not get the chance to engage in some of their own favorite activities with the students. If you have certain activities that you love to do with your students, you may want to suggest that the intern try something similar and then do them again later in the year as a review, or you could simply wait until next year when you have a new group of students.

There are rare occasions when interns enter the classroom ill-prepared for the role. When this occurs, it is difficult to relinquish control. In fact, it is foolish to jeopardize the education of your students. If you detect potential within the intern to become an adequate teacher, rely on support from a college supervisor to help the two of you as the intern’s abilities develop. Progress may be slower, but often there is great growth throughout the internship. Although the internship may prove to be a trying time, and it is certainly not an ideal situation, it still can provide an excellent opportunity for learning. If the problems are more severe, your duty is to contact the college supervisor very quickly.

Conclusion

When I began this project, I wanted to share some of my insights as a cooperating teacher. My goal was to focus on the richness of the learning experience that this role can provide. As I spoke with other educators about my writing in relationship to the internship, they indicated an interest in the professional development aspect of being a cooperating teacher. They also said that people need to be more aware of the other impacts that this role may have on a teacher. They wanted me to share a bit of the day-to-day reality of working with an intern. I was asked to be honest and open about the rewards and the sacrifices.

I hope I have painted a fair picture of the experience. It is not easy for me to be objective because I have generally had highly rewarding experiences with interns. As I have already explained, I truly believe that serving as a cooperating teacher is the richest professional development exercise anyone can undertake. The impact that it has had on my teaching and my professionalism is immense. Becoming a cooperating teacher can be a springboard for further professional activities or it can be an end in itself. Either way, the effects are immeasurable and long-lasting.

If interns develop their capacity to care and come to recognize what truly gives them heart in teaching, the placement has been successful. Ideally, both the teacher and the intern increase their professionalism while working together. The experience could be compared to a mountain-climbing expedition. People cooperate as a team in taking small steps toward a desired destination. Communication, perseverance, and thoughtfulness are essential. The summit, which in this case is mastery teaching, may be reached some time in the future. If it is not conquered, the journey is still a wonderful adventure.

When I think about it philosophically, I can see that cooperating with an intern is a vehicle by which an individual teacher can influence the future direction of education. The effect of our interactions with our interns will be evident in whatever they do throughout their careers. We will have had a role in educating more people than we could ever have imagined.

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Appendix 1

AGREEMENT WITH INTERN

I, _____, agree to intern in Mrs. Och's classroom while she is conducting her research on the professional development of cooperating teachers.

I understand that:

- I am not the subject of her research.
- I may inquire about her progress at any time.
- The results of the study have no bearing on the success of my internship and vice versa.

Date: _____

Signature: _____

4. What changes or improvements did you discover in your own teaching?

5. What discoveries did you make about yourself personally?

6. How could you have been better prepared to supervise an intern?

7. What did you learn from your experiences at the workshop days facilitated by university personnel?

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