

Noble Triad or Devil's Triangle? An autoethnography of a neophyte university supervisor

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Abstract

This autoethnography provides an account of my experiences as a neophyte university supervisor providing supervision to a student teacher. The supervision practicum was part of a course I took as a graduate student in a university located in a large south-western city in the United States. I visited my student teacher eight times in a high school located in the vicinity of the university. My educational and teaching background, supervision style and philosophy guided the way I supervised the student teacher throughout the practicum. The dynamic relationships with the cooperating teacher and the student teacher were revealed through an analysis of my journal. This paper attempts to expand the sport pedagogical literature around the supervision of student teachers from the perspective of a university supervisor by looking at how the differences in gender, race, and experience of individuals within the triad affected the perception of self within the triad. Data also indicated that my ideal of the Noble Triad was disrupted by the power differentials within the triad and the difference in expectations placed on the student teacher. A Noble Triad is formed when the university supervisor, cooperating teacher and student teacher are in agreement with each other. Additionally, my philosophy and supervision goals of being more than a “guide on the side” was continually shaped by a community of practice built around technical-rationalism. Though a reliance on observational tools provided a sense of security as a first-time supervisor, these tools have sometimes taken my focus away from the student teacher. Suggestions for future neophyte university supervisors are also provided in this paper.

Keywords: PETE; teacher educator; physical education; cooperating teacher; student teacher.

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INTRODUCTION

Student teaching is considered the capstone experience of a Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) programme. The student teaching experience provides actual teaching opportunities in the “real world” which help student teachers cope with the “reality shock” of teaching in full-time teaching positions (Chepyator-Thomson & Liu,

2003; Neide, 1996; Pellet et al., 1999; Wright, 2001). Throughout the student teaching experience, student teachers receive assistance from two other persons: the cooperating teacher and the university supervisor. The cooperating teacher is employed in a school and is contracted with the university to supervise a student teacher. The university supervisor supervises the student teacher for the purpose of fulfilling the student teaching requirement of the PETE programme. Both the cooperating teachers and university supervisors are influential in the development and socialization of student teachers (McCullick, 2001). They provide constant reassurance, guidance, and feedback to increase the confidence of student teachers during supervision. Supervisors also provide direct and intentional strategies to help student teachers become more effective physical educators (Metzler, 1990).

The triad, which consists of the student teacher, cooperating teacher and the university supervisor, however, can sometimes result in complex and confusing relationships (Murphy, 2010). A bond is often formed between the student teacher and the cooperating teacher because of the extended time they spend together compared with the university supervisor (Murphy, 2010). Relationships within the triad may become complicated because expectations of cooperating teachers are typically based on a pragmatic view, whereas expectations of university supervisors are based on theory (Murphy, 2010). When the university supervisor is caught between the theoretical ideals of the university and the pragmatic compromises of student teachers, who require hands-on pedagogical techniques which can be employed in the “real world”, the triad becomes a Devil's Triangle (Metzler, 1990). A Devil's Triangle is also formed when the university supervisor, cooperating teacher and student teacher are at odds with each other (Metzler, 1990). Conversely, when the three individuals within the triad are bonded together for the singular benefit of the student teacher, a Noble Triad is formed (Metzler, 1990).

University supervisors have an impact on the lives of student teachers (McCullick, 2001), however, there is a dearth of studies examining the experiences and training of university supervisors (Johnson & Napper-Owen, 2011). Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to provide an account of my experience as a doctoral student, providing first-time supervision to a student teacher from a university supervisor's perspective. In this paper, I have shared my training as a university supervisor, the challenges I faced, and suggestions for future beginning university supervisors. This paper is contextualized in a US setting and aims to provide beginning university supervisors with an insight into the supervision process and the interpersonal relationships within the supervision triad.

Autoethnographic Approach

Autoethnography is a personalized account which draws upon the experiences of the author or researcher for the purpose of extending sociological understanding (Hopper et al., 2008; Sparkes, 2000). Ellis (2004) describes autoethnography as a form of ethnography which “overlaps art and science; it is part *auto* or self and part *ethno* or culture” (p. 31). In particular, autoethnographers are concerned with self-evolving

narratives of lived experience from their emotional memories which form their life story (Hopper, 2008). For many years, scholars have used the autoethnographic approach to explore the concepts of identity construction (Duncan, 2000; Sparkes, 1996; Tsang, 2000). For example, Purdy et al. (2008) discussed the social power which exists between the principal author, as a rowing coxswain and her coach. Hopper et al. (2008) advocate autoethnography as an alternative genre of qualitative research which could allow more voices to be heard, broaden our understanding of social reality, and to make research on health, sport, recreation, and physical education accessible to more people. Jones (2005) asserts that autoethnography is “believing that words matter and writing toward the moment when the point of creating autoethnography texts is to change the world” (p. 765).

The autoethnographic approach was used in an attempt to take the reader through my journey as a beginning university supervisor. The negotiation of my position and personal identity within this process, as well as the dynamic relationships with the cooperating teacher and student teacher, were revealed through an analysis of my journal. In training to become a sport psychology consultant, Tonn and Harmison (2004) also shared Tonn’s experiences of sport psychology service delivery via a self-narrative journal. Besides providing a description of my feelings, thoughts, and perceptions, this paper also discusses the challenges I faced as a beginning university supervisor. The following sections describe my background, supervision philosophy and approach to supervision which provided the framework for the supervision experience.

My Educational and Teaching Background

As a native of Singapore, I moved to the United States to pursue graduate studies after teaching physical education for five years in a Singapore public school. I completed my two-year physical education teacher training at the National Institute of Education (NIE) in Singapore prior to teaching full time. The last semester at NIE was my student teaching practicum, where I spent four months in a secondary school together with two other physical education student teachers. My university supervisor and cooperating teacher each observed my lessons at least three times during the entire practicum, and they both gave me feedback which helped me improve my teaching. To this day, I can vividly remember the feedback given by my university supervisor on his visits, which impacted the way I teach physical education. For example, he would often encourage me to engage my students in more activity and less teacher talk during physical education classes. These previous personal student teaching experiences shaped my beliefs and actions as I began the supervision practicum. Beginning supervisors often rely on their memories as student teachers to perform the role as supervisors (Rikard & Veal, 1996).

My Supervision Style and Philosophy

My style and philosophy towards supervision began to develop through “on-the-job” training as I supervised my student teacher throughout the semester. My supervision style is similar to my teaching style, in that I believe in a facilitative rather than a direct

form of teaching. Supervision of student teachers is essentially teaching, though the setting is practised in a physical education class, away from the university (Metzler, 1990). Philosophically, I believe that supervision is an important part of the student teaching experience. Additionally, I believe that the cooperating teacher and the university supervisor each have an important role to assist in the development of the student teacher during the student teaching experience.

My supervision philosophy was further developed through my participation in a graduate-level Curriculum and Supervision in Physical Education course. The second author of this paper was the instructor of the supervision course and my mentor throughout my doctoral programme. My mentor contributed to shaping my supervision philosophy and developing my role within the supervision triad. Although he was not physically present within the triad, his beliefs provided a layer of influence on how I supervised my student teacher. In a way, he became a fourth member within the triad, who contributed to shaping my philosophy. Overall, my beliefs coupled with my instructor's influence have contributed to the development of my style and philosophy towards student teacher supervision.

Approach to Supervision (Goals)

My supervision style and philosophy guided the way I worked with the student teacher and cooperating teacher, and shaped my goals during the supervision practicum. First, my goal was to maintain a Noble Triad with the student teacher and cooperating teacher. This approach guided me to communicate the knowledge I gained from the university with the student teacher and cooperating teacher during each visit, and to incorporate strategies which worked in the "real world". To sustain this Noble Triad, it is important to frequently carry out three-way post-teaching meetings with the student teacher and cooperating teacher (Tjeerdsma, 1998). Frequent meetings are also one way to build rapport and enhance trust between the three parties (Johnson & Napper-Owen, 2011).

Second, my goal was to work collaboratively *with*, rather than directing my opinion *at* the student teacher. I believe that in this supervision process, every member in the triad should have an equal opportunity to present their voice. Instead of a top-down approach in the supervision process, I aimed to maintain a parallel approach towards my communication with the student teacher. Student teachers have the potential to reflect on their teaching experiences and communicate areas of teaching they feel require improvement. Therefore, my goal was to maintain an interactive supervision style, rather than being a teacher who is a "sage on the stage" or a teacher who is a "guide on the side" (Metzler, 2005).

Supervision Practicum

The semester-long student teaching practicum is a requirement for physical education majors in their final year of the PETE programme. To provide experience for PETE doctoral students in supervising student teachers, a supervision practicum is included in the graduate-level Curriculum and Supervision in Physical Education course. In spring

2010, there were seven graduate students (five males and two females) enrolled on the course and each was supervising one student teacher for the entire semester. The course included meeting face-to-face for three hours each week to share our supervision experience and discuss topics related to supervision. The culminating course assignment was the supervisory project which included a minimum of six visits to the schools where the student teachers were teaching during the semester. Guidelines for each visit were provided by the course instructor, which included keeping a journal of the supervisory experience and videotaping the student teacher. The required text of the class was *Instructional Supervision for Physical Education* (Metzler, 1990), along with other publications related to student teaching supervision. These weekly meetings and readings further shaped my supervision style and philosophy.

I visited my student teacher at the school she was teaching a total of eight times during the supervision practicum, which started in January and ended in April 2010. Prior to each visit, I informed my student teacher that I would be observing her. In addition, I would meet with the cooperating teacher and student teacher at the end of each visit. To document my personal thoughts prior to and interactions which took place during each visit, I meticulously kept a journal throughout my supervisory visits. Journaling is often used in autoethnography to record personal thoughts and feelings as the autoethnographer lives through an experience and connects past memories to the evolving lived experience (Hopper et al., 2008). In addition, journaling can be used as a qualitative research technique to provide a data set of the researcher's reflections (Janesick, 1999). The journal consists of my preparation for and my post-thoughts after each visit. Emerson et al. (2011) suggest that observation entries be written immediately to capture the specificity of the event. Therefore, I entered my post-thoughts in the journal on the same day of each visit while my memories of the events were still vivid.

Excerpts from my journal compose four extracts, presented chronologically, of my supervision experience. These stories were extracted from the journal to describe the relationships within the triad and the development of my supervision style throughout the practicum. My aim is to describe my journey as a beginning supervisor through the journal extracts, and to adapt Anderson's (2006) analytical autoethnography framework to discuss each extract. Anderson (2006) suggests that the purpose of analytic autoethnography is not only to document personal experience, but also to use empirical data to gain insight into a broader set of social phenomena. I read and analysed the extracts repeatedly to develop the discussions. After the extracts and discussions were developed, I discussed and confirmed the analysis through peer briefing with the second author. Peer debriefing was used in analysis to increase the credibility of the study and ensure that analyses were grounded in the data (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). In the extracts, Mark and Carol are pseudonyms used for the cooperating teacher and the student teacher respectively.

Journal Extract 1: Perception of Self within the Triad

January 25, 2010. In preparation for my first visit to meet Carol, I performed some mental imagery of the meeting with her and the cooperating teacher at the school. I was thinking to myself, the right words to say to them and in what sequence, so as to present myself professionally as a university supervisor. The feeling of going out to the school as a university supervisor for the first time is almost like presenting at a major conference. I felt like I had a responsibility to represent the university well and I wanted to leave a good impression, especially with the cooperating teacher. I wanted to portray an image that I am confident and knowledgeable about supervising student teachers even though deep inside, I felt a sense of doubt because of my inexperience. I figured I have this fear perhaps because of the difference in gender and race from the cooperating teacher, who is an experienced Caucasian male teacher, in his forties (according to one of my classmates who had taught in that school). I am worried that my appearance as a small-built Asian woman of non-American descent will be looked upon as a non-credible candidate for a university supervisor. I tried to assure myself that I had about five years of experience teaching physical education in Singapore and half a year in the US. Also, I have visited several schools in the US and have observed how physical education classes were carried out. Though I am not entirely familiar with the American culture, I do have some experience. On the other hand, I felt like I have something in common with the student teacher. We are of the same gender and same race and perhaps we can understand each other better? Looking at her reminds me of myself eight years ago when I went through my student teaching experience. As a student teacher, I remembered being anxious when I first met my university supervisor in school. I was anxious about the feedback he would give me after he observed my teaching. My university supervisor's feedback really mattered because I wanted to be a good physical education teacher. Keeping my feelings as a student teacher in mind, I wanted to be an empathetic supervisor who understands the process my student teacher is going through.

Discussion of Journal Extract 1

This narrative is extracted from my first journal entry written before the start of the supervision practicum, which revealed that I attempted to find out information about the cooperating teacher from a classmate who knew him. After I discovered the difference in my gender, ethnicity, physical size, and experience from the cooperating teacher, I began to form perceptions of my position within the triad. Besides the perception of being physically smaller than the cooperating teacher, I also perceived myself as hierarchically *lower* than the cooperating teacher within the triad due to the differences in gender, ethnicity, and experience. Richardson (2005) describes the ways in which her childhood ontologies shape adult assumptions of the social world, and how those early memories influence her interactions and anxieties. Part of my anxiety in the gender difference from the cooperating teacher may be attributed to where I grew up. Singapore is a small country situated in Asia, where our national values system is still predominantly male, conservative, and largely hierarchical (Chng & Sankaran, 2007).

Therefore, because of such gender norms ingrained from a young age, I perceived myself as having a *lower* position within the triad before the start of the practicum.

Pillow (2006) asserts that “practices, representations, and knowledge of the female body are not simply innate, natural occurrences, but rather are *political* —that is, contrived, monitored, controlled, and moralized by a social system” (p. 215). Studies on workplace organizations have also examined identity issues among minority and women faculty members. It was found that women workers often face internal identity conflicts as they attempt to negotiate the hegemonic culture with their “minority” race and gender status (Johnsrud & Sadao, 1998; Turner et al., 1999). Although an individual is inseparable from history and context, she is continually being shaped by the practices, which comprise life and work within the communities and the workplace (Vince & Reynolds, 2009). Also reflected in the journal is the similarity of my race and gender with the student teacher. Having these similarities reinforced my beliefs that I could identify with the student teacher during the practicum. Previous studies (Johnson & Napper-Owen, 2011; Murphy, 2010) had examined how differences in experiences and expectations of the cooperating teacher, university supervisor and student teacher affected role perceptions and relationships within the supervision triad. It would be valuable to also examine whether similarities or differences in demographics (i.e. race and gender) of the three individuals would affect role perceptions so as to fully understand the relational complexities within the supervision triad.

Journal Extract 2: Power Dynamics within the Triad

February 01, 2010. I entered the gym at about 1:25pm when the class was about to start. I noticed an adult male figure (who I supposed is the cooperating teacher, Mark) pasting some plastic boards on the wall and Carol was taking the attendance of the class. I tapped Carol on her shoulder to inform her that I had arrived and walked to the far left corner of the gym and waited. Mark is a Caucasian American and he appeared to be about six feet tall, and of medium to large size build. When Mark finished pasting the stuff on the wall, I walked towards him and introduced myself. He didn't appear extremely friendly or chatty initially. I felt like I had to prompt him and ask him several “ice-breaking” questions to get us to start talking. I asked him several questions such as “are you the only PE teacher here?”, and “how long have you been teaching here?” to try to get to know him better. He suggested that we talk in his office. He pulled two chairs towards his office door so that we could talk and watch the PE class at the same time. It was then that he started to warm up a little and we began to talk about the school culture, the students' behaviour and the PE programme. At the end of the class, we had a three-way post-teaching meeting in Mark's office. He started the meeting by asking Carol what she felt about the class. She said that she made one necessary modification to the class halfway and felt that it was a good decision. Besides that, she did not speak much. Then, Mark explained to Carol the areas she needed to improve. She took out a piece of paper and noted his suggestions. During the entire 20 minutes conversation, I felt that Mark was dominating the meeting. I didn't have a chance to speak, which made me really unhappy. I felt that he is more experienced than

I am (he had taught for 17 years in total) and he probably had a better idea in giving her feedback. When I finally had a chance to speak, I contributed to the meeting and reiterated the goals Carol should focus on and mentioned that during PE, students must have learned what she had set out to teach at the beginning of the class. In other words, have her objectives for the class been met? Mark commented, "Well said". I thought that it was rather flattering for him to give me such affirmation, but at the same time, I was wondering if I was trying to impress him.

Discussion of Journal Extract 2

Extending from the previous discussion where I described my personal perception of self within the triad, this extract described the communication which happened during an observational visit. This was my first meeting with the cooperating teacher; I did not have an opportunity to meet with him prior to this meeting. During this meeting, I was trying to develop a rapport with the cooperating teacher by engaging in a conversation during the lesson because I believed this would strengthen the relationship within the triad. Oftentimes, there is minimal interaction between the university supervisor and cooperating teacher and neither party take the initiative to promote any communication in relation to the teaching performance of the student teacher (Kelly & Tannehill, 2012). From this extract, the student teacher speaks very little and appeared to be very passive. One explanation of the student teacher's passivity could be due to her background and culture — Asian, non-American descent. She lived in the United States for about four years and was training to become a licensed teacher in American public schools at the time of the supervision. This extract resembles similarity to a case study by Johnson and Napper-Owen (2011), where the student teachers allowed the cooperating teacher and the university supervisor to lead the meetings and they did not find the power differential uncomfortable. In that case study, Johnson and Napper-Owen (2011) highlighted that the university supervisor was more domineering during the meetings because she was the most experienced within the triad and she had previous relationships with the cooperating teachers in their undergraduate PETE programme. In contrast, I felt that the cooperating teacher was the most domineering within the triad during our three-way post-teaching meetings, perhaps because he had the most teaching experience in schools. This extract reinforced my initial perceptions of the existence of a hierarchy within the triad, demonstrated by the domination of voices during the three-way meetings. The power dynamics within the triad interrupted my ideal of Metzler's (1990) Noble Triad, which I perceived as all triad members having an equal opportunity to voice their opinion.

As Caplow (1968) pointed out, the addition of a third person to form the student teaching triad disrupts the daily relational work of the dyad between the student teacher and cooperating teacher, thus creating a hierarchical shift in power when the university supervisor is present. Johnson and Napper-Owen (2011) also suggest that a dyad instead of a triad may be more beneficial for the student teacher's improvement. Unclear or poorly defined roles of individuals can cause confusion and hierarchical problems within the triad (Veal & Rikard, 1998). Because this was my first meeting with

the cooperating teacher, we did not have prior opportunity to clarify our roles within the practicum, and this may have compounded the hierarchical issues which surfaced. Therefore, it is important for the university supervisor and the cooperating teacher to discuss the roles of individuals within the triad before the start of the practicum, which could be a potential strategy to build greater trust among the three individuals.

Journal Extract 3: Community of Practice around Technical-Rationalism

Feb 08, 2010. I arrived in the school at about 2pm with a plan to observe the third PE class. When the second class ended, I quickly showed Carol the observation forms I was going to use that day (Management of Student Conduct and Perimeter & Equipment Coding Form). I also quickly reiterated her goals (management of class) which we talked about last week. We did not have much time to talk to each other before the observation, because she only had a five-minute transition between each class. I showed Mark the form, detailing what I would be observing during the lesson. When the class ended at 3:10pm, Mark, Carol and I adjourned to Mark's office where we had our usual three-way post-teaching meeting. Mark began speaking first (like last week), and I still felt like he was leading the discussion. When I did have a turn to speak, I showed them the Perimeter & Equipment Coding Form, which I used to code Carol's teaching behaviour. I also shared with them a physical education teaching model which emphasizes a progression of skills through segments (instruction, extension, refinement, and application). As I was speaking about these segments, Mark began to take down some notes and he mentioned that it really makes sense and that should be how we teach PE.

Discussion of Journal Extract 3

Starting from this visit, I was using at least one type of observational assessment along with videotaping to share my observations with the cooperating teacher and student teacher. Reflected in this extract is our organization's philosophy of teacher professionalism which was built upon a technical-rationalistic system, such as effective strategies, behaviour management skills, classroom management, and feedback. Being part of the graduate-level Curriculum and Supervision in Physical Education course, along with the interactions with six other graduate students and the instructor of the class, we have built a community of practice towards supervision. Communities of practice are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning and active participation in the practices of social communities and constructing identities in relation to these communities (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Our weekly interaction and sharing of practices were built around the technical-rationalistic system to supervision. As the supervision practicum went along, my supervision philosophy evolved to become deeply embedded within the technical-rationalist beliefs of the community. For example, we often emphasize the use of systematic observations and quantification of good teaching behaviours with percentages during the Curriculum and Supervision in Physical Education course. To a beginner, the systematic observation instrument helped provide some *scaffolding* to make me feel more secure in my new role as a supervisor. However, some physical educators in Australia and Europe advocate a more critical

pedagogical philosophy (Fernandez-Balboa, 1995; Garrett, 2006; Garrett & Wrench, 2011; Macdonald & Tinning, 1995). Looking broadly at the field of teacher education in the US, Cochran-Smith (2004) also challenged a technical view of teaching which equates learning with testing because this could underserve children of colour and children in poverty. With more experience in the field, I could introduce a more critical approach to my teaching and supervision in the future.

Oftentimes, supervision expectations of the university supervisors are based on theory, having spent more time in the academia setting, whereas supervision expectations of cooperating teachers are based on pragmatism, having spent more time in a practical physical education classroom (Murphy, 2010). Reflected within this particular extract are my expectations of the student teacher based on what I learned from my training as a supervisor in the university. For example, during our three-way post meeting, I mentioned these four words: instruction, extension, refinement, and application, which I read from the textbook, *Teaching Physical Education for Learning* (Rink, 2010). This extract revealed that the cooperating teacher who had 17 years of teaching experience was very positive towards basic acquisition of skills when I described the four words commonly used in our pedagogical language. Even though there may be some *technical* terms which were unfamiliar to the cooperating teacher, I felt that a quick explanation of these terms could clarify concepts and bring the university supervisor and cooperating teacher to the same level of expectations of the student teacher. Consequently, this may strengthen the relationship between the university supervisor and cooperating teacher.

Journal Extract 4: A “Guide on the Side”

Mar 15, 2010. It has been two weeks since I visited Carol. The break in the visit was good for me because of my busy schedule as a graduate student (with lots of assignments) and research assistant work. However, it may be detrimental to the good relationship I have established with Carol and Mark. Besides, too many things can happen within two weeks and I need to catch up on Carol's progress in student teaching from the last visit. The last time I visited her, I saw a drastic improvement in her behaviour management skills. Carol was able to manage the class to be more on task with the activities that she planned compared with the last time I visited her. I was really surprised with Carol's improvement in behaviour management within two weeks. I commented on Carol's improvement during our three-way post meeting, but Mark did not find it surprising at all.

April 15, 2010. Today will be my final observation of Carol. I am glad that the supervision is coming to an end. With two more weeks left of the semester at the university, I began to feel a little overwhelmed with assignment deadlines and exams for all the classes happening at the same time. Anyhow, I hope I have made a difference to Carol's experience of student teaching. I hope that all the feedback I have given her so far has been useful in helping her improve her teaching.

Post-supervision reflection: this supervision experience has been very enriching and I felt that I became a better supervisor towards the end of the practicum. I am not sure if I have been of any help to my student teacher or whether I have had an impact on her teaching experience. I tried my best to provide her with feedback to help her improve on her teaching every time I was there. But somehow, I felt that I was too caught up with the videotaping and the systematic observations, and making sure I did them all correctly, that I missed building a "solid" relationship with my student teacher. I felt that because I had to complete my tasks and deadlines set by the Curriculum and Supervision in Physical Education course, I was missing that personal touch of developing a closer relationship with her. Though stated in our course syllabus that we were to visit our student teacher six times, I took the initiative to visit her eight times, because I wanted to have more contact with my cooperating teacher and student teacher. If I could change the frequency of my visits, I would like to visit her every week, rather than once in two weeks. A two-week gap is too long. Also, I would not perform any assigned tasks, such as videotaping and/or formal systematic observation during some visits. I felt that being formally observed and videotaped may create stress for the student teacher. It also makes me feel like I have tasks to accomplish and hence no time to interact more fully with my student teacher and the cooperating teacher. Instead, I would make anecdotal notes of my student teacher's teaching performance during some visits and create time to interact with the student teacher and cooperating teacher so as to build a stronger rapport between us.

Discussion of Journal Extract 4

This collection of extracts is taken from the final visits with my student teacher. In line with my supervision philosophy to be more than a "guide on the side", I attempted to contribute to the improvement of the student teacher by using systematic observation techniques to code teaching behaviours and provide feedback to her. However, it appears that there was an internal struggle within myself to spend more time knowing the student teacher and cooperating teacher, without the anxiety of accomplishing tasks such as videotaping and coding teaching behaviours. Though I may have felt like a "guide on the side" at times, these tasks provided a structure for neophyte supervisors to confidently work within the triad.

I was also surprised by the drastic improvements in my student teacher though the cooperating teacher did not find them surprising at all. In this instance, a cooperating teacher may be a better mentor to the student teacher than the university supervisor, because of the cooperating teacher's daily interaction with and observation of the student teacher (Johnson & Napper-Owen, 2011). Also reflected in this extract is the lack of time to provide more observational visits to my student teacher due to the heavy workload as a graduate student. Furthermore, given the cost of school visits and the limited capacity and funding within teacher education, it is not practical to visit the student teacher once a week. Having dual roles as a graduate student and a university supervisor also created a potential conflict of interest between performing research, completing other coursework assignments, and supervising the student teacher. Overall,

the emphasis on the proper administration of observation assessments and videotaping tasks during the supervisory visits may have taken my focus away from the student teacher. Therefore, shifting the focus back to the student teacher with a purpose of helping her improve on her teaching performance will enable me to be more than a “guide on the side” in the future. This supervision practicum also provided a glimpse into the world of academia, where a faculty member may have to “juggle” between various tasks, namely teaching, research and service, and off-campus student teacher supervisory visits.

Reflections

This paper presents an account of my experience as a first-time university supervisor. My chronological journal extracts were presented to reveal my experiences during the supervision practicum. Metzler's (1990) description of the Noble Triad and Devil's Triangle within the supervision triad provided a lens through which the data were analysed. Throughout the eight visits with the student teacher, I experienced a transactional hierarchy of power with the cooperating teacher, demonstrated by a domination of voices during meetings. The perception of the power differential within the triad was further compounded by the difference in gender, ethnicity, physical size, and experience between the cooperating teacher and university supervisor. Being a female, non-Caucasian, small-build and with lesser teaching experience compared with the cooperating teacher, have created a perception that I am hierarchically *lower* than the cooperating teacher. This experience has taught me that a difference in cultural and demographic variables between the members in the triad created a unique experience for me during this supervision practicum. Every supervision experience is different and hence my present experience may not be the same in future supervision assignments. Nonetheless, it is important to understand that the diversity of gender, age, ethnicity, physical size, and experience of individuals may affect the perceptions of relationships within the triad. In the future, it may be helpful to acknowledge the diversity within the triad, but try not to let any perceptions of the *lowered* self, affect the quality of supervision given to the student teacher.

At the beginning of the supervision practicum, I perceived that a Noble Triad was easily attainable. In reality, it is challenging to achieve such noble collaboration and is further complicated by the difference in expectations between the cooperating teacher and university supervisor (Murphy, 2010). Although my experience did not turn out to become a Devil's Triangle where the university supervisor is at odds with the other members of the triad, there were times when I had to clarify my expectations of the student teacher, using *technical* terms I learned from the textbooks that might be unfamiliar to the cooperating teacher. I often present what I believe to be effective teaching strategies through my theoretical readings from the textbooks and apply them to teaching situations. Also revealed in the journal extracts is the negotiation and disruption of my supervision philosophy and goals to be more than a “guide on the side”. My goals were challenged by focusing *too* much on the observation assessments during

each visit, rather than on the student teacher. Nonetheless, having a focus on identifiable tasks such as systematic observations and videotaping the student teacher can provide inexperienced university supervisors with a given role because it can alleviate incompetency felt due to a lack of supervision practice.

Based on my supervisory experiences, several suggestions to improve future supervision processes are offered. Overall, I benefitted from participating in the Curriculum and Supervision in Physical Education course which provided an opportunity to supervise a student teacher. This type of support and community for graduate students could also be provided by other universities when students are embarking on their first time experiences as a supervisor. It is also important for supervisors to develop a supervision philosophy which could include beliefs, goals, and methods to achieve goals early in the stages of the supervision practicum experience though Murphy (2010) suggests that it may be based on the supervisor's past experiences as a student teacher themselves instead of training. Having a supervision style, philosophy and goals will enable university supervisors to better guide the student teachers to become effective physical educators. I believe that a beginning supervisor's philosophy will develop more clearly given more time in the field. In addition, building rapport between the university supervisors and the cooperating teachers will enhance the likelihood of developing a Noble Triad. One suggestion is to meet with the cooperating teacher before the start of the student teaching practicum to discuss role expectations within the triad, especially if the cooperating teacher and university supervisor have never met before. Clarifying roles and responsibilities could eliminate future confusion and hierarchical problems within the triad (Veal & Rikard, 1998). It is important to establish communication between the cooperating teacher and university supervisor in relation to the performance of the student teacher because the communication between the two has been found to be minimal (Kelly & Tannehill, 2012). Another suggestion is to carry out three-way post-teaching meetings frequently to discuss the performance of the student teacher. Three-way post-teaching meetings are effective in building rapport and establishing communication among the individuals within the triad (Tjeerdsma, 1998). To help better connect the language used between the cooperating teacher and university supervisor, a training course may be implemented to introduce common pedagogical concepts and *technical* terms used in pedagogy literature so that the individuals within the triad can understand each other from a technical perspective. One suggestion is to introduce an online supervision training course for cooperating teachers, which would be an easy and effective way for universities to help make these connections (Williams & Hannon, 2009). An online format allows cooperating teachers to complete the course at their convenience and provides accountability.

CONCLUSION

Though this paper is a single account of a beginning supervisor's practicum experience, I believe that this autoethnography extends the limited literature on the supervision triad

from the perspective of a neophyte university supervisor. Journal extracts were used to compose the narratives to describe the first author's experience and there are many benefits to journal writing. As Laker (1994) explained, the use of the journal helps individuals critically reflect on the strengths and areas in need of improvement in supervision contexts. When journaling, it is important to critically reflect on the events which happened during the supervision process. Critical reflection is not just looking back on an incident and its outcomes, but to analyse the process and plans for future action and development (Keay, 2005; King, 2008; Vince & Reynolds, 2009). Overall, I believe that the process of critical reflection on the supervision experiences will benefit supervisors in improving their supervision skills. For example, providing feedback to student teachers in a timely manner is an important supervision skill. Therefore, it may be helpful to record the events of providing feedback and critically reflect on the student teachers' responses to the feedback.

There needs to be continued exploration of the experiences of the university supervisor within the physical education student teaching triads because this would benefit the PETE programmes (Johnson & Napper-Owen, 2011). Therefore, future research could extend this study to include voices of beginning supervisors, cooperating teachers and student teachers through journals and interviews which would add a richer and more in-depth understanding of the supervision triad.

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Tan Leng Goh is currently a doctoral student in Sport Pedagogy at the University of Utah. Her interest in examining the relationships within the student teaching supervision triad led her to write this paper. She would like to thank Leslie Podlog for his thoughtful commentary and editing of drafts of this paper.

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