

The mentoring experiences of an Irish student teacher on his physical education teaching practicum

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Abstract

As part of a larger on-going programmatic research effort examining student teaching supervision in physical education at a four year university course in Ireland, this study examined the mentoring experiences of a student teacher during teaching practice. Over the past two decades there has been a plethora of international research on education supervision as a whole, however, there is a lack of research into the area of PE supervision, especially in Ireland. This study focuses on the interactions within the student teaching triad from the perspective of the student teacher, which is composed of the cooperating teacher (CT), university tutor (UT) and student teacher (ST). The main research question examines the type and frequency of feedback given to the ST from the CT and the UT. This is a descriptive study which uses both qualitative and quantitative methods to form a detailed view of the mentoring experiences of a student teacher. A combination of field notes, weekly observations, daily logs, observation time logs and conference analysis were kept by the student teacher. Results reported are a culmination of descriptive and qualitative analysis of data which indicate that the CT provided minimum feedback, spent little time observing teaching and that the interaction between the CT and the UT was minimal.

Keywords: teaching triad; cooperating teacher; student-teacher perspective; student-teacher supervision.

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INTRODUCTION

This study examines the mentoring experiences of a ST while on his teaching practice (TP) placement. The literature review illustrates that while the TP placement is widely studied by teacher educators, there is, however, relatively little first person research from the ST perspective. This research will share an insight into the mentoring experience of an Irish ST on his TP placement to help show what the TP placement experience is 'like' for the ST.

Garrett et al. (2007, p.19) highlight that teaching is a challenging yet rewarding experience when they recognise teaching as a "Highly complex process that brings together a vast array of knowledge, skills and competencies applied in an uncertain world of practice". It is all the more challenging for the ST as s/he undertakes the TP experience serving as the new, novice teacher in the school setting. Tannehill (1989, p.245) points out that the purpose of the practicum is seen as an internship, "Gaining experience to build upon, practicing while still learning, and discovering what it is

really like to be a teacher". No matter how the TP is designed or administrated it is still the prominent place where the ST learns professional knowledge and competence as a teacher (Behets & Vergauwen, 2006; Hascher et al., 2004). Hardy (1999) reports that TP is where real teacher education is learned, while Metzler (1990) notes that TP can be viewed as entry into the final learning process as a student and exiting as a more informed teacher at the end of the process. No TP placement can ever be considered ideal, the ST is challenged on many levels and this is taken into consideration from the CT and the UT as they recognise that the ST is still in the learning phase of their teaching career. As Paese (1984, p.54) commented, "Student teaching has always been recognised as the most valuable experience in professional preparation by graduating students and experienced teachers". TP is the fundamental focal point of any physical education teacher education (PETE) programme, being the cumulating aspect of all previous experiences throughout the course of the college degree.

The ST and the teaching practicum has been the focus of a wide array of academic discussion over many years (Anderson, 2007; Ayers & Housner 2008; Behets & Vergauwen, 2006; Hascher et al., 2004; Paese, 1984; Zanting & Verloop, 2001). This research centred on the mentoring experiences of the ST, the role of the university in training the ST and the interactions between the UT, CT and the ST. During TP the ST is at a stage where their peers and the beliefs of veteran teachers can easily influence them to change their teaching behaviour (Keay, 2009). Throughout TP the ST works in collaboration with a UT and a CT. It is an assumption that the ST is in an ideal position to gain wisdom from the CT, UT, and teaching colleagues, however, this may not always be the case as not all STs are in ideal schools or teaching triads. The TP journey is an emotional time for the ST. Hascher et al. (2004) report that for the ST, the TP placement can be a nerve-racking experience with a roller-coaster of emotions felt daily. They highlight the stress associated with being caught in the middle between trying to please the UT and the CT adding to the many fears that face the ST while on TP, "They are afraid of failure, of a lack of acceptance by their mentors, of misunderstanding by pupils and of problems with classroom management and discipline" (p.625). Capel (1992, in Mawer, 1996) concurs emphasising that it is no wonder that, with this plethora of emotions, the ST is nervous, stressed, excited and overwhelmed by the TP experience.

In North America research on TP has been explored extensively over the past four decades through both programmatic study and independent researcher efforts to examine all aspects of the TP experience (CT, UT, ST, TP triad) in both education and physical education (Boehm, 1974; Darst, 1974; Hamilton, 1974; Hughley, 1973; Rife, 1973; Siedentop, 1982). While this research dates back to the 1980s and might appear somewhat dated, it provides a picture of what we know about TP from another context that might have implications for, and be applied to, the Irish setting. Tannehill and Zakrajsek (1988) looked at the supervisory behaviour and practices of CTs in secondary physical education. They used two instruments for data collection as a way to examine these practices; a daily log and a weekly wrap-up report with results indicating that CTs provided minimum feedback, held few supervisory conferences and spent little time observing teaching. Hardy (1999), from a British perspective, looked at ST perceptions of how their teacher education programmes

helped them learn to teach. His research reaffirms what Rikard and Veal (1996) concluded, that once CTs are trained this begins a life cycle of mentoring; one day the ST will become a mentor for the prospective teacher to help guide them. It is never envisioned that STs become clones of their mentors, but rather learn from CTs and from their teaching experience on how to be a good teacher with clear commitments to students.

Research on the student teaching experiences of PE teachers in Ireland is limited as this area of study has only recently become a focus for scholars in this field (Belton et al., 2010; Chambers, 2009). The current study is part of a larger ongoing programmatic research effort examining student teaching supervision in physical education at the University of Limerick. Investigations have involved collaboration between the university faculty and physical education teachers (Tannehill & Moran, 2007), pre-service teachers (PSTs) perceptions and experiences of paired teaching practice in initial teacher education (Devaney, Geary & Vekins, 2005), design of a physical education teaching practice handbook, and ongoing investigations into teaching practice placement of PSTs, (MacPhail, Young & Tannehill, 2011). In other Irish research on supervision in physical education, Chambers (2009) examined PETE students' professional learning on TP within a community of practice framework. Results concluded that (a) untrained CTs were unsuitable mentors and (b) untrained UTs were inappropriate tutors for PETE students as they both needed teaching expertise, a positive disposition and adequate training to embrace their respective roles. Belton et al. (2010) investigated the impact of a new cooperating PE teachers programme (COPET) from a cooperating teacher's perspective. As a result of this programme, the cooperating teachers had a more defined role which allowed them to provide an enhanced learning environment for the ST while in their care (Belton et al., 2010, p.150-151).

The Triad

Goodnough et al. (2009) explain that one of the most crucial aspects of any teaching experience is the relationship that is created within the triad (CT, ST, and UT). Rodgers and Keil (2007) call this the traditional student supervision triad. This triad is composed of those with professional skills and expertise on one hand and participant needs on the other. These triad members must work together to ensure the success of the TP for the novice ST. Valencia et al. (2009) argue that each member of the triad should not operate in a single world, i.e., the individual world of the CT, ST or UT, rather the triadic relationship involves each triad member simultaneously working together to meet the demands of each respective world. Anderson (2007) stated that if any member of the triad falls short of his/her responsibilities this can have profound effects on the TP and most importantly the ST.

The Student Teacher

When examining the literature related to the ST and how the TP influences their development, reports vary from STs teaching behaviour to ST conceptions of the practicum and their own professional growth (Keay, 2009; Zanting & Verloop, 2001). Programmatic research conducted over many years at The Ohio State University (OSU) (Siedentop, 1982) supports the idea that ST performance can be improved during the teaching practicum. This long-term programmatic research examined

training CTs to become mentors, concluding that as a result of improved CT mentoring, the ST teaching performance improved over a ten week time frame.

The Cooperating Teacher

The CT is the teacher whose classes the ST teaches during their TP placement and is the professional who is intended to provide guidance and assistance to the ST for improving pupil learning and teaching practice. Mentoring must be situated in such a way that the CT or UT must find the right mix between giving the ST support while empowering them with responsibility (Mawer, 1996). By ensuring that the quality of mentoring is of a high standard you help to ensure that the ST can optimise his/her teaching performance on all levels. Mawer (1996) pointed out that the quality of the mentoring would, in turn, affect the quality of the physical education taught and received by the pupils in the school. Similarly Tannehill and Zakrajsek (1990) noted that success for the ST on TP is directly related to the quality of mentoring received. McGaha and Lynn (2000, p.43) described a mentor as, "An experienced teacher who will give time, patience, and understanding to the novice teacher", thus the CT makes up one of the two supervisors in the ST triad. Much of the literature places the CT as the most influential person for the ST during the TP experience (Anderson, 2007; Chambers, 2009). They are seen as the go-to person in times of ST need, they have the experience and skills available to offer help and advice in any situation. The CT acts as a role model who should provide a good example to the ST (Anderson, 2007). Some of the many attributes of effective mentors / CTs that were identified in the literature (Capel, 2003; Cothran et al., 2008, Kim Yau in Mawer 1996; McCullick, 2001; Zanting et al., 2001) include: Ability to demonstrate effective interpersonal skills, skilled at giving pre-lesson guidance, provide constructive and positive feedback, competent in physical education, willing to listen to ST concerns and ideas, and committed to the profession of teaching physical education.

The OSU research (Siedentop, 1982) looked at how the supervisory behaviour of CTs could be changed. This research initially reported that CTs simply monitored ST performance without any intervention and provided little feedback to the ST. As this programmatic research progressed, ST observation, feedback and positive interactions were the key areas that the researchers wanted to improve in the CT. After a series of studies (Boehm, 1974; Darst, 1974; Hamilton, 1974; Hughley, 1973; Rife, 1973), results were successful with the CT ultimately going above and beyond the supervision criteria asked of them; Displaying an eagerness among CTs to act as a mentor for STs and applying the same criteria to their own teaching, graphing their own behavioural changes in conjunction with the STs. This research highlighted the point that, "There is a vast reservoir of supervision talent waiting to be trained and utilised. For universities to persist in neglecting this talent is economically foolish and pedagogically counterproductive", (Siedentop, 1982, p.36). Tannehill and Zakrajsek (1988) looked at the supervisory behaviour and practices of CTs in secondary physical education in an attempt to examine what actually happens during the TP experience. They used two instruments of data collection; a daily log and a weekly wrap-up report. Results indicated that CTs provided minimum feedback, held few supervisory conferences and spent little time observing the ST teaching. These researchers conducted a follow-up study to determine the effects of a self-directed training programme on the supervisory behaviour and practices of a trained group of

STs in secondary physical education compared with a control group of similar teachers (Tannehill & Zakrajsek, 1990). Results revealed that for 64% of total teaching time the untrained CT was absent from the gymnasium, which created a strong divide between observation time of the trained CTs and the untrained CTs. It was noted that, "One CT relinquished responsibility almost immediately, another maintained complete control for over three quarters of the practicum, and another did not observe a single full period" (p.145). The amount of feedback given to the ST also varied with the trained CT giving considerably more feedback to the ST.

In many instances, CTs are unaware of what exactly they are meant to do (Belton et al., 2010; Chambers, 2009; Paese 1984). The role of the CT is vague as pointed out by Grimmett and Ratzlaff (1986) when their studies in the USA and Canada concluded that CTs are generally unprepared for supervising STs. In an Irish context, Chambers (2009) and Coolahan (2003) argue that despite the amount of work a CT provides to a ST, they receive little support from the school or university in terms of resources such as less class time and training to help the ST. While the importance of the CT is widely acknowledged, it is ironic that little is done to train or support the CT throughout TP in the Irish setting. Many argue that there is a need for training CTs in supervisory functions (Chambers, 2009; Hardy, 1999; McCullick, 2001). Metzler (1990, p.218) reports that, "Regardless of whom the mentor is, that person must be trained to deliver a complete range of supervisory functions and be available to carry them out on a regular basis". This is supported by Huling-Austin (1989) who argues that the ST/CT dyad is successful when the CT receives both training and financial compensation for their work.

University Tutor

Valencia et al. (2009, p.308) provide an adept description for the UT, "University supervisors were, for the most part, retired school administrators or teachers who held master's degrees and had some prior experience with mentoring or supervision". While on TP, STs at times can feel isolated from the university, if something goes wrong or a ST feels upset at any time, the university generally is not aware of it. Metzler (1990) argued that the many problems faced by the ST cannot wait for the irregularity of the visits from the UT. However, early research by Zimpher, deVoss and Nott (1980) acknowledge the importance of the UT suggesting that without the input of the UT, the ST would often not be provided with feedback and critical analyses of their teaching.

UTs see their main goal as one of helping students to, "Have a positive experience in the field", (Valencia et al., 2009, p.312). In order for physical education teacher education (PETE) programmes to impact the type of mentoring received by their ST from the CT and UT it is essential that they first establish current practice. In an attempt to inform his own PETE programme, one ST focused on the interactions that took place within the teaching triad during his TP experience. It is hoped that his findings will provide an insight to guide the development of a mentoring programme for CTs and UTs at this institution.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine the interactions that occurred within the TP triad (ST, UT and CT). These questions are from the view of the researcher (the ST)

which presents one perspective of the workings of the triad system. Based on the ST experience, the research questions were designed to illustrate the areas that need improvement within the triad, highlighting areas that are revealed for improvement by the ST within the TP triad. Specific research questions guiding this investigation include:

1. How much feedback does the CT provide the ST on a daily basis and what is the focus of that feedback?
2. What is the common theme of supervisory support received by the ST from the UT?
3. How much time does the CT spend observing the ST while teaching during TP?
4. What level of communication exists between the CT and the UT?

METHOD

Participants

The ST was the researcher. He was in year four of his degree programme with the study undertaken in his TP school during the autumn semester, 2009. TP requirements included, where possible, the ST planning for and teaching all seven physical education strands (athletics, aquatics, adventure, games, dance, gymnastics, HRA) of the Junior Cycle Physical Education (JCPE) syllabus in an equivalent of between 10 to 12 single classes of 35 minutes per class for 10 weeks. Throughout the TP placement the ST taught both junior and senior cycle students. For the junior cycle students, he taught 4 double classes lasting 70mins each; adventure, dance, gymnastics, games and HRA. For the senior cycle classes the ST taught one double class lasting 70 minutes, badminton and rugby in line with the CTs yearly PE plan. The all-girl's post primary TP school, where this ST completed his placement, was a small country school located 5km from the nearest town in the midlands of Ireland. It was comprised of approximately 375 students and 42 staff. The school has a good teacher to student ratio, however this will change in the near future as the school is eight teachers over quota for the number of students the school has. There are two PE teachers in the school, one male and one female teacher. The female PE teacher was assigned to the researcher as she had the most responsibility in the physical education department and had previous experience supervising other TP students with the most recent supervision two years prior to this research. She had been teaching for thirteen years in the school yet had no formal training in the role of a CT. She is a former student of this post primary school and shows strong loyalty to the school.

The UT was assigned to the ST by the university TP office. This choice of UT was determined on a geographical basis with the tutors living nearest to the TP schools being considered for selection. It must be noted that the ST had the same UT in his second year TP placement. The UT had more than 20 years teaching experience. He had previously completed a master's degree and now serves as a part-time teaching practice tutor for the university.

University ethical guidelines for all aspects of the study (e.g., participants, data collection tools and data analysis) were followed accordingly with full approval

received prior to beginning the research. All documentation is filed with the University Ethics Board.

Procedures

The study was broken down into three time periods; pre-TP, during TP and post TP. Before any student commences their TP placement the university sets key requirements that must be fulfilled prior to the start of TP, such as an agreement with the CT and the school of teaching of a minimum of 5 double periods of PE classes over 10 weeks and an initial meeting with the UT is arranged to discuss the timetable and schemes of work. Completed schemes of work are checked by the UT and you will be informed whether you are cleared to begin teaching practice on the designated date. In the event that you are not deemed to be ready, you will begin TP at a later date.

Pre-TP: The ST was in contact with both the CT and UT through email. During this period, the ST was made aware of key information from the UT and CT on what they felt the ST needed to know to get started. The CT explained the school policies, physical education procedures and discipline protocols to the ST. From the university teacher's handbook, the UT outlined some of the qualities that he admired most in STs during TP; innovative teaching methods, creativity in classroom transitions and energetic/whole class involvement.

During TP: The ST collected data on feedback from the CT and UT at various times of TP respectively. For the CT, the majority of feedback occurred after class. Similarly for the UT, feedback was recorded during the post lesson appraisal. Outside of these times feedback was provided sparingly from both parties. At the end of TP the CT thanked the ST for their help throughout the semester by presenting a box of chocolates to the ST and offering kind words of praise for the future. Back at the university a formal meeting occurred between the ST and the UT whereby the UT conducted a debriefing session on various elements of the TP. Areas where improvement were still needed, teacher strengths and ideas for future professional development were discussed.

Data Collection

A number of data collection tools that were used for this study were drawn from the early work completed by Tannehill and Zakrajsek (1988). Daily logs (see Table 1) recorded the amount of supervisory feedback the ST received from the CT during each school day. Feedback was recorded in 11 categories of feedback using the Lesson Assessment Guide (management of learning environment, effectiveness of planning, knowledge & structuring of subject matter, coherence of lesson, effectiveness of teaching strategies, pupil learning, personal qualities, quality of interaction, self-evaluation, extent of innovative teaching, sense of professionalism) provided by the university to guide observation of a lesson. All CT feedback, whether formal or informal was recorded in the respective categories daily. Field notes included comments, anecdotal stories, general teaching advice and career prospects given by the UT and/or CT at any stage during TP. Weekly reflective journals served as a review of critical incidents that occurred throughout the week. It included reflection and analysis of key incidents that happened each day, such as discipline

issues, injury to students and/or teacher, resources and time management issues etc. Observation time logs recorded the amount of time the CT spent in the classroom observing the ST on a daily and weekly basis. Conference analysis, following all CT and UT teaching conferences, the ST recorded the feedback provided using the 11 criteria of the LAG as a basis for this analysis.

Table 1. Daily Log

	Feedback	No Comment	Solicited Feedback
Management of Learning Environment			
Effectiveness of Planning			
Knowledge & Structuring of Subject Matter			
Coherence of Lesson			
Effectiveness of Teaching Strategies			
Pupil Learning			
Personal Qualities			
Quality of Interaction			
Self-Evaluation			
Extent of Innovative Teaching			
Sense of Professionalism			

Data Analysis

Quantitative data (daily logs, observation time logs) were analysed through tallying results and are reported as frequencies and percentages. Following Strauss and

Corbin (1998) protocols, qualitative data (daily log comments, field notes, reflexive journals, transcripts from conferences) were each read to identify the feedback provided to the ST with any accompanying narrative (comments, anecdotal notes, etc.) about the STs teaching behaviour. An example of a completed daily log showing supervisory feedback can be viewed in Table 2 and, on this particular occasion, no feedback was solicited. Commonly identified feedback were grouped together into clusters and examined more thoroughly for distinctive properties by asking such questions as, 'why was this feedback given?', 'to what was this feedback in response?', 'what teaching behaviour elicited this response?' As a result of this process, categories of feedback were identified; feedback in class, feedback outside of class and feedback ad hoc to include all other times (including prior and post TP). The themes were reworked to help create a pictorial representation of the feedback given as seen in Figure 1.

Table 2: Completed Daily Log, Tuesday Week 2

	Feedback	No Comment	Solicited Feedback
Effectiveness of Planning	With the new emphasis on adventure in the JCPE, it's important that you try to have at least one adventure trip outside school.		
Effectiveness of Teaching Strategies	Always explain the plan when you are near the destination. This way you will have all students listening to you. If you try to explain the plan when you get there students will be more distracted by the surrounding environment.		
Quality of Interaction	Where possible especially on adventure trips let friends be together in groups. Think of what you would like if you were them. If it is needed, group students to ability level while also keeping in mind any students who are prone to be disruptive. Be clever when separating these students and then they wouldn't suspect anything.		
Self-Evaluation	80% of the time you'll learn from your mistakes. Try everything you can and learn from it. If it works use it, if it didn't work ask yourself why didn't it work?		
Sense of Professionalism	When going on external school trips it is vitally important that you are a leader. You have to explain the rules and expectations clearly. As you are outside		

	school grounds students are likely to be more energetic. Be firm and fair and if necessary don't be afraid to stop a student taking part in an activity if he/she is disrupting the activity for everyone else.		
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RESULTS

Results are reported for each of the research questions.

1. How much feedback does the CT provide the ST on a daily basis and what is the focus of that feedback?

The daily log, conference analysis and field notes were used to document evidence in answering this research question. Daily log findings are presented in Table 3 in the form of frequencies and percentages of supervisory feedback given to the ST by the CT. By examining the daily log it can be noted that 10 of the 37 supervisory comments, or 27% were in the category of “management of the learning environment” and were shared across six of the nine weeks of TP. This is in contrast with two categories receiving only one comment each; coherence of lesson (week 3) and self-evaluation (week 2). The reader will also note that supervisory comments peaked in weeks 1, 2, and 3. The frequency of comments received by the ST decreased as each week of TP passed, with only one comment posted in week nine in comparison with eleven comments posted in week two. Examining data from the conference analysis revealed that throughout the TP placement, the CT had no formal conference with the ST. Although there was no formal conference arranged for discussion or feedback, the CT did communicate informally before and after class, often when in passing in the staff room. In these cases, the ST collected this data in the field notes, which are described below. Field notes describing interactions from the CT were not aligned with the LAG categories previously discussed rather they were grouped according to themes identified through data analysis. Below are some examples of comments from the CT as noted in field notes:

Equipment and Resources: On the first day of TP, the CT showed the ST the PE equipment, she commented, “You have the freedom of my resources and equipment, if there is anything else you need just let me know” (day # 1).

Off-hand Phrases: There were a handful of occasions where plans had to be changed at the last minute due to unforeseen circumstances; one of these times the CT commented “Improvisation is a PE teacher’s speciality” (day # 6).

Table 3: CT supervisory feedback to ST per week

TP Criteria	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8	Week 9	Total %
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Management of the Learning Environment	2	1	2	1	3	1				10	27
Effectiveness of Planning		2				1		1		4	11
Knowledge and Structure of Subject Matter			1			1		1		3	8
Coherence of Lesson			1							1	3
Effectiveness of Teaching Strategies		2		1						3	8
Pupil Learning			1	1		1				3	8
Personal Qualities	1		1							2	5
Quality of Interaction	1	2	1	1						5	14
Self-Evaluation		1								1	3
Extent of Innovative Teaching	1		1				1			3	8
Sense of Professionalism		1							1	2	5
Total	5	11	8	4	3	4	1	2	1	37	

2. What is the common theme of supervisory support received by the ST from the UT?

Field notes and the UT conference analysis served as the data sources for answering this third question focused on UT supervisory support. Field notes were categorised into three themes which emerged from the data and reflect supervisory support provided outside of the post lesson conference: Motivational strategies, innovative teaching methods, and teaching advice. The ST noted that the UT enjoyed talking at length about many teaching strategies and ideas.

Motivational Strategies

The UT explains that the ST should introduce rewards and incentives into classes. "Students will always work and play harder if they know there is a possibility of winning a prize or reward. Put yourself in their shoes, wouldn't you play harder if you knew it was worth your while?"

Innovative Teaching Methods

The UT really focused on innovative teaching, giving examples of a wide range of teaching methods and resources to use in physical education. "Try to think outside of the box at all times when teaching, constantly ask yourself, how many ways can I do this? By trying new things all the time and always looking for new teaching strategies that's how you keep on top of your game. Don't ever forget the potential ideas from

the students, never be afraid or ashamed to ask students for ideas, often you can be surprised of the adaptations and games that they can come up with”.

Teaching Advice

The UT offered advice on books that would help improve teaching performance. “I can see that you’re a keen learner, every time I see you, you are looking for new ways to improve. I suggest you read these books, as they will open your mind to higher levels and I’m confident that a bright teaching career lies ahead of you. I even bet you that in a few years you’ll be doing this job!”

Conference Analysis

The conference analysis with the UT was broken down into the respective LAG categories. The UT analysed the teaching performance of the ST based on these categories. The biggest emphasis was placed on ‘*extent of innovative teaching and pupil learning*’ whereas little attention was given to ‘*personal qualities and sense of professionalism*’.

3. How much time does the CT spend observing the ST while teaching during TP?

The ST’s timetable consisted of five physical education classes, four classes at junior cycle teaching the JCPE curriculum and one at senior cycle teaching games. Two classes were taught on a Tuesday, one class on a Wednesday and two classes on Friday. Daily observation time logs were used to answer this research question with results presented in Figure 1. When viewing weekly observation time by the CT, weeks two and three stand out prominently. Total observation time for these two weeks is 120 minutes each which is considerably higher than any other weeks. It should be noted that during these two weeks classes were held off-site with the legal requirement stipulating that the CT must be in attendance at all field trips outside of school grounds. The reader can also observe that as each week progressed observation time decreased. Results from the observation time logs conclude that observation time for the total of TP was minimal, with the CT observing two classes fully and observing the rest of the classes part-time (less than ½ of the class).

4. What level of communication exists between the CT and the UT?

Throughout the TP experience there was no communication between the CT and the UT apart from on the first occasion when the UT introduced himself to the CT and thanked the school for accepting the ST. There may have been external communication outside of this via telephone calls and/or emails but no mention of this was ever made to the ST.

DISCUSSION

This study highlights the ST perspective from inside the triad between the ST, CT and UT. It examined the mentoring experiences of the ST while on the TP placement. While this study examined only one triad setting, the results of the study are aligned with previous studies on the supervisory triad (Bullough & Draper, 2004; Smith, 2007; Valencia et al., 2009). In looking at the different types of interactions that took place

during this TP placement (feedback, reflecting on critical incidents, observations, supervisory support from UT, CT/UT communication), the ST noted areas that are in line with previous research in this area.

Feedback

Feedback from the CT was both infrequent and incident related which aligns with the US research shared by Tannehill and Zakrajsek (1988). As noted, there were no formal conferences to help the ST make the connection between the feedback provided and his teaching. The CT provided feedback that tended to fall outside of the LAG categories based on her teaching experience and perhaps not the areas which were of concern to the developing ST. The ST believes that if the CT was trained in supervision and provided with time to observe his teaching, then the results could be substantially different as suggested by other researchers (Anderson 2007; Belton et al., 2010; Chambers 2009), where trained CTs had more focus on their role as a mentor to the ST resulting in a stronger ST performance.

Lessons Learned from CT and UT

Feedback from the CT was limited, however, often the ST learns through observation of the CTs actions. The researcher learned that to be a successful PE teacher you have to have strong advocacy for your subject, be innovative and be prepared for less than ideal situations to occur as the school will often take classes from the PE department as it is a non-examinable subject. For example, the CT illustrated that it's important to be creative in making resources for your class when he developed simple adventure tools as a means of providing more creative targets for throwing activities. The researcher also learned that the CT's interactions with the students was relaxed with an emphasis placed on classes being fun, enjoyable and lessons of high intensity. It was noted that the CT had a stronger discipline stance than the researcher, however classroom management often improves with experience which may explain why the CT had stronger classroom management and well maintained student behaviour. The CT was a competent teacher who showed strong interest in his subject and always tried to improve the image of PE within the school. In summary the researcher learned that it's important to always speak up for your subject, to always look for new ideas to make content more exciting through rule changes or equipment adjustments and finally to have a fun but controlled stance over the class at all times.

The UT provided more praise of new ideas and techniques than did the CT. One such example was suggesting the use of tyres as useful equipment for an adventure class noting that many teachers no longer use them as they are not perceived as new or innovative anymore. His feedback spurred the researcher to always push himself to try new things in all classes. He pointed out that the first few years of teaching should be what he called a "Mistake learning phase"; "By making mistakes and then improving on them you become a better teacher, there's no point in sticking with the easy, safe route all the time as this won't help you advance as a teacher" (Conference analysis 1).

ST Reflections on Critical Incidents

As noted by Tannehill (1989), TP is essentially a learning experience for the ST, it is about practice. Through interactions with the CT and UT, the ST had limited opportunity to learn best practices for effective teaching. Through his personal self-reflection and re-evaluation of his teaching methods following interactions with the CT and/or UT, the ST was able to make informed changes in his teaching behaviour that occurred throughout the TP. While the opportunities in this situation were limited by the lack of frequency of supervisory support, what improvements the ST noted are aligned with Siedentop's (1982) suggestion that the CT can make a difference to the ST teaching practice.

Observation Time

The amount of time the CT spent observing the ST was consistent with findings from Tannehill and Zakrajsek (1990). With the exception of the two off-site experiences, the CT observed a minimal amount of classes. It must be noted that although the CT had fewer classes to teach this was replaced with responsibility for directing the school play. If school management had catered for the mentoring role of the CT, observation time and feedback to the researcher might be different as suggested by Chambers (2009).

Supervisory Support from UT

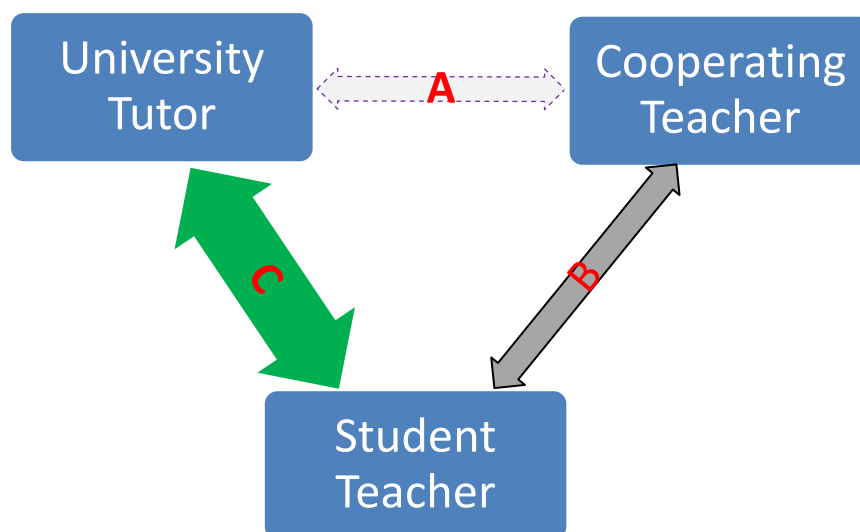
From the ST's perspective, the UT was helpful in providing support and advice throughout TP which supports both the work of Zimpher, deVoss, and Nott (1980) and Valencia et al. (2009), who contend that the UT is able to provide pedagogical guidance to the ST that they may otherwise not receive. Key areas of focus that the ST considered valuable were consistently talked about in the post lesson conferences. Classroom management and pupil learning were discussed as they were considered essential aspects for the development of teaching. While the UT only visited on two occasions, these infrequent visits still provided the ST with constructive feedback, set targets for his improvement and provided moral support during TP, which the ST didn't always receive from the CT. An important criticism must still be noted, while the UT provided effective support to the ST, why he chose not to initiate and pursue communication with the CT that might have allowed more support on a daily basis is unclear.

Communication between the CT and UT

Communication between the CT and UT did not go past the initial formalities of introductions. This level of communication is not uncommon in the triadic relationship (Bullough & Draper 2004; Carlson et al., 2007). Brouwer and Korthagen (2005) point out that the UT and CT should maintain regular contact to achieve coordination between activities in college and in the practice school, as well as informing each other about the learning processes going on at both sites. While limited time was available to both parties to communicate, this cannot be factored as a reason for minimal communication.

Figure 1 represents the ST's experience in graphic form, what he has labelled, Kelly's Supervisory Triad. Each arrow represents one of the supervisory relationships within this triad setting.

Figure 1. Kelly's (2010) Supervisory Triad



Relationship A: Arrow A is dotted and transparent with little supervisory substance. Interaction between the UT and CT is minimal, to none. It included only brief formalities of introduction. There is no communication in relation to the teaching performance of the ST. Neither the UT nor CT took the initiative to promote any communication.

Relationship B: Arrow B has more interaction represented by the bold outline. However, it is still narrow highlighting that there was little substance in the type and quantity of feedback provided. Interaction is more common, although superficial as both CT and ST see one another on a daily basis. Communication is mainly informal with brief discussions held in the staffroom or in passing on the hall. Feedback is focused on classroom management and planning. The CT provides minimal supervisory observation of the ST. Supervisory intervention decreases with time as both CT and ST learn to work more independently of one another.

Relationship C: Arrow C represents more supervisory feedback in the short space of time during UT visits so the arrow is wider. Interactions occur before TP, during TP and after TP. Discussions are more formal with sit down conferences to discuss the lesson observed and teaching experiences to date. The UT provides many ideas and suggestions for improved practice. The UT talks outside the criteria of the LAG while always having a positive attitude towards the teaching performance of the researcher.

CONCLUSION

This study highlighted the interactions that occur with the teaching triad from a student perspective. By looking from the inside out, the researcher was able to

ascertain the mentoring experiences received from both the CT and the UT during TP. While the limitations of the study include the sole focus on only one setting and the perspective of only one ST, the results nevertheless coincide with both national and international results of similar studies (Chambers, 2009; Siedentop, 1982; Tannehill & Zakrajsek, 1988). The results emphasise the importance of training CTs and developing stronger communication links within the triad. Through improved communication with all members of the triad the TP practicum can become more focused on the ST to help identify strengths and weaknesses of his/her practices at an early stage. While CT training would still be beneficial for the improvement of the TP placement, this research highlights that there is a lack of informative communication between all parties of the triad. It is hoped that the results of this study will help inform further research in this area as supervision in Ireland is constantly gaining momentum.

FIRST AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Seán Kelly is a physical education graduate from the University of Limerick, Ireland. His interest in initial teacher education, mentoring experiences of student teachers and the interactions within the teaching triad led him to complete this dissertation during his final teaching practicum. He graduated in 2010 and then pursued a Master's degree in Geography at University College Dublin, Ireland. He is currently teaching in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

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