

## Supervision of Early Field Experiences: Exploring Three Alternative Models

By **Dennis Potthoff and Frank Kline**

### Introduction

The benefits of practicum experiences in learning professional roles are widely accepted. Practicum experiences can help teach appropriate realities, motivate participants, promote career choice, facilitate concentrated exposure at minimal cost, provide inexpensive labor to help meet community or national needs, and provide academic stimulation for practicing and prospective professionals (Gehrke, 1981).

Practicum field experiences are the most valued component of teacher preparatory programs (Silberman, 1970; Brimfield & Leonard, 1983; Hauwiler, Able, Ausel, & Sparapani, 1988-89). While student teaching no doubt remains the capstone event, early field experiences are a regular program feature (Waxman & Walberg, 1986; Klueder, 1984; Ishler & Kay, 1981).

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Field experiences are not universally praised. Critics charge that field experiences encourage imitation, subservience, and conformity (Holmes Group, 1986), promote reflexive conservatism (Lortie, 1975), perpetuate school patterns (Zeichner, 1980), foster group management orientations (Lanier & Little,

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1986), emphasize product over process (Goodman, 1985), foster status quo attitudes (Clary, 1991), and preclude inquiry (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1986).

While it is unlikely that field experiences will become less common, these criticisms do suggest a need for improving field experiences. Prominent strategies include identifying and articulating a theoretical base (Guyton & McIntyre, 1990), achieving congruence between campus and field components (McNaughton, Johns, & Rogus, 1982; Erdman, 1983), emphasizing concepts and analysis over practice (Dewey, 1904/1965), using structured activities (Bonar, 1985), using competent cooperating teachers (Hefke, 1991), providing seminars (Bowyer & Van Dyke, 1988), improving supervisory practice (Goodman, 1985; Zeichner, 1992), challenging teachers' beliefs (McDiarmid, 1990), and developing clinically-based experiences (Gilbert, Hirst, & Clary, 1987).

Improving supervisory practice, one common recommendation, seems to be currently driven by accountability concerns and by a hope that supervision can make a difference in preservice teachers' development. NCATE (1990) requires that all field experiences be accompanied by professional supervision. Clary (1991) argues that increased supervision helps in determining if a field experience generates the desired results. Goodman (1985) believes the quality of a field experience improves when supervisors are more involved.

Professional supervision of early field experiences is seldom provided by college faculty, however. A survey of ten midwestern programs (Colgate, 1991) indicates that only cooperating teachers provide direct supervision in 70 per cent of early field experiences. College supervisors often focus on students having difficulty (Morris & Curtis, 1983).

Given the probability that the resources allocated to early field experience supervision will remain scarce, determining how to most effectively utilize resources is critical. One option is to focus on preparing cooperating teachers for a supervisory role. This strategy would promote cooperating teacher competence and encourage congruence between campus and field components. Providing direct supervision to preservice teachers is a second option. This strategy creates opportunities for directly influencing teacher growth and development. The purpose for this study was to investigate the effects of alternate models of supervision on preservice teachers' attitudes toward teaching, classroom performance, and satisfaction with supervision.

## **Methodology**

Preservice teachers enrolled concurrently in the described field experience and an Introduction to Education course. The field experience required preservice teachers to spend from one to two hours each week, at a regularly scheduled day and time, observing in classroom settings. Pairs of preservice teachers regularly observed in two classrooms. Structured assignments relating to school/classroom

climate, students, effective teaching, and educational goals provided a focus for observations. Each assignment culminated with preservice teachers submitting a written reflective narrative.

Approximately 180 preservice teachers were divided into eight sections. Each section was subdivided into three groups. A different supervisory model was used with each subgroup. The faculty supervisor for each section delivered three supervisory models. One component common to all supervisory models was that preservice teachers met on campus with supervisors every third week for debriefing sessions. All supervisors attended a pre-semester training session. Brief summaries of each model follow:

***Model One—Public Relations Model***

Developing informed and competent cooperating teachers/principals was the primary purpose for Model One. Faculty supervisors arranged their schedules to meet with principals and cooperating teachers each day the preservice teachers were observing at times when public school personnel were available—usually before or after school.

***Model Two—Student Growth/Learning Model***

Promoting preservice teacher reflection and growth were the primary purposes for Model Two. Supervisors met with preservice teachers for on-site debriefing sessions immediately following each school observation.

***Model Three—Traditional Model***

Model Three supervisors provided principals with an introduction to the field experience. Early in the semester, supervisors helped principals with placements, provided information about the schedule and format for observations, and arranged a routine for checking attendance. If desired by the principal, supervisors also met with cooperating teachers. Supervisors stressed their availability but visited a school only when asked to do so.

Two instruments were used to collect data in this study: an 11-item **teacher attitudes survey** (Merwin & DiVesta, 1959) using a six-point Likert scale was administered pre and post experience to all preservice teachers; a four item “**field experiences satisfaction survey**” utilizing a seven-point Likert scale format was administered to all preservice teachers, cooperating teachers, and principals following the field experience. Survey items explored: 1) the amount of supervision, 2) the quality of interaction with the supervisor, 3) the perceived understanding of goals/objectives, and 4) the overall satisfaction. The preservice teachers’ scores on the four observation assignments, evaluated by faculty unaware of supervision model, were also analyzed.

The factorial model for each of the measures was analyzed using an analysis of variance (ANOVA). A group factor consisting of three levels, one for each model

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of supervision, was included in all analyses. For the attitude survey, a repeated measure ANOVA was used with attitude employed as the repeated measure. The score for each of the 11 items in the survey was summed separately for the pre-test and the post-test (after the negatively stated items had been recoded) and the ANOVA was performed on the sums.

For the satisfaction survey, ANOVAs were performed separately for each item. For preservice teachers, a one way ANOVA was performed with the supervision model being the three-way factor. A 2x3 ANOVA was performed for the responses of school personnel with the two factors being role (teacher or principal) and supervisory model.

For each of the four observation assignments, the preservice teachers' scores were submitted to a one way ANOVA with supervisory model providing the three levels.

The selection of a more liberal .10 level of significance was prompted by the exploratory nature of the study.

## **Results**

The results of the repeated measures ANOVA of the attitude survey showed a significant main effect difference ( $p < .10$ ,  $df 1$ ) in the change of attitude from the pre-test to the post-test (see Table 1) with post-test attitudes being less positive. A significant difference ( $p < .10$ ,  $df 133$ ) between supervisory model groups was also noted with the Model One subgroup being significantly more positive.

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**Table 1**  
**Means, Standard Deviations, and Repeated Measure Analysis of Variance of the Model of Supervision on the Sum of Teacher Attitudes Survey Scores**

For the preservice teachers, the results for all four satisfaction survey items were non-significant. The satisfaction survey item relating to level of understanding of the goals and objectives for the field experience revealed a significant main effect difference between cooperating teachers and principals (see Table 2).

Results from the four ANOVAs used to analyze the preservice teachers' grades for their observation assignments revealed a significant difference ( $p < .10$ ,  $df 1$ ) for the first assignment with the Model Two group scores significantly higher (see Table 3).

### **Discussion/Conclusions**

The attitudes survey indicated that the preservice teachers, across all supervisory models, were significantly less positive about teaching by the end of the field experience. Consistent with previous semesters, some participants elected not to

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**Table 2**  
**Means, Standard Deviations, and Analyses of Variance of the Items**  
**from the School Personnel Satisfaction Surveys**

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**Table 3**  
**Means, Standard Deviations, and Analyses of Variance for the Grades**  
**Received by the Preservice Teachers on Their Observation Assignments**

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pursue a teaching degree. Also, preservice teachers exposed to Model One were significantly more positive. An examination of pre- and post-semester means suggests that initial differences between groups was the primary reason for this. Because preservice teachers chose the section they enrolled in and self-selected between elementary and secondary placements, rigorous control of group composition was not possible.

Two explanations for why principals felt significantly more confident than cooperating teachers about their understanding of the field experience goals and objectives seem reasonable. First, as the primary contact point for supervisors, principals may have been better informed. Regardless of model, supervisors interacted with the principals. In contrast, supervisors regularly interacted only with the cooperating teachers in Model One schools. A more concerted effort to share pertinent information directly with cooperating teachers might lessen this difference. A second explanation is that principals are more confident people and/or are more confident about working with field experiences. If this perception were valid, future research should reveal a similar pattern regardless of the strategies used to better inform teachers.

On the first observation assignment, the scores for preservice teachers exposed to Model Two were significantly higher. No significant differences were noted for the remaining assignments. Even though on-campus debriefing sessions were purposefully scheduled to take place after assignments were due, the regular feedback provided to all preservice teachers, via on-campus debriefings, class discussions, and grades/comments apparently negated an initial advantage enjoyed by the Model Two subgroup. Using a 100-point scale, the mean scores for the observation assignments rose steadily from 62.9 for the first assignment to 68.9 for the last assignment. However, the standard deviations for the four observation

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assignments were similar (9.94, 10.70, 10.09, and 8.93 respectively). It appears that constriction on the upper end of the scale was not a factor.

Overall, the most striking result of this study was the lack of difference between supervisory models. Despite variations in structure and supervisory effort expended, this study yielded few significant differences in preservice teachers' attitudes toward teaching nor did it yield significant differences in satisfaction level among preservice teachers, principals, or cooperating teachers. Also, beyond the first observation assignment, no supervisory model group performed significantly better on the reflective narratives.

One explanation for the lack of difference is that the supervision model applied to early field experiences does not matter. Within limits, one supervision model may be as good as another. This conclusion seems to be supported by the similarities in responses to the teacher attitudes survey and the satisfaction survey and by the lack of difference in scores on the final three observation assignments. Overall satisfaction ratings were generally quite positive (overall ratings were consistently above 5.0 on a 7.0 scale). Most principals, cooperating teachers, and preservice teachers felt supervision was adequate.

Interesting patterns in the participants' responses suggest that practitioners actually preferred Supervisory Model Three. This model provided minimal faculty supervision. The principals exposed to Model Three were more satisfied on all measures. The cooperating teachers exposed to Model Two or Model Three were generally more satisfied, even though only Model One provided for regular cooperating teacher/supervisor interactions. These differences, although not statistically significant, are consistent in their direction, allowing one to hypothesize that the differences are real but too slight to be detected with the power available in this test.

The nature of the field experience perhaps contributed to the lack of difference. The field experience only required preservice teachers to observe in classrooms about two hours per week. In situations where preservice teachers fill instructional roles and/or where the time commitment is greater, the responses to supervision may differ.

Another possible explanation for the lack of variation is that the supervision models were not sufficiently distinct enough to yield significant differences. Perhaps the decision to bring all students back to campus every third week minimized differences between the supervision models—especially lessening the power of Model Two. Also, the realities of school schedules made it difficult for Model One supervisors to meet regularly with all cooperating teachers and principals. Replicating this study, using more distinct supervisory protocols, might yield measurable differences.

The results of this study apparently suggest that using different supervisory models for early field experiences may not yield significant differences in attitudes, satisfaction, or performance. It is important, however, to remember the current context. Even if minimal supervision of preservice service **is** just as effective, it is

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not **perceived** by influential forces as being equally effective (e.g. NCATE, 1990). Searching for models of supervision which satisfy accreditation standards while also encouraging professional growth and minimizing possible “negative” outcomes from field experiences is critical.

There are those who argue that the best hope for improving field experiences is to radically alter traditional school structure and climate. Zeichner (1992), for example, argues that “immersing preservice teachers, practitioners, teacher education faculty, and administrators in environments which are changing from within and which ground theoretical studies in practice” (p. 303) should be the goal. Cochran-Smith (1991) contends that placing preservice teachers with practitioners struggling to reform the system is the way to go. Regardless when, if, and how the system changes, providing adequate supervision for all field experiences will almost certainly remain an expectation. Over the past two decades, early field experiences have become a commonplace program feature. Implementing models appropriate for supervising early field experiences should follow.

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