

Proactive Seminars for Student Teachers

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As university supervisors of student teachers, our goal is to assist our student teachers in every way possible by providing them with the tools to be successful and by encouraging them to reach their potential. The traditional supervision experience involves supervisors observing and providing feedback to student teachers on a regular basis. Many times, due to time constraints or the number of student teachers, supervisors feel unable to assist the student teacher as much as they would like. In addition, faculty who prepare teachers are challenged to deliver quality programs within the constraints of personnel reductions (French & Plack, 1982).

Cooperating teachers can aid in the delivery of high-quality experiences for student teachers. Some university supervisors may rely heavily on the cooperating teacher's impact on a student teacher. There is no doubt that cooperating teachers have great influence on student teachers and should be able to structure the teaching experience for the student teacher (Koehler, 1984), but the nature and quality of that influence should be factored when determining student teacher development (Rickard & Veal, 1996). Many times, the cooperating teacher is limited by time and by the types of experiences available to student teachers within the constraints of the student-teaching experience. One example is when a student teacher comes into the school setting two weeks after the beginning of the semester and many of the rules and routines have already been established for the students. The student teacher

does not have the opportunity to observe those important initial steps of establishing routines for the school year.

A strategy that enables supervisors to more successfully monitor and communicate with the students, as well as maximize the efforts of the cooperating teacher in a different learning environment is through seminars. Seminars have historically been used in a directive manner with an expert presenting information to a targeted audience on a selected topic and then allowing the audience to ask questions regarding the topic (Brown & Atkins, 1991; Kahan, 1996). Some supervisors mirror the traditional seminar; in other words, the supervisor introduces a topic, asks the student teachers if they have problems associated with the topic, and then gives solutions to their problems with no processing on the part of the student teacher. This may or may not allow student teachers the opportunity to be proactive in discussions and limits feedback to students' actual experiences. By changing the format of the seminar, allowing the students more control in the solutions to their problems, students can have increased opportunity to interact, be proactive, and address issues brought forward that are not addressed in the school setting.

What Is a Proactive Seminar?

Seminars, typically, are designed to provide an opportunity for student teachers and university supervisors to discuss key elements of the teaching/learning process that include, but are not limited to, discipline and man-

agement, evaluation, professionalism, innovative ideas for teaching particular concepts, parent-teacher conferences, procedures for starting the school year, paper work demands, and job interviews. Many of these elements are either not addressed in textbooks used in teacher preparation curricula (Rickard & Veal, 1996) or are not specific to the unique situations that student teachers encounter with their students. Proactive seminars, in contrast to traditional seminars, ask student teachers to assume an active role as listener, problem solver, and source of social support for other student teachers. In proactive seminars, the university supervisor introduces scenarios related to the aforementioned teaching/learning process and then allows the student teachers to develop solutions. The intent of the problem-solving session is to anticipate in a proactive manner the situations that they might encounter, so that if problems like these scenarios arise in the schools, they are not forced into a "reactive" situation. Student teachers generally begin a career with the desire to be a good teacher, but sometimes lack some of the tools necessary to achieve that goal. Proactive seminars, if conducted properly, can assist in bridging the gap from theory to practice and provide a mechanism for learning how to address and resolve issues in ways that generate effective teachers.

Guidelines for Conducting Proactive Seminars

1. Begin each meeting with general information the student teachers will need for the weeks until the next

meeting (e.g., dates of upcoming exit exams, lesson plan due dates, videotaping of classes for evaluation).

2. Ask the students to share any problems or successes that may be occurring in their teaching assignments at this point. These experiences may range from lack of communication with a cooperating teacher to an accomplishment with a student. Some of the student teachers may think they have no experience to share, but once one person offers an example, then the others seem more willing to share their experiences. Discuss some of these experiences, remembering that student interaction is the key to address and resolve the issues. If one of the students is talking, the others should be listening for the problem and possible solutions they may offer at the conclusion of this student's time.

3. Following this discussion of daily experiences, the university supervisor will introduce a key element related to the discussion of the teaching/learning process that will be discussed throughout the remainder of the seminar. The supervisor should have previously prepared scenarios and any other handouts that would aid in stimulating discussion and increase students' understanding of concepts appropriate for the topic of the day.

How to Choose Topics for Each Seminar

The university supervisor, based on student input, will determine the topics of discussion for the future seminars at the initial student teacher meeting. Boggess, McBride, and Griffey (1985) identified five major concerns of student teachers in the development of teaching: (1) lesson and unit planning, (2) discipline and management, (3) demands of the task of teaching, (4) evaluation and grading of student teachers' performance, and (5) teaching as a career choice. University supervisors should consider these five areas when determining the topics for the semester seminars. Three techniques for identifying topics of most interest and use to student teachers are: (1) ask the student teach-

ers to examine and rank in order of importance a list of topics presented by the supervisor and based on past student teachers, (2) ask the student teachers to list and rank topics of interest that would affect their student-teaching experience the most, or (3) identify the five or six most important topics with input from student teachers for any other topics of interest. Once the topics have been identified for the seminars, the university supervisor will develop scenarios depicting the topics to be addressed.

Using Scenarios to Develop Proactive Seminars

In proactive seminars, scenarios are used to illustrate a type of micro-teaching that aids in reducing the stress of these basic concerns related to student teaching, but allows the student teacher to take charge of the problem. The following six example scenarios illustrate four of the five concerns previously mentioned. More examples applicable to discipline and management are presented because research indicates that student teachers cite this topic of concern more frequently than any other (Boggess, McBride, & Griffey, 1985).

Scenario 1: Discipline and Management Skills. You have a coed class of 30 high school students enrolled in an archery unit. You have told the students the rules applicable for safety: (1) leave the bows on the stands until instructed by the teacher to pick them up, and (2) do not point the bows at other students while they are still at the targets retrieving arrows. There are eight outdoor stations with equipment at each station. Problem: two students pick up bows and arrows and start pulling them back to shoot while three students are still picking up arrows on the targets. What should you do?

Scenario 2: Discipline and Management Skills. You are teaching a soccer unit. Three students are standing in one area of the field talking while the other students are participating in the game. You have gone over to them and reiterated the necessity to play

and not visit. They move about six feet from the initial spot of conversation and continue talking. What do you do?

Scenario 3: Management Skills. The gym is set up for badminton. For organizational purposes, you have put four racquets and two birdies at each of eight courts. You have locker room duty and have to wait until all students are out of the locker room before going to the gym. When you finally enter the gym, the students are all over the place, hitting birdies into the rafters, through the basketball nets, and at each other. What do you do?

Scenario 4: Demands of the Task of Teaching. It's the beginning of the school day, and you are preparing for the lesson that you had planned to teach that day. You have been given full responsibility of the classes at this point in student teaching. The cooperating teacher informs you that the gym is being set up for an assembly and you will only be able to use half the gym today. Nine students are out for make-up testing, three students need in-school suspension work for the day, and a parent is at the front office needing to talk to you. What steps do you take to juggle all of these responsibilities? How do you handle these situations and not sacrifice your responsibilities to teach and meet the objectives of the lesson?

Scenario 5: Evaluation and Grading of Student Teacher. You are teaching a unit in lacrosse, an activity with which you're not very familiar. You have had to prepare extensively to get ready for this unit. The cooperating teacher has given you full control of this unit and feels that you are ready to teach without his or her help. You go out to the field (where you are meeting your class) and realize that your university supervisor is there to observe you, unannounced. You know that your grade and evaluation are depending on good teaching strategies and class management. This class has a history of being the most challenging. You have had numerous discipline problems with them in the past (i.e., fights,

disobeying rules, talking during teacher's instruction). How do you handle this situation?

Scenario 6: Teaching as a Career Choice. Teaching is demanding. It requires a great deal of paper work, parent phone calls regarding students' behavior, coping with balancing facilities and equipment with other programs, other teachers' stereotypical views about your role as a physical educator, and the need for organization to be effective in such a large physical environment. Why be a physical education teacher?

The Roles of the University Supervisor and Student Teachers

The purpose of the scenario-based seminars is to provide an opportunity for students to address issues confronted in student teaching, as well as to learn and employ problem-solving techniques while drawing on the experiences of the supervisor. The supervisor supplies each student teacher with a copy of two or three scenarios for the topic of concern for that seminar and then asks them to focus on the first scenario. The student teacher's role is to engage in a problem-solving approach to find possible solutions to this scenario (i.e., define the problem, consider possible solutions, describe the consequences and obstacles of each solution, and choose the best solution [Durlak, Fulrman, & Lampman, 1991]). The supervisor tracks whether the students identify a plan to solve the problem, select various means or steps toward the goal, and identify obstacles that would interfere with completing appropriate behaviors (Kazdin, 1994).

Often, student teachers have preconceived ideas about teaching behaviors based on their own experiences observing teachers. Developing problem-solving skills to allow for broadened alternatives to their respective situations will strengthen their abilities to think for themselves and, in turn, has the potential to enhance their confidence as teachers. Probing questions can be interjected by the

supervisor when necessary, such as "What have you been taught to do?" "What is your plan?" "How do you do this?" or "What could I have done to prevent this situation in the first place?"

With mainstreaming, student solutions may be less effective for special populations. The supervisor should add specific scenarios that include special populations (i.e., deaf, blind, wheelchairs, learning disabled). They can also develop coping plans for equipment or facility deficiencies and unusual weather situations. This informal problem-solving strategy, the handouts that the supervisor provides, and the way the supervisor directs his or her questions will allow the student teachers many avenues for developing answers for very real situations. By the end of the meeting, it is hoped the students will realize that their problems are not unique or isolated and that they can learn from and help each other through this process. Throughout the seminar, the student teachers will be required to take notes on each of the situations discussed in order to take the ideas of the seminar and try them in their individual settings. This scenario technique will develop their communication skills and broaden their base of experiences from which to draw for future problems.

Desired Outcomes of Scenario-Based Seminars

Throughout the course of the seminar, the student teachers will:

- explore many possibilities to solve their problems and enhance their abilities to cope with various difficulties that arise. The supervisor's role is to ask questions and present challenges necessary to develop the most sound solutions to each problem.
- develop a variety of coping techniques. This will provide a variety of possible solutions to draw upon when faced with changing situations.
- develop an appreciation for their situations and the uniqueness their personalities bring to the solution of any given scenario.
- learn that the university supervisors are there to guide, but also to

develop confidence in the student teachers through input and feedback.

What If You Have Several Supervisors in Your Department?

Departmental structures vary, but with downsizing, many departments have more student teachers than one supervisor can handle. This type of seminar works best with four to fifteen students. Small groups of three or less are less effective for this type of seminar because interaction between the student teachers is minimal. Large groups of 15 or more are also not as effective due to lack of interaction or because some students allow others to do all of the problem solving. If a department has more than 15 student teachers, then multiple seminars could be offered depending on the number of students. If offering multiple seminars, each seminar should have one supervisor assigned to the group. Supervisors will be responsible for developing scenarios representative of the topics of interest in their groups.

Typically, seminars should be offered every two weeks to allow for at least six seminars during a student-teaching experience. Based on an analysis of more than 200 student teachers in written evaluations of seminars, it appears that seminars held every two to three weeks are the most effective. Staggered meeting times provide student teachers more time to analyze and process the information and incorporate techniques into their individual school settings. The seminar location should be central to the majority of student teachers in the group, and the seminar should last anywhere from an hour and a half to two hours depending on the topics to be addressed.

Conclusion

Proactive seminars serve three purposes: (1) to develop better problem-solving skills for a more successful teaching experience, (2) to provide information for the supervisor about how the student teacher is handling specific situations when time is re-

stricted for field observations, and (3) to supply each student teacher with a better understanding of the total teaching experience by sharing experiences among peers. Many student teachers have developed support groups through their peers, coping skills for later use, and confidence to be innovative. University supervisors should continue to develop ways to assist the student teacher in more positive experiences. Due to increasing expectations and demands, the art of teaching is becoming more difficult, therefore supervisors need to continue to guide student teachers to be innovative and creative. One of the main points that should be expressed as a supervisor is, "The more we do, the more we learn. Even if we don't do it right, we have at least learned yet another way of not doing it. That's learning; that's growth" (Roger

& McWilliams, 1991).

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involvement with physical activity. Educators and recreation programmers must keep in mind that for a physical activity to be enjoyable, the entire experience must be kept in a context of having fun. The activities that we enjoy the most are those that we look forward to with anticipation and those that we remember fondly. Professionals can set the stage for anticipation so that individuals look forward to future physical activity events. Similarly, we can assist individuals through a form of debriefing to reflect on what they learned and enjoyed. Discussions can give a context for future events. They also underline how recreation activities are the most fun when they encompass an entire experience, not just a single event. Looking forward to doing something and being able to share stories and recall what went on last time are essential to the enjoyment experience.

Physical activity programs that make people physically and mentally healthy must have enjoyment as a cornerstone. We must become better equipped and more skillful at producing opportunities for action that result in fun and

memorable experiences. The affective benefits of participation are rapidly losing their value in an overused and abused system of statistical evaluation and comparative measurement. People yearn for meaningful experiences. Educators and recreation professionals must acknowledge this yearning and take steps to assure that enjoyment and the potential for flow experiences are included in all our physical activity leadership efforts.

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