ABSTRACT
        This is an account of the development and evaluation
of a strategy to train student teachers to create communications
patterns with university supervisors and supervising teachers which
would help them reach their objectives. The instructional plan
provided a focus on interpersonal communications skills during five
weekly, one-hour seminars, which were part of the pre-fall elementary
education student teaching experience at the University of Minnesota,
College of Education. The guiding principle was that the
instructional intervention should be derived from a statement of
desired skills. Five areas were selected for this training program:
(a) establishing relationships; (b) listening, i.e., attending,
assessing, and clarifying; (c) interpreting and valuing in listening;
(d) soliciting feedback; and (e) giving feedback. Specific behaviors
and affective responses which would constitute acceptable evidences
of skill performance were identified. The statements of evidence
reflected the project goal of developing student teachers' skills in
communicating with both their university and classroom supervisors
and were of two types: (a) behavior descriptions which could be
observed and checked by someone outside the dyad and (b) internal
responses of the supervisor to the student teacher's communications.
(The document describes the development of training strategies and
evaluation of the training program. (JA)

A PROGRAM TO IMPROVE

STUDENT TEACHER-SUPERVISOR COMMUNICATIONS

Bruce D. Sillers, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Education Career Development Office
1425 University Avenue Southeast
University of Minnesota
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55414

Willard M. Kniep
Program Coordinator, Elementary Student Teaching
1425 University Avenue Southeast
University of Minnesota
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55414

A PROGRAM TO
IMPROVE STUDENT TEACHER-SUPERVISOR COMMUNICATIONS

INTRODUCTION

The student teacher-supervisor relationship and the concomitant inter-
action are crucial factors affecting the learning outcomes of the student

teaching experience. However, student teaching programs often place little,

if any, emphasis on this element of the program. Furthermore, those who

really have the most at stake--the student teachers--assume little respon-

sibility for enhancing their relationships with supervisors.

This is an account of the development and evaluation of a strategy

to train student teachers to create communications patterns with university

supervisors and supervising teachers which would help them reach their

objectives.

The instructional plan provided a focus on interpersonal communications

skills during five, weekly, one-hour seminars, which were part of the

pre-fall elementary education student teaching experience at the University

of Minnesota, College of Education.

ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT COMMUNICATIONS

The authors began with a number of assumptions about communications and

communications training. The first was that all two-or-more-person situations

are interpersonal and communicative. One cannot not behave; all behavior in

an interactional situation has message value--i.e., is communicative. It

follows that no matter how one tries, one cannot not communicate (1). Others

cannot avoid responding in some way and thus are themselves communicating.

The ... with increasing the effectiveness of one's communication with others should
not be left to chance. The lack of a systematic focus may occur because of
little value being placed on the communication process and relationship-
building, or because of the difficult prospect facing one who intends to
identify and develop the specific skills involved.

The need to establish some degree of commonality in defining the
elements of effective communications constituted the third assumption.
Individuals have already done their own defining and standard-setting, and
this needs to be made explicit.

Last, people _can_ learn to communicate more effectively with each other.

The task of the authors was to set objectives, identify the skills
involved in meeting those objectives, and design training strategies which
would develop the skills.

SKILL AREAS AND EVALUATION GUIDE

The guiding principle was that the instructional intervention should
be derived from a statement of desired skills. Five skill areas were selected
for this training program: (1) establishing relationships; (2) listening--
i.e., attending, assessing, and clarifying; (3) interpreting and valuing in
listening; (4) soliciting feedback; and (5) giving feedback.

Specific behaviors and affective responses which would constitute
acceptable evidences of skill performance were identified. The evidence state-
ments reflected the project goal of developing student teachers' skills in
communicating with both their university and classroom supervisors and were
of two types: (1) behavior descriptions which could be observed and checked
by someone outside the dyad, and (2) internal responses of the supervisor
to the student teacher's communications.

the assembled array of behaviors and the assessment of the
impact of the seminars on the subjective reality of another
persons are limited in number and scope. Thus, the supervisors' observations
and feelings were regarded as valid criteria, as they were the intended
targets for the student teachers' actions.

The skill evidences (listed under the appropriate skill area) were
incorporated into an evaluation guide. (Figure 1 contains one section.)
Each of the five sections of the guide had a similar format: a statement of
attendance or non-attendance at the relevant seminar experience, an assessment
of the over-all skill performance, and the list of specific behaviors or
affective responses (of supervisor) accepted as evidences of skill per-
formance. The evaluation for each of the three subheadings was a simple
"Evidenced" or "Not Evidenced" check.

<center>(Insert Figure 1 here)</center>

<center>DEVELOPMENT OF TRAINING STRATEGIES</center>

The authors decided early that the communications training for the
student teachers should be conducted by the university supervisors so that
the interaction occurring during the seminars would directly contribute
to the attainment of the desired goals. The seminar experiences were
structured so that supervisors would model the target skills--thus simul-
taneously enhancing both the teaching process and the student teacher-
supervisor relationship. Therefore, the seminars were laid out in sufficient
detail so that supervisors with limited or no special expertise could conduct
them after a brief training session on each lesson (Sample in Figure 2).

<center>(Insert Figure 2 here)</center>

Specific exercises were taken from the authors' own repertoires, the
array of anonymous communications training folklore, and Interpersonal

FIGURE 1
Evaluation Guide--Soliciting Feedback

D. Participated in seminar experiences related to soliciting
   feedback . . . .

        In communication with supervisors actively sought
        feedback about performance.

        As evidence -
            Stated not only that he wanted feedback, but
            also identified area where feedback was wanted. . .

            Clarified what he heard in feedback session . . . .

            Verbalized his reaction to the feedback . . . . . .

            Encouraged further feedback through verbal expres-
            sion (which seemed sincere) of appreciation . . . .

            Made supervisor feel inclined to give further
            feedback in future. . . . .

            Made supervisor feel that feedback would receive
            consideration and would be used appropriately for
            growth. . . . .

Evidenced

Not Evidenced

FIGURE 2
Sample Seminar Soliciting Feedback

Seminar 4. Soliciting Feedback.

This seminar reviews and applies many of the elements of the first three meetings. The student teacher will engage in activities which are designed to increase his ability to receive accurate information about his teaching behaviors. To be effective he must be able to identify the areas where feedback is needed. He must also engage in behaviors which will encourage others to give the information which is sought in a form which can be used. These behaviors will be the focus of this seminar.

SUPERVISORS:

Sequence of activities:

1. Discussion. (20 min.)
    Begin by looking at behaviors related to soliciting feed-back in the evaluation guide. Draw from the students how they see those behaviors in operation and what barriers they feel exist that might inhibit a student teacher from displaying them-- e.g., fear of authority, problems with supervisor, etc.

2. Modeling the behaviors. (20 min.)
    Supervisor will model the behaviors by making soliciting statements about his supervisory behavior or about his relation-ship with the student teachers.

3. Practice role playing. (20 min.)
    a. Form groups of threes, A, B and C.
    b. Role play a supervisory conference or a real situation relating to student teacher's interaction.
    c. A will play role as supervisor or one from whom feedback is solicited.
    d. B will play the role of the student teacher or one who is soliciting feedback.
    e. C will be an observer looking specifically at soliciting behavior of B.

    Sequence:
        (1) B makes 2 or 3 soliciting statements and follows through.
        (2) A responds to each statement by giving feedback if appropriate.
        (3) C relates what he has observed, focusing on B's soliciting behavior.

    Rotate roles twice so all have opportunity to play all roles.

C̲o̲n̲t̲i̲n̲u̲e̲d̲ ̲(̲p̲.̲ ̲7̲)̲.

The training for supervisors was based on an advanced run-through and discussion of each seminar with the two authors--one of whom was the supervisor coordinator. Thus, coordinator-supervisor communications in the training sessions paralleled that of the supervisors and student teachers in the seminars.

SEMINARS

The supervisors generally met with their students once a week for a two-hour seminar--one hour of which was allocated to the communication process (one hour per skill area). A total of 11 supervisors and 113 student teachers participated. Students received outlines of the seminar topics and copies of the evaluation guide at the beginning of the course, so that the overall goals and the specific performance criteria were explicit and public. Super-visors received detailed instructions on conducting the exercises, but were encouraged to adapt the specific procedures and content to fit the needs of their particular group.

EVALUATION OF THE TRAINING PROGRAM

The program was set up as a trial instructional intervention, not as an experimental study. Therefore, the evaluation focus was on the general program goals and components. The data consisted of solicited and un-solicited comments on the instructional procedures, an assessment of students' performance of the desired skills, and inferences made by the authors.

Instructional Procedures

Upon completion of the instructional program, the eleven supervisors who had used the exercises in their seminars were asked to evaluate the

procedure.. t fit int) are pre r... Ten supervisors responded. Of these,
five c ne 1 nd the forma. of or entication to be . atisfactory and easy to
work wit .; four felt the exercises were manageable, but needed s. e im-
provement; and one rep rted that the package was difficult to work with.
Nine of the ten supervisors considered the exercises to have adequate trans-
fer to the real world even though they may have seemed somewhat artificial.
No supervisors reported that they "never felt comfortable" doing the exer-
cises, and all of them felt that the directions were explicit enough so that
they usually or always knew what to do. All reported that being walked
through the exercises prior to using them was valuable, with three
indicating that these sessions should have been more detailed.

No aspect of the package format was singled out for change by more than
one person, although each made some comment. When asked which exercises
were most and least manageable, seven identified the relationship-building
seminar as the most manageable, while none of the other seminars emerged
consistently in either category. Based on verbal comments from the super-
visors about the exercises, the writers felt that the supervisors responded
more on the basis of their preference for certain exercises than on manage-
ability.

Behavior of Students

Supervisors used the evaluation guides to assess each student's per-
formance. Fifty students were reported to have exhibited (at some time, at
a minimal level) all of the criterion behaviors. Twenty-seven students were
reported not to have exhibited one or more of the criterion behaviors. No
one criterion accounted for a notable proportion of these twenty-seven students.
However, a few areas tended to tally more "not evidenced" checks, and may be

worth further inve... ... n. Almost completely, the counter-evidences under
e ... ltnat... ... istl... ... consist ed of "employs 'what off' responses in
conversati... "... with university supervisors) and "seldom or never talks
about professional or personal self" (with both supervisors). The lack
of talk about self could be supportive of those viewpoints which value
self-disclosure as a relationship-building technique. Other areas in which
some students might not have been as successful were in asking for further
elaboration of the message on the emotional level before reacting to a
feedback statement by the supervisor, in making the supervisor feel that the
value placed on the message was separate from the value placed on the speaker,
and in limiting the amount of information given in feedback to what the
supervisor could use at the time. Very few people did not show the behaviors
under the category of "soliciting feedback," which may relate to supervisor
comments reported in the next section.

Supervisor and Student Reactions

The authors received unsolicited comments concerning the program--
most of them positive--which seemed to fall into these categories: (1) the
need for such a focus within the student teaching experience, (2) the
training the supervisors received, (3) the detailed plans laid out for the
supervisors' use, and (4) the impact on the target relationship. The chief
negative feedback seemed to consist of disagreement with the high value and
priority placed on the communication process between supervisors and student
teachers. In addition, some supervisors reported difficulty in utilizing
the evaluation guide properly.

The collage exercise in the first seminar seemed to be enthusiastically
received by both students and supervisors as a valuable aid to self-disclosure

I ... ... reported that they
the ... ... to be a great boost to students
in ... ... help them most, thereby enhancing
the supervisors' ability to be of maximum assistance.

Supervisors seemed to increase their skills, even though they
were only secondary targets. Their coordinator (one of the authors) ob-
served supervisors' increased use of the skills in staff meetings, conferences
(with students and teachers), and individual interactions with him.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Time and effort needed to be devoted at the beginning of the
program to dealing with the participants' feelings about the importance of
interpersonal communications, so that the necessary commitment would have
been obtained: from supervisors to use and stay with the instructional
plan, and from students to try to develop those skills.

2. Specific attention should have been given to helping supervisors
become more capable of modifying the specifics of the instructional package
to fit their situations, or else skilled consultants should have been
readily available to assist them.

3. There should have been a greater variety in the types of exercises
used in order to increase interest and motivation.

4. The evaluation guide, although helpful, needed refinement. It
lacked qualitative and quantitative dimensions which would suggest criterion
levels of performance. However, the specificity of the guide was beneficial.
Whatever the form, the supervisors needed more assi   in using it with
their students.

5. T... ... ... of the ... ...
interaction ... ... There ... ... limiting th ... ...
ject ... ...

o. There seemed to be good transfer of the instructional program to
the work setting. Indeed, the exercises--the types, the processes used, and
the content chosen--were actually a part of the "real world" aimed for in
the goals.

7. The time allocated and the scope of the intervention were adequate
for the objectives set and the scope of the desired outcomes. This might
not have been true if opportunities for practice of the skills had not
existed outside the instructional setting (i.e., supervisors and student
teachers interacted in other parts of their seminars and in school settings,
as well as in the one-hour sessions devoted to communications).

8. The instructional program had beneficial side-effects on staff
competencies. Future programs might set this as one of the main goals.

9. The next program, in addition to containing refined instructional
techniques, should include a systematic research design to more accurately
assess the impact of the program on students' and supervisors' behaviors.

NOTES

1. Watzlawick, Paul et al. Pragmatics of Human Communication (New York:
    W. W. Norton & Co.), 1967.

2. Jung, Charles et al. Interpersonal Communications (Portland, Oregon:
    Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory), 1971.