

A Seven-Month Practicum: Collaborating Teachers' Response

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In this study, we interviewed collaborating teachers who had participated in our field experience program to examine collaborating teachers' perceptions of a long-term, on-site teacher-education program and to define their role as teacher educators. Collaborating teachers stated that this long-term, preservice field experience effectively socialised teacher candidates into the teaching profession, both in the classroom and the school. They describe the strategies they used to scaffold teacher candidates into teaching. Successful scaffolding techniques are situated within the context of an extended field experience.

Keywords: mentor, scaffold, socialise, reflection, preservice

Dans le cadre de leur étude, les auteurs ont interviewé des enseignants associés qui ont participé à un programme de formation à l'enseignement en milieu scolaire du Collège de Saint-Boniface afin d'étudier leurs façons de voir la formation à long terme sur le terrain et de définir leur rôle de formateur auprès des stagiaires. De l'avis des enseignants associés, ce programme de formation à long terme en milieu scolaire permet d'intégrer efficacement les stagiaires dans la profession d'enseignant en classe comme au sein de l'école. En outre les auteurs présentent les stratégies auxquelles ont recours les enseignants associés pour encadrer les stagiaires. Ces stratégies se situent dans le contexte de stages prolongés.

Mots clés: mentor, étayage, encadrement, stage pédagogique

With the expansion of the field experience component in preservice teacher education programs across North America and the desire to create teacher-education programs based on social constructivist theory, collaborating teachers become much more significant players because they assume a greater responsibility as mentors to preservice teachers. Research to date has looked at the role of collaborating teachers in two contexts: either in short-term field placements during preservice education or as mentors for first year teachers. Generally, the research paints a bleak picture of the roles

of collaborating teachers. Roles and responsibilities are not clear (Wideen, Mayer-Smith, & Moon, 1998). Teacher educators have little control of the selection of collaborating teachers, and few practise the kind of learner-centred teaching advocated by reformers (Cochran-Smith, 1991; Cohen, McLaughlin, & Talbert, 1993; Feiman-Nemser, Parker, & Zeichner, 1993). Feiman-Nemser (1996) has suggested that if teacher educators want teacher candidates to learn new ways of thinking and acting, they must be placed with collaborating teachers who are already practising the kinds of reform teacher educators want to see or establish contexts in which collaborating teachers and teacher candidates explore new strategies together.

Within the context of educational reform and, more specifically, reform that espouses closer links between universities and schools, those in charge of teacher-education programs need to reconceptualize the mentoring role of the collaborating teacher. Some researchers, for example Knowles and Cole (1996) and Wideen, Mayer-Smith, and Moon (1998) have recommended revising the role of collaborating teachers from one of formal supervision to one of scaffolding teacher candidates in learning to teach. Dempsey (1994) and Richardson (1997) highlighted the value of collaborative, school-based approaches to the field experience, advocating a movement away from the present apprenticeship model, and moving toward an inquiry model in which all partners — teacher candidate, collaborating teacher, and faculty advisor — are involved in reflective practice. Learning to teach is rooted in personal experience and practice (Gunstone, Slattery, Baird, & Northfield, 1993; Knowles & Cole, 1996; Loughran & Russell, 1997; Skau, 1990). Reflecting on practice enables teacher candidates to formulate a personal theory, which in turn affects how they teach (Fenstermacher, 1994). Dempsey (1994) underscores the importance of interpersonal relationships and constructive dialogue as essential elements for reflective practice.

We have based the conceptual framework for this study on social constructivist epistemology. According to social constructivist theory, learning and language are products of social collaboration (Vygotsky, 1962). The role of discourse community is crucial in this view of learning because within the collaboration of a group of knowers learning takes place. For a discourse community to function effectively, all members of the group need to have a voice in the conversation. In other words, power is shared and decisions are negotiated (Vadeboncoeur, 1997).

This view of learning has immense implications for teacher-education programs because it redefines where knowledge lies. Knowledge does not reside exclusively in the domain of the university, nor is it found solely in the domain of the school experience. Rather, knowledge is found in the

transaction of both theoretical and practical experiences (Levine, 1996). For this reason, teacher-education programs must construct dynamic links between practice and theory. In this study, we have documented the beginning of a university-school collaboration that attempts to create this dialectic between theory and practice. We used group interviews with collaborating teachers to give a voice to often-silent partners in these teacher-education programs. They are members of the discourse community of teacher educators and as such, they should have a voice in the construction of knowledge of learning to teach.

In this article, we have focused on the collaborating teachers' perceptions of an on-site, preservice field experience. We also describe how collaborating teachers perceive their role, and more specifically, the strategies they use to scaffold their teacher candidates in learning to teach.

This study extends the existing literature in several ways. First, studies have concluded teacher educators have little control over the selection of collaborating teachers. This on-site program addresses the issues about selecting suitable placements for teacher candidates. Second, most studies have looked at the role of collaborating teachers in the context of short-term field placements or the role of mentor with first-year teachers. In our study, we investigate the role of collaborating teachers in a seven-month, teacher-education program. Third, research is pointing to the importance of collaborating teachers revising their role from one of formal supervision to one of scaffolding teacher candidates as they learn to teach. The present study describes how that shift might take place. Finally, constructivist reform initiatives advocate an inquiry model in which reflective practice is a tool for informing teaching. This study describes what reflective practice means for collaborating teachers.

The following research questions guided our study of the experiences of collaborating teachers.¹ How do collaborating teachers in an extended practicum describe their role in the education of teacher candidates to contribute to schools in today's society? What do collaborating teachers see as their role as mentors in a seven-month practicum?

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Since 1995, the Faculty of Education at the Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface, in Manitoba, has offered an on-site program as an option to students of a post-baccalaureate Bachelor of Education degree. In the first year of the program, teacher candidates spend most of their time on the university campus, taking mandatory education courses. They have three weeks of practicum interspersed within this first year. In their second and

final year, students spend seven months in a single field placement from the end of August until the end of March. They meet weekly on the university campus with their faculty advisor to participate in seminars on topics related to teaching and learning theory and to share their field experiences with their peers. Faculty advisors are full-time professors who are responsible for teaching undergraduate education courses as well as accompanying a cohort of teacher candidates. They place teacher candidates for their practicum, visit students in their placements at least once a month, communicate via e-mail twice weekly, and meet with them weekly on the university campus.²

A program goal is to gradually socialize teachers into the teaching profession by making a more cohesive link between theory and practice than is usually offered by traditional preservice education models. Placing the students in an extended field experience gives them the opportunity to assume the responsibilities of a practising teacher. With full-time professors, who teach undergraduate education courses and act as faculty advisors, we believe that a greater possibility exists to link theory and practice. Dialogue journals between faculty advisors and teacher candidates, on-site visits, and various assignments also bridge the gap between theory and practice. Furthermore, by participating in the faculty seminars with their cohort group and their faculty advisor, teacher candidates establish a community of learners whose major goal is to create a theory and practice dialectic.

Teacher candidates in this program are placed in either French immersion or French first-language schools. This educational community is relatively small, insular, and well known to faculty advisors, who, in consultation with school administrators, use certain criteria in choosing collaborating teachers. These criteria include the preferences of the teacher candidates, an acceptance on the part of the collaborating teacher of a constructivist view of learning, a commitment of both partners to build a collaborative work environment, a commitment to inquiry as a component of learning, and the possibility of placing at least two students at a school. A further criterion for the immersion schools is preference to those schools that are best able to provide a French ambiance. Under no circumstances are teacher candidates placed with teachers against the wishes of the collaborating teacher or the faculty advisor. In contrast to the research previously cited, faculty advisors have a great control over the selection and participation of collaborating teachers for this program.

Unless extenuating circumstances occur, faculty place students in the same setting for their entire field experience so they may develop a relationship with the same collaborating teacher and students. Our faculty believe that teacher candidates refine a teaching style and understand

learners over time, a process facilitated when they can practise their teaching with the same group of children under the guidance of the same collaborating teacher for the entire practicum.

METHODOLOGY

We chose qualitative inquiry for this study because it allowed us, as researchers, to examine knowledge in the social and historical context in which it was created (Lincoln, 1992). We wanted to understand the meaning collaborating teachers constructed about their experiences in an on-site program, a study of the experiences of a specific population in a specific context. To gather data about teachers' experiences, we used group interviews (Knodel, 1993; Morgan, 1995, 1997) which were particularly well suited to informing the questions for the study because participants had first-hand experiences as collaborating teachers in an on-site teacher-education program. Group interviews allow participants to make comparisons among each other's experiences and opinions, an exchange of opinion that provides valuable insights into complex research questions. In our study, the interactions among the participants who have been mentors in the on-site program provided a rich data source.

The population for this study was the 77 collaborating teachers who participated over the past five years in the on-site program either in French first-language or French immersion settings. Seventeen collaborating teachers agreed to participate in the study. Twelve taught at the elementary level, five at the senior level.

One of the researchers, Gestny, was the moderator of the interview groups. The fact that she had worked with many of the collaborating teachers may have had an impact on the data collected. For example, her acquaintanceship with the participants may have facilitated disclosure, but it may also have resulted in the participants responding to her position as a faculty member rather than to her as a moderator of the interview groups.

There was a high degree of homogeneity among the collaborating teachers. They had all experienced the on-site program as collaborating teachers, they all belonged to a similar social class, and they held the same professional status. The researchers did not sense that age or gender affected the discussions. The collaborating teachers were comfortable participating in the interview groups.

In the spring of 2001, I (Gestny) conducted two interview groups with five and seven participants respectively, composed of collaborating teachers who taught at the elementary level, and one group interview composed of

five collaborating teachers who taught at the secondary level for a total of three interview groups. I developed an interview guide, based loosely on the research questions, to direct the group interviews. Each group met on two separate occasions for a total of six sessions. Each session lasted approximately two hours, providing 11 hours and 15 minutes of audiotapes. As moderator, I began the group interviews with an open question to prompt discussion, and gradually moved the discussion toward the objectives of the research agenda.

The interviews, conducted in French, were audiotaped with the help of a technician, and the tapes were transcribed verbatim. The transcriber was present at the group interviews, facilitating her ability to match voices with participants' names. As moderator, I made notes on a flip chart during the discussions and reviewed the flip chart notes with the participants at the end of each session to ensure my notes represented the discussion. A transcriber took notes at each group meeting and transcribed the tapes and participated in a debriefing session with the researcher after each interview group. Data from the transcripts used for publication were then translated into English for reporting and dissemination.

Data Analysis

Using QSR*NUDIST (1997) to manipulate the data, we labelled units of meaningful text or phenomena each time they reappeared and subsequently classified them according to emerging themes. Most of the ideas fit into themes established by the discussion guideline; we classified others as "free nodes," or themes that were not part of the discussion guideline. The software allowed us to match participants with their comments with any given code. It also allowed us to return to the original transcript and reread the coded material in context and to analyze each category according to the vigour and the frequency with which it was discussed. Some of the coding categories were fairly general, including large "chunks" of text; some were more specific using smaller segments of text.

The analysis of the data was recursive. It began with a detailed description of one group before applying the resulting codes to the remaining groups. The fact that we added fewer and fewer categories as we analyzed the last set of transcripts suggests saturation of our data and the addition of another group interview would have added little further insight. We then reviewed all the transcripts to ensure that our categories represented the three sets of transcripts.

We asked a disinterested teacher educator to read one of the sets of transcripts to generate categories of codes. She generated a list of categories

based on her interpretation of the data. When we compared her list to the list of categories already compiled, we found that the categories were virtually identical to the original categorization. We used this second rater to guard against researcher bias and to triangulate the analysis.

Using QSR*NUDIST, we generated reports for each category containing the texts that had been coded for that category, and constructed an index tree to show the relationships among the various categories generated from the three groups. This procedure provided insight into how we could fracture the data and reassemble it in new ways. It also permitted systematic comparisons across the groups and the segments. The overview grid also facilitated the internal reliability of each group interview because it permitted us to compare statements within and, more importantly, across sessions. We checked to see what data were left out of the index tree and considered revisions.

FINDINGS

The findings reported in this article consider the effectiveness of a long-term, on-site practicum, and the role of collaborating teachers as they help teacher candidates learn to teach.

Perceptions of a Seven-Month, On-Site Practicum

All participants from each interview group were convinced of the value of the seven-month practicum. They believed it gave the teacher candidates a realistic and authentic experience. Furthermore, it enabled them to develop their own teaching styles in the classroom and to integrate into the culture of the school.

Collaborating teachers provided an argument to support a long-term practicum. Some of them mentioned the advantages for teacher candidates to see the beginning of the school year. Others noted that teacher candidates encountered the range of reactions and emotions that children experience during the school year. Estelle³ said the seven-month practicum give teacher candidates "the reality of working with teacher aids, of working with non-French speaking students combined with French-speaking students in the same class, all those things."⁴ Other collaborating teachers stated that a long-term practicum enabled the teacher candidates to integrate into the school culture, not just a single classroom.

All the focus groups expressed their dissatisfaction with a program organization where teacher candidates split their practicum into two blocks of five weeks in the first semester and six weeks in the second semester.

These collaborating teachers believed that when the practicum was split, the teacher candidates never really got the chance to develop their own teaching styles. Dorothee suggested that the seven-month practicum gave teacher candidates a chance to develop their own personalities and not “clone” the personality of the collaborating teacher. She believed that in the split, two-block program, teacher candidates had to copy the personality of the collaborating teacher to survive; whereas in the seven-month practicum, teacher candidates are obligated to let their own personality flourish: “You can’t hide and you can’t become the other person either because eventually the students will get to know you and they will tell you.” François spoke of his own experience with the two block organization. He felt that teacher candidates were just “gens de passage” and never really felt integrated into the school. From the collaborating teachers’ point of view, the notion of “real-life” experience was a great strength of the seven-month practicum. Some collaborating teachers stated that even a seven-month practicum was too short. Estelle expressed concern that teacher candidates did not see how a school year wrapped up. Raymond expressed regret that they would not see the end of the year when the pressure really sets in.

In summary, the collaborating teachers’ criticism of a split block practicum and their belief that even a seven-month practicum was too short gave no doubt of their support for a structure that gave teacher candidates a long-term practicum in a classroom setting.

Scaffolding Learning to Teach

As the research reviewed in the introductory section points out, the role of collaborating teachers has changed from one of formal supervision to one of scaffolding teacher candidates as they learn to teach. The term scaffold refers to the guidance collaborating teachers provide to enable teacher candidates to develop further by helping them to reflect on experience, make connections, and observe model teaching. The following findings articulate how this scaffolding is actualized.

Building the Scaffold. Collaborating teachers discussed the importance of establishing teacher candidates as a member of the teaching staff from the outset. This, they believed, was key to success for teacher candidates in establishing their presence in the classroom. Joanne stated, “It is very important that the teacher candidate feels equal to you. Otherwise, it will not work.” Participants suggested a variety of ways to integrate teacher candidate into the teaching staff. Katherine talked about educating parents and the staff by ensuring that teacher candidates attended staff meetings

and parent-teacher conferences. Thomas also spoke about educating parents. He said it must be made clear to parents that teacher candidates are teachers and should be respected as such. As the months passed in the practicum, teacher candidates assumed more and more responsibilities in communicating with parents and participating as a faculty member in the administration of the school.

Collaborating teachers in this study used terms such as “facilitator,” “*accompagnatrice*” (teaching companion), “coach,” and “guide” when referring to their role as teacher educators. Dorothee described her role as follows: “They [the teacher candidates] are not an empty vessel that you must fill by giving them all the information and showing them what to do. You are a helper, a support. You permit the teacher candidates to learn.” The participants saw their role as one of supporting the teacher candidates in their construction of knowledge.

Collaborating teachers adamantly believed their main role was to help teacher candidates develop self-confidence. Thomas said, “Yes, you really have to give them confidence and encourage them not to fear trying things out. They hesitate, and that is normal.” Anna referred to her role as one of emotional support for the teacher candidate. She recounted that sometimes her teacher candidate would be quite optimistic of the success of a lesson only to discover it did not evolve as she anticipated. In such instances, Anna provided emotional support by saying things such as “Don’t get discouraged. You are coming along fine.” Pierrette talked about the importance of confidence in risk taking: “You have to establish a state of confidence in a situation so the teacher candidate feels confident, a little like our students. They have to be able to take risks.” Raymond also linked success with confidence. He compared the learning of teacher candidates to the learning of the students in his classroom: “I didn’t want him [the teacher candidate] to be perfect, I didn’t want him to think that he could do everything, but that he experience certain moments of success so he would stay motivated, so he could continue.” Collaborating teachers felt that instilling a sense of self-confidence was an essential part of a teacher candidate’s learning.

For the teacher candidates to experience success and develop self-confidence, the collaborating teachers capitalized on the strengths and the interests of their teacher candidates to address their weaknesses. Raymond summarised how the interests of the teacher candidate influenced how he structured learning experiences. In reference to his teacher candidate, he stated: “What are your challenges? What are the things you liked, you like, or you don’t like? How can I, for the rest of your mentorship, how can I help you more efficiently?” Judith gave a similar example based on her experience: “What are your strengths? Okay, Maths. So, that is where we

started, there, where he was comfortable. He will be able to do it and will enjoy success and from that he will develop his self-confidence, which will grow." Working through a teacher candidate's strengths and interests was key in ensuring success and developing self-confidence.

This ability to discover teacher candidates' strengths and weaknesses requires time and patience. Joanne remarked, "You have to be very patient because they do not work at the same speed as we do." Roxanne spoke from the point of view of a collaborating teacher who had worked with teacher candidates from the on-site program on three different occasions. One of her teacher candidates was very quiet, posing a new challenge for her. She reflected on this challenge.

A challenge that we face is to learn to know this person and to go find her . . . because in my three experiences, I had one teacher candidate who was a little more difficult to get to know because she was rather quiet, and she did not want to start teaching, and I had to ask myself, when will she be ready, when will she be able? I gave her time and fortunately, because at the outset, I thought this is going to be a long process, but it worked. So, I think, you have to give them time. And you learn the strengths and weaknesses of that person. (Roxanne, collaborating teacher)

Collaborating teachers also discussed taking the time to know teacher candidates to judge what responsibilities they could assume.

It is important to learn to know our teacher candidate as quickly as possible so that when we give them responsibilities they experience success, successes from the start to develop confidence so they can discover, "I am able to do this." (Raymond, collaborating teacher)

These two quotations provide examples of the importance collaborating teachers attributed to taking the time to get to know their teacher candidates. Understanding teacher candidates helped the collaborating teachers determine how much structure they need as they learn to become teachers.

Taking Down the Scaffold. In the interviews, the collaborating teachers noted that their role changed until teacher candidates took full responsibility for the classroom.

The collaborating teacher is a partner. At the beginning we are there to show them, and it is true that at a moment during the mentorship, there is a reversal of roles and we are no longer the teacher, but the teacher's aid. (Thomas, collaborating teacher)

I believe the role of the collaborating teacher evolves in the sense that you are very present in the professional life of the teacher candidate at the beginning and little by little, you become less attached and you give the teacher candidate more freedom. You give him more space, more liberty. (François, collaborating teacher)

Collaborating teachers were aware that their means of scaffolding changed during the practicum, from being quite directive to giving the teacher candidates more independence and ownership for their own learning.

According to the collaborating teachers, they faced the difficult challenge of knowing when to push the “chick out of the nest,” when to back off and let the teacher candidates take a solo flight. The teachers reported that this decision was very individualized and that dialogue between the collaborating teachers and the faculty advisors was important to determine when the teacher candidates were ready to take new risks and accept new responsibilities. Sometimes, the collaborating teachers thought their teacher candidates were ready to take a new risk only to discover they still needed support. Thomas worded this phenomenon in the following way: “Sometimes you get the feeling they are ready, and other times you feel that you have to be there right to the end.”

No common date, checklist, or test exist for collaborating teachers to inform them when to move back and let the teacher candidates have more room. Danika said she judged that the teacher candidates were ready by the questions they posed. Her experience taught her that teacher candidates posed many questions at first, and when they stopped asking questions, she felt they were ready to take over. Christine commented, “Sometimes you have to just let them go. It depends on the individual.” Thomas observed that a good indicator was when the teacher candidate was obviously feeling comfortable in the classroom, whereas Janelle thought it was instinct that tells the collaborating teacher when to let go. Participants reported that they have to know the limits of the teacher candidates, and they had to evaluate the situation.

This shift from a relation of protégé-mentor to one of shared teaching sometimes required a gentle push from the collaborating teachers. One teacher talked about a moment when she realized that she had to leave her teacher candidate.

At some point I felt I had to let my teacher candidate go and do her own thing. I left her alone in the class for periods of time, long periods of time, so she could feel, “yes, this is my class.” (Christine, collaborating teacher)

Only after Roxanne encouraged her teacher candidate to substitute for her did her teacher candidate realize she could assume full responsibility for the classroom. Judith and Thomas shared this tactic of leaving the teacher candidate alone at a certain point.

Pierette noted the tension she experienced when she tried to share her responsibilities with her teacher candidate.

You try to instill a certain confidence in the teacher candidate when she arrives. I really didn't know which responsibilities I could give her that would enable her to affirm herself as a teacher and yet, not jeopardise my feeling of ownership for my classroom. (Pierrette, collaborating teacher)

The teachers reiterated this sentiment when they talked about the disadvantages of working with teacher candidates. They felt a sense of loss in having to share their students. Collaborating teachers described a delicate balance between encouraging teacher candidates to take more responsibility and retaining some kind of ownership of their students.

Naturally, when a teacher candidate has the opportunity to take risks, there will be, at times, moments of failure. The collaborating teachers talked about the importance of being honest and frank with teacher candidates.

I think that one of our roles is to be honest. It is difficult but I think it is facilitated when collaborating teachers have a certain amount of experience. You must be able to tell the teacher candidate, "Listen, it is not always going to work but what you have done is good, however there are certain weaknesses." And in fact, that will develop her confidence because the more you tell her exactly how you feel, the more that will help her in her development. (Roxanne, collaborating teacher)

Participants commented on the importance of a close relationship with teacher candidates so that honest discourse could take place. They also warned of the necessity to temper criticism. Thomas noted the vulnerability of teacher candidates: "They are like little birds, they are so fragile, you mustn't crush them." Janelle said, "And you mustn't brood over them either." And Anna, "You have to have a middle ground." Joanne concluded, "We are there to help them open their eyes." The collaborating teachers were protective, concerned, and yet anxious that the teacher candidates take responsibility for their actions and accept recommendations and criticism.

In summary, the collaborating teachers saw themselves not as formal supervisors but as facilitators, responsible for supporting the teacher candidate in their learning. They stated they needed time to establish relationships, to encourage self-confidence, to determine strengths and weaknesses, and to transfer responsibilities so the scaffold provided by the collaborating teachers could gradually be removed.

Reflective Practice in Learning to Teach

Collaborating teachers agreed that one of their roles was to accompany teacher candidates in reflecting on their teaching, a topic they discussed at

length. They proposed various strategies including showing teacher candidates how to set goals, giving feedback that encouraged reflection, thinking aloud, having teacher candidates critique the collaborating teachers' lessons, and modelling how they continue to learn.

The collaborating teachers reached consensus that teacher candidates must be able to set attainable objectives so that they can reflect on their teaching. They should base the success of their lessons on an evaluation of these objectives. Judith, for example, asked her teacher candidate, "What is the purpose of your lesson? Did you succeed? Were all the students able to achieve that goal? How could you have helped that child achieve that goal?" Collaborating teachers often related this ability to reflect on teaching to their capacity to give feedback. Lara described how she debriefed with her teacher candidate.

Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of a lesson, what worked well, what didn't work so well, what could have been done differently . . . not necessarily to discuss what was wrong with a lesson, but to explore different ways or procedures to present the lesson. (Lara, collaborating teacher)

The collaborating teachers noted another strategy to prompt teacher candidates to reflect on teaching: to critique the collaborating teachers' lessons. Raymond stated, "You [teacher candidate] saw a situation in class. How would you have reacted if you were in my place, if you were the teacher?"

The collaborating teachers mentioned the importance for the teacher candidates to observe that they constantly reflect on their teaching and adjust their approaches to accommodate the students in their classes. Thomas stated that teacher candidates must know that "you can stop the lesson if you see it is not working and try something else"; another participant added, "Because that happens to us as well." The collaborating teachers reported that teacher candidates have a perception that experienced teachers have in some way mastered their profession. They sought to correct this myth by modelling for the teacher candidates how they reflected on their teaching. Pierrette mentioned the practice of thinking aloud, which she saw as a way to model the kind of questioning teachers engage in when they are teaching or reflecting on their teaching.

I would say that our role as teacher educators is to think aloud. . . . If we think aloud or we say, "I did such and such a thing because of these circumstances." . . . When we think aloud, we provide a model, and we show that we think as well. We permit questions and questioning. (Pierrette, collaborating teacher)

The collaborating teachers also nurtured reflective practice by modelling a disposition for lifelong learning, which they exemplified by working with new curricula, being aware of recent research, attending professional development sessions with their teacher candidates, and reading professional journals. Judith talked about the teachers in her division who participated in a book club. They met once a month to discuss their readings and their attempts to apply some of the notions to their own teaching. Dorothée said, "The best quality of a collaborating teacher is that he realizes that he is a learner himself, for life." Her comment received nods of approval from her colleagues.

It was apparent that reflecting on teaching should be a practice of the collaborating teachers, it should be modelled for the teacher candidates, and once the teacher candidates had a certain degree of experience they too should begin reflecting on their teaching. Experience is crucial to the ability to reflect on practice. Teacher candidates are, at first, centred on themselves and their lesson plans. As they gain confidence and experience, their attention gradually moves to the learners (Fuller & Brown, 1975). Only when teacher candidates started to attend to their students are they in a position to reflect on their teaching, their students' learning, and ultimately, on their own learning. The extended field experience provided in the context of the on-site program at Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface offered the time for this process to unfold.

These collaborating teachers were practising learner-centred teaching, according to contemporary theory. They are aware of the importance of focusing on what beginning teachers already knew and believed about teaching. They strove for collaborative relationships in which partners saw teaching as problem solving, in reflecting thinking that serves as a model for the teacher candidates as well as a backdrop for effective feedback.

CONCLUSION

Although this study is limited to the experiences of collaborating teachers in a particular context — and the researchers' interpretation of that experience, it helps inform teacher education research in several ways. First, most studies (Duquette & Cook, 1994; Gervais & Desrosiers, 2001; Martin, 2003) have looked at short-term placements for teacher candidates. The experiences of the collaborating teachers in our study led them to support a long-term practicum because it gave teacher candidates a realistic and authentic opportunity to be socialized into the teaching profession. Second, in our study, we have described some strategies collaborating teachers used

to scaffold teacher candidates. They took the time to understand their strengths and weaknesses, they gave them honest feedback, and they structured the learning environment to remove the scaffold gradually to give teacher candidates more responsibility and independence. Third, the collaborating teachers described how they accompanied teacher candidates in reflecting on their experiences and using that information to inform their teaching. Collaborating teachers have several strategies as part of their role as teacher educators as members of the discourse community of teacher education: developing a collaborative relationship, building self-confidence and trust, determining strengths and weaknesses, modelling reflective practice, helping teacher candidates set goals and evaluate their teaching, helping them develop their own teaching style and personal learning theory. Building this scaffold and slowly removing it takes time. The data for our study suggest a long-term practicum is a necessary condition to successfully scaffold teacher candidates as they learn to teach.

DISCUSSION

Contrary to studies cited in our literature review, we have control over the placement of teacher candidates in the program at Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface. We invited collaborating teachers to participate as teacher educators according to, among other criteria, their adherence to constructivist learning theory. Placing teacher candidates with collaborating teachers who are practising the kinds of reform aligned with current research is crucial because they are being called on to assume a greater responsibility as teacher educators.

In our group interviews, collaborators did not consider the role of theory in learning to teach. They didn't mention any examples of collaborating teachers helping teacher candidates link personal practical knowledge to paradigms of learning theory. If reform in education calls for collaborating teachers to help teacher candidates anchor their practice in theory, our study underscores the urgency of clarifying the role of collaborating teachers as teachers of theory.

Hargreaves (1992) and Fullan (in Beatty & Shaw, 1994) talk about "reculturing," as the need to change the culture of teaching so that it is more collaborative, so that there is a twin focus on new pedagogy and on new professional collegiality" (Fullan, in Beatty & Shaw, p. 6). This reculturing involves, among other things, the establishment of school-university partnerships where the focus of knowledge moves from a university discourse to a new discourse community to include teachers,

teacher candidates, and professors. All too often, the voice of the teachers is silenced. This study has given collaborating teachers a voice in the discourse community of teacher-education programs. Their contribution is imperative if teacher educators are to talk about a shared vision of the role of schooling.

Implications for Further Research

Collaborating teachers are teacher educators and as such, are responsible for the teaching of theory. How can we help teacher educators see themselves as teachers of theory? How can we help them ground their theories in research and encourage teacher candidates to do the same?

Studies cited (Clarke, 2001; Knowles & Cole, 1996; Wideen, Mayer-Smith, & Moon, 1998) suggest that collaborating teachers should revise their role from one of formal supervision to one of scaffolding teacher candidates in learning to teach. More studies looking at how collaborating teachers create learning scaffolds would enrich programs designed to prepare collaborating teachers for their role as teacher educators.

The relationship between an extended practicum with collaborating teachers practising learner-centred teaching and the effectiveness of beginning teachers as agents of learner-centred reform merits further attention. There is also the need to study the relationship between extended practicum experience and teacher retention.

NOTES

- 1 In this article, we have presented some of the findings of a larger study that considered perceptions of collaborating teachers as teacher educators. The larger study, using group interviews documented a process of consultation. The goal of this study was the following: to establish basic assumptions underlying a teacher education program, to define the role of collaborating teachers within the parameters of these basic assumptions, and to determine how to support the collaborating teachers.
- 2 When we conducted this study, teacher candidates had two choices for the final year of their Bachelor of Education. About half of the teacher candidates followed a more traditional campus-based program, while the other half chose the on-site program described above. Education faculty at Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface have now made this program compulsory for all Bachelor of Education students.
- 3 We have used pseudonyms to respect the right of participants in this study to anonymity.

- 4 Given the provisions of section 23 (Minority Language Educational Rights) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, it is not uncommon to find children in French first-language schools with limited proficiency in French.

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