



Review

What can we learn from studying the coaching interactions between cooperating teachers and preservice teachers? A literature review



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H I G H L I G H T S

- Cooperating teachers are largely underprepared for their important role in teacher preparation.
- Underprepared coaches tend to be guided by their own personal experiences being coached.
- Coaching practices are related to teaching practices.
- Preparation can lead to changes in a cooperating teacher's coaching practices.
- Building relationships appears essential to effective coaching.

A R T I C L E I N F O

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A B S T R A C T

This research review focuses on studies that have examined the coaching interactions of cooperating teachers and preservice teachers around practice in teacher education programs. The review is situated inside of the practice-based turn in teacher education where the focus is on teaching as learning through practice and the crucial role that cooperating teachers play in mediating this learning. Forty-six studies were identified as meeting the criteria for inclusion. The analysis of these studies yielded a total of fourteen findings with varying levels of support. These findings are clustered in four areas: current practices and conditions; innovations in practice; relationships and tensions; and local contexts and teaching practices. The findings point to the need for stronger theoretical framing of the work of cooperating teachers in supporting teacher development and to the need for teacher education as a whole to be more proactive and responsible in the preparation of cooperating teachers.

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University-based preservice teacher education is in a state of transition from a training model that emphasizes the acquisition of skills and mastering of competencies (Sandefur & Nicklas, 1981) to a practice-based model that emphasizes participation, engagement, and reflection (Grossman & McDonald, 2008; Zeichner, 2010). This transition (described by Mattesson, Eilerston, & Rorrison, 2012 as a “practicum turn” in teacher education) draws on the growing understanding of learning and teaching as experiential, social and expansive within a cognitive apprenticeship framework (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989). This practice turn is tied itself to a larger shift in theory that elevates the study of social practices from the study of repeating for automaticity to the study of all human activity (Schatzki, Cetina, & Savigny, 2001).

Following Lave's (1996) classic work, teaching is viewed as learning in practice through apprenticeship. This view situates teaching as learning in practice and through apprenticeship — experienced through increasing levels and forms of participation. Apprenticeship, for Lave, is more about learning ways to participate than it is about specific techniques. Practices are more than just what we do but are inclusive of the reflection and learning that accompanies the work of teaching. Zeichner (2015) describes the scope of this practice turn in teacher education in these terms: “Throughout the world, in various ways and to varying degrees, there has been an explosion of effort to move more of the preparation of teachers to schools.” (p. 257).

This practice-based turn brings to the forefront the critical role that cooperating teachers play in teacher preparation as the primary mediators of field experiences in preservice teacher education. Research into the effects of practicum experiences and the influences of school contexts (including cooperating teachers) on the learning of preservice teachers reveals somewhat contradictory findings (Zeichner, 2002; Zeichner & Gore, 1990). There is some level of consensus, however, around the following findings: (1) practicum experiences are appearing earlier and more often in teacher education programs than in the past; (2) these experiences are typically viewed by students as the most important part of their preparation; (3) practicum experiences are sometimes (if not often) found to be in contradiction to the methods and approaches advocated in university courses; and (4) practicum experiences tend to socialize preservice teachers into the status quo for classroom teaching practices (Clark, Triggs, & Nielson, 2014). If there is to be a transformation in the ways in which teachers are being prepared then clearly there must be closer attention to the role of the cooperating teacher in mediating these practicum experiences.

Because language mediates much of the experiential learning in

a practice-based context, it is important to consider not only the structure of the experiences and context for cooperating teachers and preservice teachers working together but also the interactions that occur between them. Language provides increased ability to deal with abstract concepts in representing experiences (Bruner, 1966). Talk around practice is one of the primary tools available to cooperating teachers in deconstructing their own practices for preservice teachers and engaging in conversations around the approximations (teaching events) that are observed by the cooperating teacher. The interactions and conversations between cooperating teachers and preservice teachers around practice are imbued with content, expectations, understandings, strategies and even the power and authoritative stances taken.

Cooperating teachers use talk not only to describe their own decision-making and reflection but also to nurture the learning of the preservice teachers in the context of practice. This nurturing work around practice directed toward growth has come to be referred to in terms of ‘coaching.’ While research focused on the coaching of inservice teachers has become quite robust (see Sailors & Shanklin, 2010 special issue of the *Elementary School Journal* devoted to coaching (Volume 111, Issue 1)), less work has considered coaching interactions that appear in the work of cooperating teachers coaching preservice teachers.

What has research revealed about the coaching interactions between cooperating teachers coaching preservice teachers around practice? This is the question that has guided this review of the literature. While there have been other research reviews that have examined the work of the cooperating teacher in relation to preservice teachers (e.g., Clark et al., 2014; Metcalf, 1991) these reviews have focused more broadly on the structures, relationships and other mentoring dimensions of teaching. This literature review is focused on studies that have examined the “coaching” interactions between cooperating teachers and preservice teachers in the context of practice.

1. Method

We limited our literature search to studies that are: (1) empirical (employing quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods research methods); (2) published in scholarly, peer-reviewed journals; (3) focused on cooperating teachers working with preservice teachers for initial certification; (4) focused on the coaching interactions between the cooperating teacher and preservice teachers around practice; (5) published in English; and (6) published since 1990 (the publication date of the first *Handbook of Research in Teacher Education*). While our review is focused on coaching, we did not restrict

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