



## The efficacy of training cooperating teachers



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### H I G H L I G H T S

- Trained Clinical Faculty (CF) tended to have greater self-efficacy for mentoring.
- Evaluations of student teachers mentored by CF tended to be higher.
- Assessment and feedback may be associated with stronger candidate performance.
- CF in partnership schools may strengthen the mentoring skills of untrained CTs.
- Novice teachers' self-efficacy was unrelated to the training of CTs.

### A R T I C L E I N F O

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### A B S T R A C T

This study investigated outcomes of a clinical faculty training program designed to prepare cooperating teachers for supervising pre-service teachers. Drawing on multiple data sources from more than a decade of implementation, researchers investigated initial outcomes of the program for cooperating teachers, student teachers, and new teachers. Findings suggest that the training resulted in a greater sense of efficacy for aspects of the role and may lead to more effective evaluation practices by clinical faculty and to stronger performances by student teachers. The lack of other significant results may have implications for policies related to the evaluation of teacher preparation programs.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Clinical experiences in teacher preparation

Teaching is an applied profession; therefore, the preparation of teachers is dependent upon the authentic practice and development of a broad set of knowledge, skills, and dispositions in clinical settings, namely K-12 schools. This notion is not new. The history of novice teachers learning the craft of teaching under the tutelage of master teachers stretches back for millennia in both Western and Eastern traditions (Plato, 1997; Waley, 1938). In more recent eras, this approach has continued but has changed given societal factors such as industrialization and the advent of common schooling. For example, in the United States, the role of preparing primary and secondary school teachers became the expressed mission of “normal schools” in the 1800s, and a hallmark of this movement was the establishment of field-based practice in lab schools as an expected norm

in teacher preparation (Lampert, 2010). This model had European roots and then was later emulated in the 1900s by countries such as China as they developed their educational systems (Fitzgerald, 2001; Liu, 2009).

The belief in the value of clinical experiences in teacher preparation persists in the present day. On the cusp of the new millennium, Darling-Hammond (2000) contended in her policy review of educational research that the evidence supporting the important role of field experiences was inarguable. Even in the United States' contentious political climate, the importance of clinical experiences in teacher preparation appears to be a rare piece of common ground. Consider the case of the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), which is the long-standing accrediting association for teacher preparation in the U.S., and the National Council for Teacher Quality (NCTQ), which is a non-governmental organization that has been highly critical of teacher preparation. Although NCATE and NCTQ are frequently at odds, each recently published reports making the case that clinical experiences are not only vitally important but that they merit continued research to harness fully the potential effect they are believed to hold for the preparation of new teachers (NCATE, 2010; NCTQ, 2011).

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### 1.2. The role of cooperating teachers

Teacher preparation is developmental in nature, and clinical experiences have been described as a critically important element in pre-service teacher development (Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001). Typically, clinical experiences in teacher preparation occur in the classrooms of in-service teachers who most directly and most immediately supervise teacher candidates from their earliest observations to capstone student teaching experiences. These “cooperating teachers”—that is, in-service teachers who willingly open their classrooms to teacher candidates—are themselves a critically important link in the preparation of new teachers. This, too, is not a new notion. More than 50 years ago, for instance, Andrews (1950) suggested the important role that cooperating teachers (CTs) should play in providing field experiences. Furthermore, Andrews suggested that serving as a CT required particular knowledge and skills that are not necessarily possessed by all classroom teachers and, therefore, would require advanced training. The implicit caution was that experience and expertise as a classroom teacher were necessary *but not sufficient* for effectively mentoring aspiring teachers.

Mentoring is the central component of serving as a CT. Like teaching, mentoring is an applied craft—it is enacted, and the effect of mentoring must ultimately be manifested in the beliefs and actions exhibited by the mentee (Trubowitz, 2004). Mentoring in a profession relies on at least three elements: (1) the mentor's own depth of knowledge, skills, and experiences in the profession, (2) the mentor's ability to identify accurately the potential in a mentee, and (3) the mentor's ability to enable a mentee to achieve his or her potential (Trubowitz, 2004). In teacher preparation, a CT serves as mentor to a teacher candidate, which requires a foundation of craft-skill and experience in such areas as human growth and development, pedagogical content knowledge, and assessment for learning. Additionally, a classroom teacher who is serving as a CT should possess knowledge and skills related to characteristics of adult learners, stages of teacher development, professional standards of teacher competency, classroom observation techniques, coaching strategies, and the like. In other words, there is a specialized set of knowledge and skills for mentoring that a CT should possess. Experience as a classroom teacher is *not* likely to be adequate in and of itself to serve effectively as a mentor (Ganser, 2002; Sinclair, Dowson, & Thistleton-Martin, 2006; Sykes, Bird, & Kennedy, 2011).

### 1.3. The need to prepare cooperating teachers for their role

Based upon the assumption that not all effective teachers are necessarily effective CTs, teacher educators have designed, developed, and investigated the outcomes of CT training programs, and the findings suggest the efficacy of such training. Boatright, Phelps, and Schmitz (1986) found that training CTs helps improve observation techniques and helps reduce the halo effect in evaluating teacher candidates in field experiences. In other words, training CTs reduced the likelihood that a CT's overall impression of a student teacher would directly influence the CT's evaluation of a specific skill of that student teacher. Other studies comparing trained and untrained CTs have found that trained CTs are more likely to provide evaluative comments, interact with their student teachers in planning and preparation, engage in the clinical supervision process, and be nonjudgmental in their feedback (Bryant & Currin, 1995; Kent, 2001; Killian & McIntyre, 1987; Koster, Korthagen, & Wubbels, 1998). Giebelhaus and Bowman (2002) drew similar findings. Their study explicitly equated the role of the CT to that of a mentor and posited that mentoring knowledge and skills could be taught (Giebelhaus & Bowman, 2002). They concluded that such

training resulted in effective mentoring behaviors by CTs (Giebelhaus & Bowman, 2002). Similar conclusions were drawn from studies in Australia (Sinclair et al., Thistle-Martin, 2006) and the United Arab Emirates (Ibrahim, 2007), both of which placed onus on the university to provide such training.

In addition to the evidence that training CTs may be associated with positive outcomes for those CTs, previous research into characteristics associated with the *absence* of training is also instructive. For example, Clarke (2001) found that *untrained* CTs may be *less likely* to fail a student teacher who does not meet expectations of performance, a phenomenon that may be the result of either the halo effect or a lack of understanding of performance expectations. In a study of teachers with 9–10 years of classroom experience serving as CTs, Sanders and Sinclair (2005) found multiple instances in which complications in field experiences arose. They attributed this phenomenon to incongruence between the expected roles of CTs and what CTs were actually observed to do (Sanders & Sinclair, 2005). The implication of Sanders and Sinclair's (2005) finding is that if CTs are intended to serve as the clinical extensions of university-based teacher preparation programs, then the assumed benefits of field experiences may be diminished if CTs are not aware of and/or do not enact their expected roles. In a qualitative study of student teaching in which none of the CTs reported having received any training for the role, Valencia, Martin, Place, and Grossman (2009) found that these CTs “viewed learning to teach as experimentation, but instead of scaffolding the experience, they provided little support, which resulted in an environment of benign neglect” (p. 310). While these CTs interacted with their student teachers frequently, those interactions rarely drew upon formal observations of instruction to inform any type of coaching discussion and they included little specific feedback about teaching. Valencia et al. (2009) noted, “these novice teachers yearned for, and could have benefited from, the perspectives and guidance of their classroom mentors” (p. 314). To summarize such findings, when teachers serve as CTs without the benefit of training, there is evidence that they are less likely to fulfill the expectations of the role, which may detrimentally affect the intended purpose of pre-service field experiences.

### 1.4. The state of cooperating teacher training

Despite evidence suggesting that training CTs results in more effective mentoring behaviors and that the *absence* of training is associated with ineffective mentoring, CTs do not typically receive training to serve in the role. Levine (2002) alluded to the illogic of this phenomenon, noting that clinical experiences are vital to teacher preparation yet are perhaps the least intentional component of the process. Darling-Hammond (2006) posited, “Often, the clinical side of teacher education has been fairly haphazard, depending on the idiosyncrasies of loosely selected placements with little guidance about what happens in them and little connection to university work” (p. 308). More recently, Zeichner (2010) characterized clinical experiences as historically being “unguided and disconnected” (p. 91). Clarke, Triggs, and Nielsen (2012) provided further evidence of the state of CT training in their comprehensive review of the literature on cooperating teachers. Drawing on 456 papers from 16 countries and covering a span of 60 years, the authors concluded that the body of literature “reveals a strong sense that cooperating teachers lack specific training to enable high quality engagement and developmentally progressive support for student teachers” (Clarke et al., p. 49). In a comparative study of cooperating teachers in Australia and Canada, Mitchell, Clarke, and Nuttall (2007) found a paucity of studies of the preparation of CTs for the role.

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