

BUILDING RECIPROCAL RELATIONSHIPS IN THE STUDENT TEACHING PRACTICUM*

Jacqueline DAVIS & Joan Kelly HALL (University of Georgia,
Department of Language Education)

Abstract:

This research study reports on the collaborative effort of university supervisors and pairs of cooperating and student teachers of Spanish. The cohort collaboratively designed experiences, responsibilities, and concessions for student teachers to facilitate the development of reciprocal relationships. The study identifies elements that enhanced or hindered reciprocity in the teaching relationship. This report emphasizes the responsibility each member of the cooperating teacher-student teacher pair has to cultivate reciprocity. It concludes with a discussion of how teacher educators can promote the success of the student teaching experience and with suggestions for future research in foreign language teacher development.

Key-words: *student teaching; reciprocity; supervision*

Resumo:

Este estudo aborda o esforço colaborativo entre supervisores universitários e pares de professores e estagiários de espanhol. O grupo trabalhou em conjunto na elaboração de experiências, responsabilidades e concessões para o

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estagiário a fim de facilitar, de maneira ativa, o desenvolvimento de relações recíprocas. O estudo identifica elementos que reforçaram ou inibiram reciprocidade na relação de ensino e enfatiza a responsabilidade que cada membro do par colaborativo professor-estagiário tem que ter a fim de cultivar a reciprocidade. Este trabalho encerra com uma discussão acerca de como os educadores podem colaborar para que o estagiário tenha uma experiência bem-sucedida, além de oferecer sugestões para futuras pesquisas na área de desenvolvimento do professor de língua estrangeira.¹

Palavras-chave: *estágio; reciprocidade; supervisão*

1. Introduction

Teacher educators frequently view the student teaching practicum as the most important experience of teacher preparation (Clark, 1995; Feiman-Nemser, 1983b; Graham, 1993; Zeichner, 1986) because the student teacher becomes a long-term participant in a classroom community. Others have also called it a "transforming experience" or a rite of passage (Head, 1992:101; White, 1989) and a socializing experience into the teaching profession. Although student teaching is often considered the most valuable stage of teacher preparation, there are conflicting views on its worth. Evertson (1991), for example, argued that many student teaching experiences are "miseducative" and merely reinforce existing public school teaching practices that are less than ideal.

Researchers have examined student teaching in all fields of education more critically in the last decade, and

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findings have shown it is not as ideal as educators formerly believed. The foreign language education field was no exception. Lange and Sims (1990), for example, surveyed ninety-five Minnesota foreign language teachers and found that student teaching experiences can range on a continuum from valuable to inadequate. More than 20% of their respondents described student teaching experiences that were, "difficult, artificial, and highly inadequate," (1990: 302). Only two respondents said, "Student teaching was my most valuable experience," (1990: 302).

Student teachers *ideally* step into the role of language "teacher" during school field experiences as they gradually shed the role of "student." This occurs as they apply the skills and pedagogical knowledge developed during methods courses and as they reflect on their classroom experiences. This transformation occurs with the cooperating teacher's guidance and the university supervisor's peripheral supervision. Student teachers in our foreign language education program said the relationship with cooperating teachers was a crucial factor in making this role shift from student to teacher. It also significantly affected their perceived professional development and their perception of the teaching practicum. Our observations confirmed what the student teachers said, and led us to question why this relationship was so important.

A search of the foreign language education literature offered few answers. Teacher education studies overall were limited (Bernhardt & Hammadou, 1987a; 1987b; Hammadou, 1993), and few recent studies looked at the effect of the cooperating and student teacher relationship (Nerenz, 1979a; 1979b). To investigate how this relationship affected foreign language teacher development the authors collaborated with

local cooperating teachers and their student teachers during the spring of 1993.

We identified six significant roles in the 1993 study: friend, motivator, clearinghouse, master teacher, facilitator, and mediator. The first two roles included supportive behaviors that acknowledged the feelings and emotional needs of the partner, such as a thoughtful gesture or encouragement. Sharing resources and available materials, such as job interview information and handouts, were typical behaviors of the clearinghouse role. The facilitator role consisted of arranging experiences that were helpful for the partner, such as observations in other teachers' classrooms and meetings with school personnel. Presenting a united front during conflict situations and preventing loss of face between the partner and students or other school personnel were characteristic of the mediator role. The critical factor for the student teachers was participating *reciprocally* rather than *complementarily* in these roles (Hall & Davis, 1995).

Student teachers in *reciprocal* relationships perceived they shared power and decision-making with the cooperating teachers. They perceived themselves more as colleagues in their relationships and felt more positively about the benefits of student teaching. In *complementary* relationships, however, the student teachers did not feel they had an influential role. They reported greater frustration and dissatisfaction with the practicum experience, and sometimes identified with the students, aligning with them against the cooperating teacher. The cooperating teachers, as well, were usually less satisfied when they had nonreciprocal relationships (Hall & Davis, 1995).

The results of the 1993 study led us to the specific question: Why did some pairs form reciprocal relationships

while others did not? The response from these participants, and the ongoing discussion among the members of the study, led to the second study in the spring of 1994, which we report in this paper. This report focuses on the elements that enhanced or hindered reciprocity between the cooperating and student teacher pairs and each member's responsibility to cultivate it. We conclude with suggestions for the active role teacher educators can take to promote the success of the student teaching experience and recommendations for future research.

2. Review of the Literature:

Our search of the literature uncovered studies that dealt with the impact of relationships on cognitive and professional development in general, and in language teacher education in particular. It also addressed issues related to three goals of the research: improving cooperating and student teacher relationships, empowering the members of the group, and benefiting all members.

Research supports the importance of relationships for cognitive and emotional development (Hinde, Perret-Clermont, & Stevenson-Hinde, 1985). In fact, research has shown that optimal development derives from relationships that promote self-confidence and an active interest in learning (Caine & Caine, 1994; Rutter, 1985). Hinde (1987), for example, argued that routine interactions between the participants primarily define relationships. Therefore, different relationships evolve from different kinds of social roles and interactions.

Individual cognitive and emotional growth is enhanced by participating in relationships characterized by the following: (1) active participation of all parties; (2) provision

of a variety of meaningful experiences, (3) explicit teaching of skills and knowledge, and (4) mutual sensitivity and responsiveness (Hartrup 1985; Rutter, 1985). For optimal benefit, all members must perceive value in their relationship. Individuals are more positive about relationships that lead to cognitive and emotional growth. The following studies examined these four characteristics of relationships.

Bailey, Dale, and Squire (1992) noted mutual benefits gained by the cooperating teacher, student teacher, and ESL students when the teaching partners collaborated successfully. Extended discourse within a teaching community, for example, enhanced each member's professional development, while joint planning and reflection on teaching significantly benefitted student teachers. Shannon and Meath-Lang's (1992) study found that sustained dialogue in the cooperating and student teacher relationship benefitted both members professionally in the following ways: cognitive growth and increased opportunities to receive positive and helpful feedback on their teaching.

Studies in the field of English education investigated how reciprocity, collaboration, and reflective discourse about language teaching enhanced student teachers' cognitive and professional development (Graham, 1993). Kalekin-Fishman and Kornfeld (1991) found that English as a foreign language (EFL) student teachers valued the *interpersonal relationships* established with their cooperating teachers more than the cooperating teachers' *professional skills*.

Freeman's (1991) study did not directly relate to student teaching, however, it offered insights into the powerful role of communication to promote active participation and mutual sensitivity. He examined discourse during an inservice MA program of foreign

language teachers. He found discourse with colleagues facilitated the process of constructing understandings of teaching. Specifically, participation in this long term discourse community enhanced cognitive growth and increased ability to articulate practice.

Field's (1994) study examined the benefits of active participation, providing meaningful experiences, explicit teaching, and mutual sensitivity. She found that student teachers of English specifically benefitted from relationships that provided mentoring. She argued that cooperating teachers must empower student teachers and recognize their contributions during the practicum. Field recommended three ways cooperating teachers can do this: (a) treat student teachers as colleagues, (b) value student teachers' contributions to teaching, and (c) work with student teachers to negotiate and incorporate new ideas within their shared teaching responsibility. Field's suggestions described increasing reciprocity.

3. Creating Reciprocal Relationships with a Cohort of Teachers

The primary agenda for this study was to develop reciprocity between cooperating and student teacher pairs, particularly at the beginning of the practicum. We hoped that group activities would raise consciousness, stimulate joint discussion and reflection, and lead to cooperating and student teachers working together to make the role shift from student to teacher more successful. The cohort activities were designed to define, plan, and implement experiences that fostered development of collaborative, reciprocal, and professional relationships among student teachers, cooperating teachers, and university supervisors. An imbedded goal was to provide meaningful experiences and an

environment to enhance the student teachers' professional development.

Our work with this cohort began with the belief that both groups of teachers had important knowledge and that we could combine all our knowledge collaboratively. We were concerned with empowering both groups of teachers, acknowledging the skills and knowledge they brought into the practicum, encouraging reflection during student teaching, and providing a time and a place for that to happen. Another concern was to improve the practicum to benefit all members.

In line with our beliefs and concerns we chose to limit our actions to intervention during meetings. Group meetings were organized to create consistencies in the criterion among the pairs, clarify expectations, and provide a forum to gain ideas and support from each other. We empowered the members to work through their relationships with a clearly stated stance that we would not take part in the day-to-day working of the practicum. Our role was explicitly peripheral. We specifically told the pairs to work out their differences, placing the responsibility firmly on them with group support and guidance if needed. By empowering them, we decreased our intervention and increased their accountability. Below we report on this collaborative study.

3a. Theoretical Framework of the Study

An action research framework was chosen for this study for the following reasons: (a) our inquiry focused on a particular issue of concern (improve the student teaching practicum), (b) all participants collaborated, and (c) we intervened to encourage change (developing reciprocity) in traditional student teaching relationships (Hitchcock &

Hughes, 1995). Action research is a process that begins with asking questions about practice, reflecting on action in light of these questions, acting, and reflecting again. It is both a theoretical perspective and a research design. Action research is, "natural practice-centered inquiry ... rooted in a valid epistemological position that asserts ... that understanding in practical realms depends on successfully fusing the three activities of acting, observing, and thinking into a single whole process," (Chism, Sanders, & Zitlow, 1987: 3). Action research is not a linear process, and has been represented as a circular and a spiral process (Chism, Sanders, & Zitlow, 1987). Proclaimed benefits of action research include the following: it joins theory and practice more closely (Smulyan, 1988), links individual and group reflection (Holly, 1987), increases participants' awareness of their decisions, and increases reflection (Ross, 1987).

A brief summary of our studies will provide a clear example of the process. Our first study, for example, began with the following questions on supervisory practice:

How do these different combinations relate to the teachers' perceptions of having developed positive and mutually enhancing relationships?

What kinds of role relationships are formed between the CTs and STs?

What are the functions of these roles?

What are the various combinations of relationships that develop between the teachers?

How do these different combinations relate to the teachers' perceptions of having developed positive and mutually enhancing relationships? (Hall & Davis, 1995: 33)

We identified roles and characteristics and found that reciprocity in the teaching relationship was a significant determinant of this process and a characteristic of more successful experiences. We reflected on the results and arrived at new questions for the current

study:

What actions led to the development of reciprocity?

What part did the university supervisors play in facilitating or in restraining reciprocity among the pairs?

How could the university supervisors help promote the development of supportive relationships?

How could we prepare future student teachers to develop reciprocal relationships?

We shared the results of the first study with the cooperating teachers, enlisted their support to continue the research with new questions, and asked the student teachers to take part. We planned meetings and specific activities to make changes, and we reflected again on the results at the end of the second study.

3b. The Participants

Our cohort consisted of seven pairs of cooperating and student teachers and three university supervisors. Four cooperating teachers participated in the prior study and two of these formed reciprocal relationships with their student teachers. The cooperating teacher group consisted of six females and one male. Two had less than ten years of teaching experience, whereas five had twenty or more years of experience. Four of the cooperating teachers had worked with less than five student teachers, and three of them had worked with more than ten.

Student teachers consisted of six females and one male, one was a graduate student and the remaining six were undergraduates. The university supervisors consisted of two females and one male. Two had five or fewer years of

experience supervising student teachers, and the other had ten or more years of experience as a university supervisor. The authors were university supervisors and participant observers. Our role was to organize meetings, initiate discussions, and solicit ideas from the others. As participants we were in contact with the teaching pairs and inadvertently affected their relationships. The third university supervisor did not actively participate in the study.

4. Meetings and Activities

This section summarizes the cohort's activities before and during the student teaching practicum. The university supervisors met with the cooperating and student teacher groups separately three times, and the cohort met as a group four times. We also began to prepare the students during their methods course. These activities are explained below.

4a. Methods Course Activities for the Student Teachers

Preparation for developing reciprocity and to prepare the students for their practicum began during the methods course in the term before student teaching. One author assisted with the course and incorporated two specific activities. The first was to select readings for discussion and the second was to invite a student teacher as a guest speaker.

The first activity was to stimulate thinking and discussions about student teaching issues in advance. Readings on student teaching were selected and the students were divided into groups. Each member was responsible for reading, preparing, and presenting the information from one article to their group. Time for group and whole class

discussion was an element of this activity²

The second activity was to invite a student teacher to talk to the class and share her experiences. We asked her specifically to include information about her daily interactions with her cooperating teacher to prepare them for student teaching. Question time followed her presentation. The students benefitted from the perspective of a student teacher with similar understandings. Regarding the issues in the articles, surprisingly, the group resented the additional responsibility of considering the cooperating teacher's perspective.

4b. Separate Cooperating and Student Teacher Meetings and Activities

During the first meeting with the separate groups (pre-student teaching) the university supervisors helped the cooperating teachers and student teachers to map out their expectations of their teaching partner. The members specified what they could offer in the teaching relationship (See Appendix I). The first activity was jointly compiling a list of experiences and expectations we felt were important to all the student teachers. Specifically, one of us chaired the meeting and the other acted as recorder at the chalkboard while the group brainstormed. After brainstorming we discussed each activity, and the group decided whether to keep or discard it. We made the requirements flexible and stressed they were minimum requirements. Items on the list included calculating grades for a set time, observing other teachers, and preparing a lesson plan for a substitute teacher.

² Three articles used in this methods course activity are listed in the bibliography: Hall & Davis (1995), Head (1992), and White (1989).

Second, we wrote a list of provisions for the student teachers. Our concern was to identify specific ways to help the student teachers make the transition into the classroom and feel like a member of that group. We brainstormed and agreed as in the first activity on specific stipulations, such as providing a physical space in the classroom for their sole use (e.g., a desk or chair), compiling a notebook of school document forms and a teacher's manual, and providing a list of ten teaching behaviors expected from the student teacher. The provisions included common areas of complaint from previous student teachers. Some cooperating teachers had never considered such provisions or thoughtfully planned such required activities in advance.

The university supervisors likewise helped the student teacher group to list their expectations from the cooperating teachers. Expectations included individual instruction on writing lesson plans, assistance with classroom management, and clear guidelines of expected conformity to the cooperating teacher's teaching style. The student teachers also wrote a list of what they felt they could offer their partners, such as a different perspective of classroom events and insights about the students (See Appendix I). Interestingly, the students identified their expectations with less guidance. Both teacher groups asked the university supervisors for support and suggestions *when requested*.

During student teaching the university supervisors met separately with the groups to discuss their concerns and any problems among the teaching pairs. Meetings provided an opportunity to check for accountability and to discuss results. Discussion topics during these meetings included relationships, the required activities, problems, and successes.

One university supervisor chaired the meetings and asked questions, such as "How is it going?", "What do you like about your student teacher/cooperating teacher?", "How do you give feedback to your student teacher?", "How does your cooperating teacher give you feedback?", "Any problems?", "Have others had these problems?", and "How did you deal with these problems?" Following student teaching, the groups met separately with the university supervisors to reflect on their experiences and to debrief.

4c. Meetings and Activities of the Entire Cohort

The entire group met four times: (1) to exchange lists; (2) to discuss successes; (3) to troubleshoot problems; and (4) to brainstorm ideas for future work together. The first meeting of the entire group occurred before student teaching. At this meeting we introduced the teaching partners and exchanged the group lists of expectations and provisions. We clarified the expectations, discussed concerns, and answered questions. The group exchanged pertinent information, such as beginning and ending dates for the practicum, dates for the schools, and spring break. Cooperating teachers gave their partners directions to the schools and a copy of their textbook. The pairs had time to socialize, exchange phone numbers, and plan a visit to the school before student teaching began. In this meeting we attempted to set up conditions to encourage reciprocity.

Activities in the whole group meetings that followed consisted of similar discussion sessions as in the separate group meetings and we included questions and issues as they arose. During the whole group meetings, the members were less candid and more careful in their answers. The cooperating teachers dominated the discussions and the student teachers talked when specifically asked to contribute.

4d. Building Reciprocity Between University Supervisors and Teachers

Activities that we attempted to develop reciprocity also cultivated a community³. The members informed us that they benefitted from the group activity, learned from the other members, and felt less isolated. During teacher and supervisor meetings we practiced Spanish (when all members were Spanish speakers), brainstormed ideas to improve the program, and discussed pertinent professional issues. We celebrated the end of the school year and the research project with a pizza party, and all members posed for a group photograph.

5. Data Collection and Analysis

Qualitative research techniques were used to gather and analyze the data because we wanted in-depth participant responses and reflections. Two primary data sources for this study consisted of journals and transcripts of group meetings. Field notes from meetings were secondary data sources kept by both participating supervisors during meetings. We asked the participants to keep journals to record significant events, concerns, and reflections. The student teachers were more consistent about keeping journals and were less willing to make comments during meetings that others might perceive as critical. On the other hand, the cooperating teachers were more open about problems in the meetings and were less consistent about keeping journals.

Transcriptions and notes from the group meetings and journals were analyzed using inductive, thematic analysis (*Erickson, 1986; Spradley, 1979*). This process consisted of scrutinizing the transcripts for recurring themes or patterns while making notes and developing codes for the themes that emerged. The next step was searching for more instances and

³ One offshoot of our work was a regular pot luck supper gathering for work and for socializing. One university supervisor invited cooperating teachers and university supervisors to her home for discussions, planning activities, and sharing teaching ideas and materials. Other meetings followed the practicum, for example, to plan and practice a conference presentation of this research which included teachers, student teachers, and the authors.

testing them against the data. Following coding, the authors linked codes into conceptual categories or groups. This required looking for connections that were significant to developing reciprocity and connecting events under categories or conceptual groups. We shared these themes with the group for response and reflection. Then we searched the data carefully for patterns that belonged in the developing categories, looking for both conforming and discrepant cases to flesh out the categories and describe them carefully (*Erickson, 1986*).

6. Preliminary Findings

Among the seven pairs of teachers, five reported that they felt successful in establishing reciprocal relationships. They also reported ending the experience with mutual feelings of respect and professionalism. The two pairs who did not establish such relationships reported that there were times when they felt they were being reciprocal with their partner, but they felt less satisfied with the kind of long-term relationship they eventually developed. They were also less satisfied with the student teaching experience overall.

Four factors were important to establishing reciprocal interpersonal relationships among this cohort: (a) willingness to invest time, energy, and interest in establishing and maintaining the relationship; (b) active engagement in forming a relationship, including interactions that facilitate creating and developing them; (c) willingness to establish a common ground and develop a shared history; and (d) active and harmonious engagement in both teaching and learning. We present each in more detail below.

The first factor was a mutual interest in developing a

relationship that required active and shared responsibility from both teachers. The investment of significant amounts of time by both teachers was crucial. One cooperating teacher, for example routinely wrote extensive supportive comments and specific suggestions on the back of the student teacher's daily lesson plans. Another student teacher described such a joint time investment in her journal:

Today [cooperating teacher] and I worked on a plan for me on how to begin a school year. We discussed the gradual steps you take to begin an all-Spanish classroom. I took a lot of notes. We also talked about a syllabus and class rules and expectations. I think this will really help me in my planning this summer... I feel like I really got a lot out of my experience.

The above student teacher noted such conversations in detail throughout the practicum, and that she regularly arrived early and stayed late. She was available for frequent conversations with the cooperating teacher. Other pairs invested little time together, and this hindered reciprocity. One cooperating teacher was too busy to spend time with the student teacher. One student teacher routinely arrived late in the morning, and another watched the clock waiting to leave at the end of the day.

The second factor was active engagement in forming the relationship. This required efforts to establish and sustain the relationship, such as confronting the partner; developing consistent work habits; giving specific feedback or guidance; and showing willingness to listen, accept suggestions, and offer help. This required continued relationship building efforts until the end of the practicum.

Many participants reported fatigue and illness, but the pairs in reciprocal relationships reported more motivation to continue their efforts. Two cooperating teachers who

developed reciprocal relationships enthusiastically reported that they met deadlines early and they felt less stress than normal at the end of the year. One cooperating teacher who did not have a reciprocal relationship reported fatigue, impatience with the student teacher's increasing tardiness and other unprofessional behaviors, and relief that it was almost over.

The student teachers valued specific helpful and positive feedback from the cooperating teachers. They shared many incidents of individual feedback in their journals and at meetings, such as the following example: "To my surprise [cooperating teacher] had not an unkind thing to say. I was totally flattered as [cooperating teacher] said my whole presence . . . is really good for being a teacher. . . . [I] left the school with a new sort of hope and anticipation." One student teacher's journal expressed disappointment that her cooperating teacher did not give her feedback. She contrasted this with the appreciated feedback her university supervisor provided, "[cooperating teacher] gives very little positive reinforcement. Up 'til now, the nicest things [cooperating teacher] has said to me was, 'You are a hard worker.' . . . If it wasn't for [university supervisor] I would have no idea where I stand as far as my progression as a teacher." Most of the student teachers in this group valued both positive and constructive feedback in the teaching relationship.

Confrontation was a specific behavior reported by some student teachers in reciprocal relationships. One student teacher confronted the cooperating teacher when she did not feel treated as a colleague. The student teacher reported after several frustrated journal entries about receiving mixed messages from the cooperating teacher, "I think we hit a truce today." Another student teacher reported frustration, but did not discuss these feelings with the cooperating teacher: "[I] don't know how to confront [cooperating teacher] about it. We are supposed to be peers and talk about these things, but I think as a student teacher you suck up and do what it takes to get through it."

Unwillingness to share frustrations and ask for clarification hindered the development of reciprocity in some teacher pairs. Confronting the cooperating teacher, however, is risky because the

cooperating teacher's final recommendation is a significant determinant for gaining a teaching position in the State of Georgia. The cooperating teacher can set the base for the student to take such a risk by remaining open to the student teacher's ideas, asking for suggestions, and working in other ways to develop reciprocity.

The third factor that affected reciprocity was common ground. All pairs that formed reciprocal relationships initially searched for a common history early in the teaching practicum. Common ground consisted of shared interests, experiences, and other personal and professional similarities. The cooperating teacher in one pair, for example, knew the student teacher's family; in another, the cooperating teacher knew the student teacher as a former student. In yet another pair they discovered a similar family teaching tradition.

Relationships, however, did not end with the teaching pairs. In this cohort, relationships among all the participants influenced the cooperating and student teacher relationships. A ripple effect among the webs of relationships affected everyone, and some relationships adversely affected others. The friendship between two student teachers in one example led to strain in one cooperating and student teacher relationship. One cooperating teacher was frustrated because the university supervisor excluded her from the consultations that followed observations of her student teacher. She felt she should participate in crucial feedback and suggestions. A conflict between one student teacher and her university supervisor created tension in another relationship.

An ongoing conflict between two cooperating teachers created tension between their student teachers (who were good friends). The student teachers were caught in the middle and were unsure of how to respond to each other. This conflict affected the cooperating teacher group as well. Confrontation arose between these two teachers during one meeting, and other teachers quickly and verbally rallied to one member's defense. A university supervisor intervened to establish all members' rights to voice their feelings whether positive or negative.

The final factor was commitment to reciprocal teaching and learning. Participants who developed reciprocal relationships reported instances when they incorporated ideas and activities from each other.

Reciprocal partners enthusiastically shared the professional and personal benefits they gained from each other in meetings and in their journals. When one partner had nothing to offer the other, the relationship could not be reciprocal. Cooperating teachers who did not value the student teacher's contributions could not be reciprocal. Student teachers who clung to the status of "student," remaining dependent on the cooperating teacher's authority could not be reciprocal either. Reciprocity did not directly relate to experience or age. The individual's confidence and openness to teaching and learning with the other was more influential.

Cooperating teachers in this cohort valued student teachers' professional attitudes. One example of such professional behavior is the following journal entry by a student teacher in a reciprocal relationship. "I was sick this morning at school [and] it was terrible. . . . But, I stayed all day [and] toughed it out. I really didn't want to miss so near the end of the practicum- I haven't missed any days." A counter example of unprofessional behavior was the student teacher who missed the last day of full-time teaching because it was an unofficial senior skip day. The cooperating teacher reported frustration with her student-like attitude. This pair did not develop reciprocity.

Another component of engagement in teaching and learning was student teacher initiative. One cooperating teacher wrote the following on her student teacher's lesson plans: "I am appreciative of how much you have taken your [student teaching] experience as though these were your own classes/ putting your heart and soul into it! It shows in everything you do." Another cooperating teacher shared the resulting disappointment with the student teacher's lack of initiative during the final cooperating teacher meeting: "I got tired of hearing what else do you need me to do or want me to do . . . it was like I was the boss, I regret that." Cooperating teachers in reciprocal relationships were more positive and reported they learned from the experience. Likewise, those student teachers who reciprocally accepted teaching responsibility were more positive about the benefits they gained from the practicum.

Reciprocal learning involved listening to and incorporating constructive feedback and suggestions from one partner to the other, and learning by observing the other. One cooperating teacher learned classroom management techniques by observing the student teacher.

Another cooperating teacher described learning from observing the student teacher's approach to teaching, "It's been good for me to watch how activities or approaches to activities that I might not have tried thinking the kid[s] would say they were 'hokie' or 'silly' have turned out well for [student teacher]." One student teacher noted her openness to the suggestions of the cooperating teacher in her journal, "[cooperating teacher] helped me to restructure one of my lessons today. . . . I think sometimes she hesitates to tell me things because she doesn't want to put down what I did. I want her to understand she is helping me w/her ideas!" One student teacher's journal, in contrast, recorded her unwillingness to incorporate the cooperating teacher's suggestions:

I really think [the lesson] went against what [cooperating teacher] wanted me to do. . . . I hope [cooperating teacher] does not feel that I am purposefully not carrying out suggestions, but I am merely trying a new approach. . . . Lucky for me, it went well. I think I will be perceptive enough to know if I am talking over anyone's heads.

The latter pair was not able to negotiate a reciprocal relationship. Not all pairs who learned from each other formed reciprocal relationships, but all members of reciprocal relationships did learn from each other.

Commitment in the relationship was not mutual in the two nonreciprocal pairs. Interestingly, in both cases, it was the student who exhibited less interest or desire to take on the role of 'teacher.' The student who chose to be absent on the senior skip day and who repeatedly arrived late in the mornings was one example. The second student teacher's behaviors included repeatedly asking for direction, not following the cooperating teacher's suggestions, and leaving early at the end of the day.

In summary, those who formed reciprocal relationships had compatible personalities and were willing to do the following: (a) invest effort and time; (b) interact in ways that developed the relationship; (c) develop a shared history; and (d) learn from each other. Among the five reciprocal relationships, both members engaged consistently in these actions. The students in nonreciprocal pairs, did not engage in these

behaviors consistently.

7. Discussion, Reflections, and Implications for Teacher Education Programs

Establishing reciprocal relationships requires effort and commitment, but it is significant to developing student teachers. Based on what we learned from our investigation and the participants' comments, we offer suggestions and activities that teacher educators can adapt for fostering reciprocal relationships during the entire process of teacher preparation.

Five actions were important in developing reciprocal relationships in this cohort. The findings showed that engaging in the following is important for all parties in the student teaching practicum: (1) to TALK to each other continually and examine other professional relationships that affect the cooperating-student teacher pair; (2) to display invested effort and interest in the practicum; (3) to begin to build reciprocal relationships before the practicum starts; (4) to commit to ongoing engagement to develop reciprocal relationships; and (5) to act as a gatekeeper. We will discuss each of these in more detail below with activities that we tried or that the participants suggested.

Participants sometimes overlooked the first and most important action for ensuring a good student teaching practicum. Everyone involved must **TALK**. All the participants must keep lines of communications open, and build trust through consistent trustworthy actions, support, and appropriate confrontation when necessary. Talk was an important tool to stimulate reflection in all aspects of teaching and working with other members. Surprisingly, this proved difficult for some participants.

All participants in this study found that the joint and separate group meetings held throughout the practicum gave them regular opportunities to ask questions and voice their

frustrations, doubts, dilemmas, and successes. Meetings also provided an opportunity to share stories, experiences, and information. The cooperating teacher and student teacher groups had each other and the university supervisors to listen to them within a supportive environment. The teachers suggested continuing meetings in the future regardless of whether we continued the research study, because they felt the experience was much richer with the scheduled time to talk. They also requested that the university supervisors take a more interactive role during and between meetings.

The group meetings also provided opportunities to address conflict, but, in hindsight, we did not carefully attend to conflict during this cohort. Providing a meeting devoted to issues of confrontation, and offering positive strategies to encourage and handle conflict would have strengthened our cohort and benefitted all members.

Just as the teachers and supervisors need regular opportunities to talk, so do the teacher pairs. One change to encourage them to talk is including regular meetings in the practicum requirements for discussion, feedback, and communication. Adding this provision to the cooperating teacher and student teacher lists would provide accountability for all members to schedule time who might not do so otherwise.

The second action necessary for building reciprocal relationships is to involve all the participants in designing and carrying out the practicum. Everyone must share responsibility for success and failure in each practicum experience. In this study, the cooperating teachers became more invested because they helped design the activities that we required the student teachers to complete. Expectations were clear because they jointly designed and agreed upon them. All participants affirmed student teachers as valuable members because we gave them an opportunity to ask for what they needed and to identify their contributions and strengths.

Conforming to a predetermined set of activities was not as important as how involved and committed the participants became when they were a part of designing those experiences.

Beginning relationship-building efforts earlier than the first day of student teaching is the third action. Student teachers need to realize that they are responsible for developing their working relationship and professional behaviors, just as they are responsible for instructing students. Additionally, the student teachers and cooperating teachers need to begin developing relationships with their partners before the practicum starts. The teachers in the group did not officially come together as a group until just before the ten-week session began. At the end of the practicum, all participants expressed the need for more time. They felt that ten weeks was too short to allow them to develop as strong a connection with each other as they would have liked. It also did not provide them time to take advantage of the opportunity to learn from each other. Group members made the following suggestions to increase time to build relationships: (a) make student teaching assignments earlier in the year, and (b) provide experiences for the teacher groups to get to know each other before the practicum. The longer they have to develop relationships in structured activities associated with the program, the greater the chances are that the relationships they establish will be successful.

Likewise, university supervisors must develop and maintain regular and active reciprocal relationships with cooperating teachers throughout the year. University supervisors need to ask teachers for help in designing teacher education programs. In our first and final meetings with the cooperating teacher group we gained important insights and helpful suggestions. They pointed out weak areas in our teacher preparation program and offered suggestions to strengthen it. Professional settings such as Academic Alliances offer alternative opportunities to exchange ideas and concerns.

A fourth activity is to change the perception that participants have about these relationships. Developing successful professional and reciprocal relationships is not a one-step process that a pair either has or does not have. It is an ongoing process of mutual engagement and a commitment to making it work. The members must realize that the relationship has to be nurtured throughout the practicum. Realizing that

some days are better and more successful than others is important. These teachers found that being aware of and attentive to the tenuous and fragile nature of developing relationships helped them to work through the more demanding moments. The regular opportunities to discuss their situations in meetings helped them to focus on the important role they played in their work together.

The fifth and final activity is that faculty in departments of foreign language teacher education, university supervisors, cooperating teachers, and student teachers must act as gatekeepers. Not all good teachers are good cooperating teachers and not all Spanish speakers make good Spanish teachers. Student teachers and cooperating teachers must exhibit responsible work ethics. Education faculty, university supervisors, and cooperating teachers need to counsel preservice teachers who are not committed to teaching, and help them to seek other employment opportunities outside education. Such students should not receive teaching certificates. In the State of Georgia, both cooperating teachers and university supervisors write letters of recommendation for student teachers that are serious considerations for their first teaching positions. Honesty in these recommendations is one way to act as gatekeeper for those teachers who do not approach the practicum seriously or professionally. We found that cooperating teachers hesitated to give negative yet truthful comments on such evaluations. Delving deeper, we found that cooperating teachers felt it might reflect negatively on their work in the program. Discussing this in the group clarified the purpose and the importance of recommendations.

Cooperating teachers find their role demanding, and it requires teachers who are knowledgeable of methods and techniques useful to teacher preparation. University supervisors must recruit cooperating teachers who are committed. Teacher educators and experienced cooperating teachers can work together to develop less-experienced teachers, and thus further empower and recognize cooperating teachers. University supervisors must not match student teachers with teachers who are not committed to working with them. Our experience shows that some cooperating

teachers expect a lightened work load and do not offer the student teacher their guidance and expertise. Student teachers must warn university supervisors when cooperating teachers do not take the role of mentor and master teacher seriously⁴. All parties involved in teacher education must be gatekeepers.

8. Professional, recognition and suggestions for research

Concerning the profession as a whole, foreign language education programs must take teacher preparation and student teaching seriously⁵. University departments of foreign language teacher education must reward teacher educators and recognize the work they do with cooperating teachers and student teachers. Since much of this work occurs outside the traditional university classroom, it often remains unnoticed and insignificant to those not involved. However, to the university faculty members involved it clearly is not. Time and effort are necessary to create partnerships with schools and to ensure successful teacher development. Their institutions need to value and reward teacher educators adequately for such work⁶.

Too, the expertise and knowledge of practicing teachers must be visible to university programs and to colleagues in the public schools. Both institutions must value

⁴ Student teachers were hesitant to complain about cooperating teachers, therefore, we developed written evaluation forms the following year to provide them an opportunity to assess their cooperating teachers.

⁵ We extended our work with the Spanish cohort to include all languages groups in the Spring following this study. The other language groups (French, German, and Latin) expressed interest in the research during the two studies. We did not find the invested interest in this larger group that we found in the smaller groups, although the activities did improve the overall satisfaction with the practicum.

⁶ Efforts such as working in the schools are not factored into important professional compensation, such as tenure and promotion, in some higher education institutions.

and reward the work these teachers do to shape teacher preparation programs⁷. The following activities will help to inform others about their efforts. University personnel and preservice teachers need to spend time in the schools, and public school teachers need to be in the universities⁸. The profession needs to support sessions at conferences where teachers, preservice teachers, and teacher educators discuss foreign language teaching and teacher education⁹. Committed teacher educators need to conduct and publish research on teacher preparation, and involve cooperating teachers¹⁰ and student teachers collaboratively as co-researchers. Research by student teachers, in particular, may be helpful to preservice teachers before they enter the classroom. Likewise, research by cooperating teachers may benefit other cooperating teachers. Again, teacher preparation is everyone's responsibility.

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⁷ Inadequate compensation for cooperating teachers' time and effort is one specific problem with the educational system in the State of Georgia. School administrators are sometimes uninformed about the efforts required to act as a cooperating teacher. One administrator before this study told a cooperating teacher that she would have a "vacation" from teaching responsibility, not acknowledging her efforts required to work with the student teacher.

⁸ We applied what we learned from these two research projects to our teacher education program and the following activities resulted. The cooperating teachers collaborated with the methods instructor before student teaching. Cooperating teachers from one school, for example, invited the entire methods class to visit their school, and the teachers prepared a program that consisted of teaching demonstrations and materials that the students could use for their future student teaching. The cooperating teachers initiated the program.

⁹ We organized a panel presentation of our cohort for the 1995 Southern Conference of Language Teachers (SCOLT) Conference in Charleston, SC.

¹⁰ We shared copies of the data and publication information with one of the cooperating teachers to share ownership and power from this research project. We encouraged the cooperating teacher to write another article for publication from this study. The cooperating teacher did not follow up on this task.

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Appendix

Cooperating Teacher List

Cooperating Teachers

Offer to Student Teachers

1. Prepare students for arrival of student teacher.
2. Compile notebook of relevant school forms and make a copy of Teacher's Manual available.
3. Provide a list of 10 classroom teaching behaviors that cooperating teacher expects of student teacher.
4. Provide physical space in classroom for student teacher.
5. Provide student teachers with opportunities to observe at least 5 different classes by 3rd week. Student teachers will provide list of observed effective teaching behaviors.
6. By beginning of 2nd week have conference with student teacher and make explicit all teaching expectations.

Student Teachers

Expectations

1. Be observed by cooperating teacher, another teacher, and principal according to State standards.
2. 'Shadow' a 9th or 10th grader for a full day and write synopsis.
3. Observe 3 other teachers.
4. Prepare one-day lesson for substitute.
5. Teach in target language to all levels, all periods, all day by end of practicum.
6. Calculate grades for a set period of time.
7. Plan a unit and write/create a test.
8. Administer oral testing.
9. Contact parent(s) by phone or mail.
10. Write adequate lesson plans for all levels.

Student Teacher List

Cooperating Teachers

Expectations

1. Instruct student teacher on how to write adequate daily lesson plans for a variety of different levels.
2. Show how to discipline and set standards for classroom behavior.
3. Be honest in all dealings with student teacher about proposed methods and activities.
4. Give relevant information about students to the student teacher.
5. Be clear about how much conformity to cooperating teacher's teaching style is expected.

Student Teachers

Offer to Cooperating Teachers

1. Provide a different perspective to the cooperating teacher.
2. Provide insight on students to cooperating teacher.
3. Provide different experiences to the cooperating teacher.

Jaqueline Davis is Visiting Scholar at the University of Queensland, Centre for Language Teaching and Research, Australia, and a Doctoral Candidate in Language Education at the University of Georgia. Her research interests include teacher education, classroom interactions, and multicultural issues.

*125 Aderhold Hall, Athens, GA 30602, U.S.A.
E-mail: jkhall@uga.cc.uga.edu*

Joan Kelly Hall is Associate Professor in the Department of Language Education at the University of Georgia, U.S.A. She is also a faculty member of the Interdisciplinary Linguistics Program. Her research interests include the study of face-to-face interaction in second language learning contexts, and intercultural communication.

*Brisbane, QLD 4072 Australia
E-mail: jddavis@sage.coe.uga.edu*