

Dilemmas of a Supervisor during Internship in a Preservice Teacher Education Program

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Abstract

Teachers are no longer at the centre of learning as being the only experts. They facilitate learning. Students are no longer passive recipients of learning but are active in their own learning and can discover and create new knowledge in a constantly evolving world. The paper explores dilemmas faced by supervisors during practice teaching in a pre-service teacher education program in the changing scenario. It raises questions related to planning, praxis between ideas and experiences, observations, reflection, feedback and supervisors' interventions. Supervisors can neither be cops nor spies. They have to foster a bond of trust with the interns through constant dialogue. It explores why interns are resistant to suggestions and how can these issues be addressed. It talks about the need to have supportive ethos to prevent critical practices from becoming meaningless rituals. The intern has to be empowered to lead her own journey by adopting a curious problem-solving stance in a collaborative environment with consistent and systematic support from the supervisor and the program. It is an ongoing and iterative process. Creative learning opportunities are needed for both the supervisor and the intern to constantly evolve.

Key words - trust, rituals, creative, flourishing humans, dialogic

Introduction

Pre-service teacher education is a complex task. It involves engaging with young people who join teacher education courses to qualify as teachers. Ironically, while teaching continues to be a low-paying job in India, teachers are held primarily responsible for the success or failure of the future generations of the nation. The constantly falling quality and commitment of teachers are often moaned. We are coming some way from the very noxious

perspective of George Bernard Shaw," he who can does, he who cannot teaches". From a majority of students who were pushed into the profession due to the non-availability of other opportunities or parental pressure to-many more young people making the conscious choice to be a teacher.

Goals of teacher education: To begin with, it is important to reflect upon goals for teacher education programs. We have to move beyond the goals of the current education system that has been driven at the beginning of the industrial revolution with the need for skilled labour in the factories to contribute to the growth of wealth measured in monetary terms. That means that we measure the outcome of education not by happiness or well-being or knowledge and skills but by the amount of wealth that has been generated. This is in turn measured as the human capital of the country. The emphasis of the goals for training teachers has to be on empowering them to critically and responsibly engage with the world and not only on preparing children for competitive participation in the global economy. Education should provide opportunities for upward social mobility for all and not be owned by the privileged few. However, the spread of examination preparatory shadow education has fuelled competition with serious implications for equity and the quality of public education in several countries (Bray, Lynkins2012; Bray et al 2015).

Teachers can play a catalytic role to a certain extent, given the larger socio-economic-political factors. We can focus on whatever we can do. We have to reflect on our role as faculty members in preparing teachers who have a voice and constructive criticality to partner and debate in curriculum design as against efficient cogs in the wheel. Emphasis should be on nurturing autonomous, critical, and engaged citizens with a voice in determining their own collective future (UNESCO, MGIEP 2018). For a peaceful and sustainable society for our coming generations the goals of education need to go beyond facilitating the development of human capital and instead focus on flourishing humans. This will need a holistic development of young people who are intellectually stimulated and are also good human beings; individuals who are empathetic and compassionate in a true spirit of solidarity (UNESCO,2015).

The learner has to be brought back into focus. Pedagogies need to give primacy to the learner and her specific needs. The system has to move around the learner rather than the learner being shaped by the system. We need to shift the focus from creating clones of efficient workers to empowering human beings who work towards collective flourishing. We

understand that learning has to be personalised and self-paced to be relevant to the learner. The conception of the learner as an empty vessel waiting to be filled by the all-knowing teacher has been debunked a long time back. So, if the learner is the centre then the pace and context of learning has to be hers as well.

Schools need to recognise the need for fostering ethics, character and citizenship and aim to develop empathy, compassion, mindfulness, purposefulness, responsibility, collaboration and self-regulation. The perception and assessment of what is right or wrong, good and bad in a specific situation is about ethics. It implies asking questions related to norms, values, meanings and limits. (Schleicher,2018) The challenge is that developing these qualities requires a very different approach to learning and teaching and therefore, teacher preparation. Considering these thoughts- the goals of schooling and teacher education need to be reflected upon.

The Context

In India there are several types of pre-service teacher education opportunities for preparing teachers at different levels like pre-school, primary, elementary, secondary and senior secondary. Some courses are offered after the students complete their graduation while the others are offered immediately after completion of school level. Bachelor in Elementary Education (BEEd) is a four-year integrated teacher education program which is offered by the University of Delhi. In this paper I will be using the context of BEEd program wherein I have had a chance to engage with various dimensions of the program as a faculty. I will focus on certain aspects of the school internship program (SIP) which is a mandatory component of the BEEd in the fourth year in my institute. The internship program is envisioned to offer a focused school experience. It is structured to be a process in partnership between the school, intern (student practicing to be a teacher), and the supervisors (faculty) as representatives of the program. It provides physical and psychosocial space for understanding the real dynamics of not only the classroom but also the school as a system as spaces for teaching learning. Over the years as this partnership has evolved it has offered several challenges and dilemmas for both students and the faculty/supervisors. In this paper I would like to flag some dilemmas and share how we have approached them and not necessarily with great success. A lot research can further help in building up this area.

The Dilemmas

One needs to look at the dilemma starting with the school itself. The school which has been running by itself with its own routines and accountability to students and the Directorate of Education/NDMC or any other management body now has to accommodate a 4-6 interns who will essentially try out and learn. This may or may not correspond with the school's goals. So, the challenge here is how to create that space for the intern where she is able to make choices that may or may not be in accordance with the prevalent practices, beliefs in the school and apply the learning from the program into the school scenario. The process involves lot of goof-ups/mistakes exposing students to different ideas that may lead to delays or disrupt school schedules. The responsibility of not using the school as a guinea pig lies with the teacher education institute through its supervisor. So, the supervisors have to facilitate a safe zone for the intern where they can try out and learn-through continuous negotiations with the school teachers and at the same time respect the needs of the school. The process is complex as the schools themselves are facing a lot of challenges posed by their management bodies and also internal dynamics. For instance, the class teacher is not supposed to sit in class while the intern is teaching-as it has been observed the student response can be very different when the regular teacher is sitting as against the intern dealing with the students alone. The students do not respond freely in the presence of regular teachers or sometimes they do not listen to the intern or the teacher interferes. But if the teachers move out of the class then that becomes a challenge for the school to deal with. They have their own curriculum- including assessment and co-curricular activities lined up. With interns around often their pace gets disturbed.

Secondly, the dilemma is how to create a genuine praxis between ideas and experiences. Conceptions about teaching are formed early in preservice teachers' lives and they are heavily influenced by their experiences in the programs (Borg 2005; Faget et al.,2005; Lortie,1975; Sugrue,1997). At the same time, they have their personal experiences of schooling and learning. The teacher education programs have to create several opportunities to evaluate and reflect upon students' personal experiences using theory and guided practice with faculty/ supervisors in the process of learning and unlearning. The need for self-reflection is not only for students but as much for faculty.

Teacher educators see their responsibility in knowledge building and truth-finding to support pre-service teachers to look beyond their own experiences, viewpoints, and

boundaries to teach others different from themselves (Darling-Hammond 2000). The challenge thus emerges that how can a teacher educator create, a genuine praxis between ideas and experiences...helping (pre-service) teachers reach beyond their personal boundaries to appreciate the perspectives of those whom they would teach (Darling-Hammond 2000).

One of the objectives of school internship program (SIP) is to develop alternative practices within the given frameworks. When the interns enter a school space they get an opportunity to translate their knowledge base, pedagogic theory, understanding of children and explore the repertoire of skills and develop reflective classroom practices. It involves an intern going into the school for 16 weeks as a student-teacher and engaging with the students, syllabi, and other people and processes. Here a protective environment is created, where the faculty gives different types of support to the intern as subject and regular supervisors. The supervisors negotiate with the school and facilitate an environment where the intern can build bridges between theory and practice, try out new ideas, and be able to reflect on the same and chart her own growth plan. Lortie (1975) states that the extended formal schooling period over thousands of hours where students have face-to-face contact and interaction with teachers is like an apprenticeship for teaching. During this, pre-service teachers develop lay theories about teaching and learning which Holt Reynolds (1992) claims represent tacit knowledge lying unexamined by a student. These lay theories evolve and are judged to shape beginning teachers in terms of their engagement with preservice teacher education, their socialisation to teaching, their teaching identities, and their teaching practices in school (Darling Hammond 2006 b). This process witnesses several aspects crucial to learning and support.

Another dilemma that confronts is whose plan is going to be implemented? The interns observe the classes they are assigned and prepare their plans. These plans have to be approved by the supervisor before implementation in class. There are several that influence how an intern is going to deliberate upon her teaching. What happens to pre-service teachers as school goes shapes who they become as teachers and how they see teaching. Dominant wisdom regarding the impact of the apprenticeship of observation is that pre-service teachers who experienced bad teaching would replicate it as the apprenticeship of observation acts as an agent of continuity rather than change (Lortie 1975). Rooted in their thousands of hours of exposure to teaching during their school experiences pre-service teachers many a times articulate conceptions of teaching that were generously simplistic and naive. They were not

talking about,” reach(ing) beyond their personal boundaries to appreciate the perspectives of those whom they would teach” (Darling Hammond 2000).

The supervisors see it as their responsibility to protect the school children from “half-baked” ideas so plans are resent for redoing several times. On the one hand, this process of repeated redoing witnesses many interns confused, fatigued, and breaking down. The faculty, on the other hand is constantly complaining about the falling levels of commitment and content level in the plans which have to be redone by the intern several times leading to huge amounts of extra work.

The dilemma is in the threshold that the intern may reach and opt for shortcuts or other means to survive the internship. In the process, the whole exercise which has the potential of trying out and praxis can become a ritual and may continue till the program lasts and fade away as soon as they enter the field riddled with its own challenges. After several times of revisions by the interns on suggestions by the supervisor one may wonder, whose plan is it that is going to be implemented in the class-the interns or the supervisors?

So, the challenge is how to save this practice from getting reduced to a ritual and how to facilitate the young mind to become aware of the possibilities inherent in her. What can we do as supervisors to support the intern in this journey? How does one facilitate interns to practice reflection in the real sense of the word? How to create an environment where their resistance to effective teaching is lowered and internship is seen as a learning opportunity? How to create an environment where fear of being judged or exposed as deficient is mitigated, where the intern is in a non-hierarchical relationship with the supervisor and they explore the possibilities together in a dialogic process, creatively.

Another set of dilemmas is related to class-room observation. As a supervisor one faces a lot of dilemmas should the intern know about the visit of the supervisor or should it be a surprise visit? How long should the observation be- full period or a shorter duration? Should the supervisor get involved during a lesson if they see an opportunity to improve/correct? When should the feedback be given- at the real time moment or after the class in person and privately? What should be the nature of the feedback?

These issues have a deep impact on the relationship between the supervisor and the intern and the self-esteem and confidence of the intern. These issues need contemplation at the level of the supervisors so that the goals of the teacher education program are met.

Discussion

Supervisors cannot be either spies or cops. The only bond between the two (the interns or the supervisors) that can be conceived of is the one of trust and this has to be built systematically and consistently. It is an ongoing and recursive process. The supervisors need to be partners with the intern and let them be the front runners in setting their own goals. They should be there to support the interns by identifying points of agreement to begin with. Preservice teacher education must support aspiring teachers to be agentic in the things they do in their practice (Biesta et al.,2015). As all of our actions big and small go a long way to building credibility and trust with the intern who is already under a lot of pressure, even small practices like gossiping about students amongst the faculty in the staff room can damage this trust.

Establishing when and how the observation will be conducted brings an element of ease and trust to the intern. The knowledge and experience that the intern is bringing along have to be acknowledged. I have observed that when the intern knows expectations clearly then goal setting is easy for both the intern and the supervisor. We (our Department) have designed a broad feedback sheet that features areas to be observed, it also leaves a lot of room for the supervisor to explore other areas. This is shared with the intern well in advance as also the filled feedback sheet with descriptive feedback. This keeps communication clear and transparent. This is followed by post-observation discussion. This practice creates opportunities for non-evaluative feedback.

The supervisors play a critical role in creating space for experimentation in the schools. They have to negotiate with the school on a regular basis. For example, allowing the interns to change the seating arrangements or setting up book corners or activity corners. Sometimes these changes excite students and they make a lot of noise. This is taken as a disciplinary issue in the school. At that time the supervisor firewalls and protects the intern from the schools' expectations. The focus should be on what students have learned rather than on how well or poorly the lesson has been executed. It models a reflective stance of curiosity about instruction (Cochran-smith, Lytte1999, West, Staub2003).

The interns are supposed to reflect on their experience in the classroom and school at large and note it in a daily journal. Journal writing comes in handy. This journal is shared with the school supervisor (The school supervisor is allotted to interns for closer and more sustained support. Normally one supervisor is assigned 4-6 interns in one school as against a

subject supervisor who rotates in different schools observing specific subjects). These are shared with the supervisor but not essentially written for them. It is encouraged that interns are honest about their thoughts and ideas and acknowledge their mistakes. This is seen as a tool through which the interns learn how to reflect on themselves in an ongoing manner. However, without the ethos of unconditional acceptance this practice can degenerate into another burdensome, meaningless exercise.

While observing there are several moments, when as a supervisor one feels the need to intervene. There could be an interesting idea or anecdote that may enrich the interaction or an important point that has been left out must be pointed out. Sometimes the students in the class are not connecting with what the intern is doing and are restless but the intern is ignoring that or cannot sense that. At times there can be an incorrect concept e.g., mixing up parameter and area.

Some supervisors feel that it is important to redirect there and then to bring about improvements. Some take over the class from the intern and show the intern how to deal with it effectively. Sometimes the supervisor who chooses to speak up mid-class may focus on classroom management issues rather than deeper pedagogic issues. This can be understood from a supervisor's perspective but at the same time it is important to see how it impacts the intern who has to continue to teach in the same class.

‘Students do not listen to me anymore’, shared an intern with tears in her eyes after she was corrected in front of the class. She was embarrassed to go back. So, such correcting certainly undermines the authority of the intern. Sometimes students ask intern will your ma'am fail you. The students can thus get distracted from the content to adult dynamics. This can create an inaccurate environment in the class which forms the basis of evaluation. So, should the feeling of the intern be a greater concern or the students' education which may be negatively impacted by faulty teaching? The supervisors also feel committed to the field and the young unsuspecting learners therein. So, unless it is a case of emergency supervisor should avoid intervening during the class.

There have been instances that the intern has taught the same topic in front of the supervisor as she has done reasonably well earlier. This gets exposed when the children in the class do not “cooperate” and leak the secret. Interns may be inclined “to game the process and show what the supervisor wants to see. They ask the higher order questions, give wait time, etc., but not change the way they teach day to day” (Marshall 2015). In order to

understand an intern's resistance or apprehension about professional development, we need to see the issue from their perspective too. There could be a level of distrust as there is a lot at stake for the intern in terms of assessment

Another challenge is how long to observe. There has been some movement from full lesson evaluation to short, frequent, unannounced classroom visits. The activities in a class are in a continuum. Then the supervisor enters for a short duration. It is important to enter at the beginning of the lesson and sit through the entire period. Short visits often do not provide accurate data to be able to understand the essence of the classroom. There can be a lot that the observer does not know about a particular lesson. Once during my observation, I found that the intern was not following the approved plan. On discussing this later I found that the school teacher had covered that portion during her scheduled class so the intern could not have repeated the same, so she modified it to beef up areas that needed more attention with the students. With this information, this episode moved from what she could have done to please me—teacher centric to an act that showed the intern's keen observation and response to student needs—student-centered. So, there is a lot that may be going on in a class and needs to be known before writing the feedback.

It is important to understand the context and also get missing information, why the intern was upset, why it felt important to deviate or drop something and how the discussion shaped after the supervisor left. I always make notes in my diary and write the feedback a little later. It is important for the supervisor to be able to reflect on the feedback before shooting off the hip and getting it wrong. Hearing from the intern enhances the quality and credibility of the feedback. This haste may seriously impact the bond of trust and make the intern less receptive to the feedback.

Attention has to be given to how to provide feedback to the intern. The challenge is not being dismissive of the complexity of an intern's practice. The supervisors need to share what they write with the intern. As Casey (2006) recommends if you don't feel comfortable sharing the notes you make with the teacher they are probably more evaluative than informative. Another useful practice that is followed is that the interns are encouraged to disagree on the feedback. So, they can write their arguments and the same can be discussed. Again, without a comfortable environment, it is not possible as it takes a lot of courage for the intern to write back and the supervisor to hear back on the feedback. But it makes the process dialogic. Suggestions are more likely to be heard and acted upon when the entire

picture is discussed face to face. Debrief sessions offer immense opportunities for the supervisor to understand the real issues going on in the intern's mind.

Sometimes it is felt that delayed feedback loses its immediacy if one waits till after the class or later. I believe good or bad issues, should be raised only after the class. However, there are no fixed rules that can be uniformly applied

Supervisors often blame interns for being defensive, avoiding, disinterested and resistant to reflect on their own practices. The onus of this behaviour comes on the system that makes an intern feel inadequate when she seeks help or makes mistakes. The anxiety comes out of several factors like losing face in front of the class students, admonishment from the supervisor, marks given on that observation, fear that deficiencies unrelated to the presenting issue will be revealed and hierarchical structures of schools that reinforce power differentials between interns and supervisors (Gonzales, et al 2004).

As supervisors we must define our role and understand how emerging problems are not seen as a failure but seen as a process of learning. We need to reflect on how much of our feedback has to be evaluative and how much is non-evaluative or informative with a clear rationale. This has also been observed that interns take and need time to accept, negotiate suggestions. Many a times it has been noted that some interns who struggled during internship did exceedingly well in the field a few years later. We have to accept the pace and believe in our students. Internship is the time when they are trying to make sense of ideas that needs certain maturity.

Another practice that has been found to be very helpful is that of making teams of interns develop unit plans and even sit in each other's class to give feedback or learn. Lateral learning really helps as the interns do not have hierarchies or marks in to interfere. When it is officially encouraged they bond well and support each other's learning and growth. The interns learn a lot when they experience non-competitive and collaborative environments. The supervisor must plan strategically for student teacher learning. That means explicitly considering the appropriate scaffolding to support the next layer of interns' progress. This can be done in regular meetings between the two.

Sometimes a well-planned class can fail miserably. There can be several factors for that disaster. Some supervisors give another opportunity to the intern and come back for observation. This approach really works and takes a lot of pressure away from the intern and encourage them to be more honest and open to suggestion as the real purpose of both the

supervisor and the intern is the learning of the latter. Multiple opportunities for success are better than the hot chase of deadlines for a perfect performance.

Conclusions

The paper presents the dilemmas faced by a supervisor while understanding her role in supporting young interns undertaking practice teaching. It presents several crossroads and paths chosen. Teachers are no longer at the center of learning as being the only experts. They facilitate, activate, and coach learning (Rautiainen ,2018). Students are not objects of learning but active in their own learning. They explore new questions have a co-sense and shape the future. We need to trust our students so that they themselves are capable of discovering and even creating new knowledge moving from being passive recipients, efficiently memorising information to developing their own agency and discovering how to improve the environment they live in actively. The title “supervisor” itself needs to be changed as it essentially means superior vision and reeks of hierarchy. When one reflects on the real purpose of practice teaching one thinks it to ensure creative and meaningful teaching by maximum interns in maximum classes.

To achieve this one observes less than 3% of the total time spent in class by the intern and expect interns to use creative teaching practices in all of 97% of the time. They have to have the motivation and the skill to reflect on their practices and learn to be autonomous.

The intern has to lead her own journey. Adopt a curious problem-solving stance. As supervisors we need to walk the talk, and communicate clearly and transparently. These research-based recommendations stem from finding about the influences of effect on cognition (Lee 2008) and the importance of collaborative interactions to learning (Bransford, Brown, Cooking 1999). They also build on school reform literature with suggests that leaders work to develop trust acknowledge valid concerns of teachers’ resistance use that resistance as a springboard for collaborative problem solving and commit resources to relational and community-building aspects of the work (Elmore 2000, Fink and Resnick 2001).

As supervisor, one has to be extremely supportive and empathetic. Interns are more likely to engage in their growth and respect others observation of their practice when they have some authority in determining their learning goals. As a supervisor one’s role can be to identify points of agreement and to direct her in ways that may empower her and bring

positive results. The role of engagement here is not to fix lessons or teachers but to support teachers' abilities to meet students' needs.

As supervisors our role is to be patient and let the interns discover their roles through collaboration and partnerships. Emerging dilemmas do not indicate an intern's deficiency but are an essential part of teaching and learning. There has to be a friendly relationship with errors which have a huge potential for opportunities for unlearning and learning. The process must be dialogic as we are looking at autonomous, creative professionals who have the willingness and capacity to reflect and grow.

Supervisor's role is very critical in developing learning opportunities for the young interns aspiring to be teachers. But to have that kind of interaction enabling factors have to be in place for example, not having too many interns to supervise, the assessment process also has to be freed from the ineffective and unimaginative supervisory cycle. The workload has to be manageable in order to make it doable and meaningful. Supervisors also need continuous training to be able to respond to the diverse needs of young interns and those of the field.

But somehow policy makers have not seen teacher education in the same light and gone in for fast-track alternatives like para teachers, shikshakarmis etc. This approach seriously compromises standards for professional practice that have a potential of impacting generations of unsuspecting young students or in other words public welfare at large. This is one space where a lack of meaningful regulation can cause significant damage. This may result in the appointment of untrained teachers who are supposed to respond to the most diverse and challenging needs of children.

There seems to be no standard model for developing supervisors or interns. It is an ongoing and iterative process. It is about creating learning opportunities for both the supervisor and the intern.

We need to build well-being in this world with empathy. A sustainable future will need more experiments to discover more alternatives. Narratives can be researched upon further. We need not just pedagogically trust teachers but also support their needs. Policy makers should focus much more on improving inputs such as curriculum development, teacher training, improvement of teacher education and teaching materials rather than simply on monitoring outputs (UNESCO 2016 B; UNESCO, MGIEP 2017b).

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