

PEDAGOGY

Supervisor Feedback: Perceptions From Physical Education Teacher Candidates

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Abstract

This study investigated physical education teacher candidate perceptions on feedback received from cooperating teachers and university supervisors during their student teaching experience. We used a basic qualitative research design (Merriam, 2009) to determine the perceptions of five teacher candidates from a public university in Puerto Rico. Teacher candidates completed daily reflections, weekly descriptive questionnaires, and in-depth interviews, which we used as sources of data. Three themes emerged from collected data: quality of supervision, feedback and evaluation, and satisfaction with relationship. Of particular interest, the teacher candidates in this study perceived cooperating teachers as not offering the needed feedback to improve their teaching performance in the classroom. Conversely, teacher candidates perceived the feedback from their university supervisors as helpful in developing and improving their teaching skills. Although the participants in this study acknowledged both their cooperating teachers and their university supervisors as mentors, the results indicate that the type of feedback received from each may be perceived as beneficial,

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neutral, and at times negative toward the student teaching experience. Recommendations for cooperating teachers, university supervisors, and student teachers will be discussed with the purpose to improve the physical education teacher preparation process.

The relationships between university supervisors, cooperating teachers, and teacher candidates are complex and unique with each potentially bringing different expectations, teaching philosophies, and methods to the student teaching practicum experience (Caplow, 1968; Gervais & Desrosiers, 2005; Knowles et al., 1994). With the development of content area knowledge, the completion of teacher education program of study courses, and the fulfillment of required field experience hours, teacher candidates next find themselves paired with cooperating teachers and university supervisors to begin their student teaching practicum experience (Cuenca, 2010; Lawson et al., 2015). The relationships within and between these three individuals have been referred to as the student teacher triad (Yee, 1967). With student teachers spending close to 400 hr with their cooperating teachers (Becker et al., 2019; Veal & Rikard, 1998), collaboration and reflective dialogue, based on mutual trust, must be established to enhance the quality of the experience (Beck & Kosnik, 2002; Hobson et al., 2009; Hudson, 2016; Gwyn-Paquette & Tochon, 2001). Teacher candidates must also manage relationships and build trust with their university supervisors, although these relationships are not as intensive in terms of contact hours.

These collaborative and mutually trusting relationships benefit the teacher candidates by improving confidence and comfort in their ability to receive and use the needed feedback (Goodnough et al., 2009). This feedback, when timely, accurate, and consistent, is generally known as one of the more effective strategies for teacher candidates to improve their performance as classroom teachers (Randall, 1992; Scheeler et al., 2004). For example, appropriate and accurate feedback may serve as a stimulus to help promote teacher candidates' critical thinking skills (King, 2008). With this, the use of verbal and written feedback is regarded as an effective strategy for promoting reflective activity (Crotty & Allyn, 2001; Hatton & Smith, 1994; Napper-Owen & McCallister, 2005; Schon, 1987). Additionally, the provision of this formal feedback has been found to motivate

teacher candidates to continue professional progress and development when they become certified teachers (D. Wilson, 2002).

However, when the feedback is perceived as inappropriate or inaccurate, the teacher candidate may form negative opinions about their progress within the practicum experience. To address potential misinterpretations of feedback, teacher candidates can adopt a receptive attitude when asking for assistance from their supervisors and when seeking clarity of supervisors' comments. This receptiveness will help student teachers clarify perceptions, learn from the feedback given, and subsequently put appropriate teaching strategies into practice (Siedentop & Tannehill, 2002).

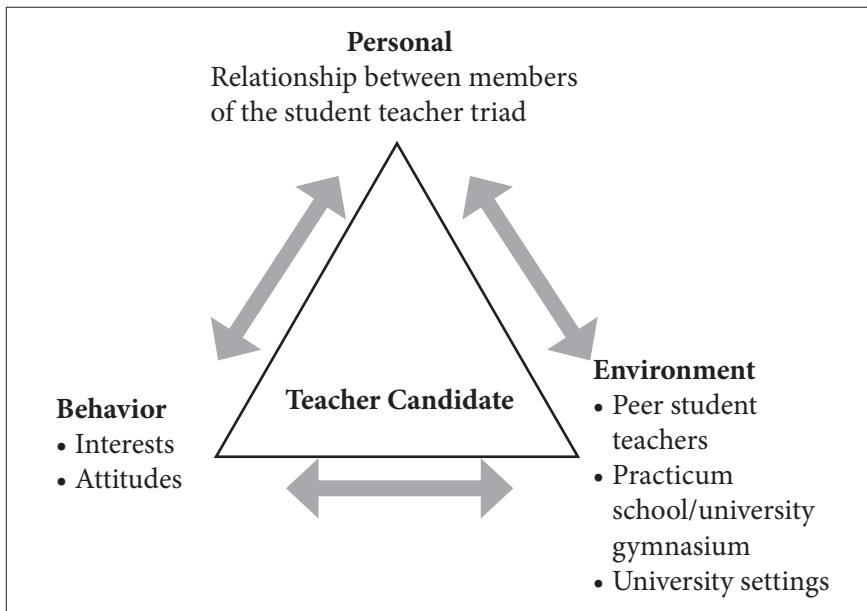
Even with the best preparation and planning, from a practical perspective there is no one magic formula to guarantee a successful experience during the student teaching practicum experience (Knowles et al., 1994). However, it is clear that the provision of adequate feedback encourages teacher candidates to be reflective thinkers (King, 2008). With this in mind, when teacher candidates receive constructive and systematic feedback, they are in a much better position to implement positive adjustments both in their own reflective teaching practice and in future classroom teaching episodes (Greenwood & Maheady, 1997).

It has been well documented within teacher preparation programs that one of the most significant, demanding, and stressful experiences is the practicum phase (Ali & Khalid, 2015; Caires et al., 2012; Widden et al., 1998; S. Wilson et al., 2001). During these student teaching experiences, teacher candidates have the opportunity to gain personal practical knowledge about the profession and the daily work of teaching (Cuenca, 2010; Gu & Benson, 2015). Furthermore, with supervision and mentoring by experienced professionals, teacher candidates can develop and refine their critical teaching skills (e.g., behavioral and time management; Ali & Khalid, 2015; Gurvitch & Metzler, 2009; Johnson & Napper-Owen, 2011). Through attentive observation, reflective listening, and thoughtful guidance, cooperating teachers and university supervisors can best facilitate a clearer understanding of the work of in-service teachers (Cuenca, 2010; Vogt, 1988).

In examining the dynamic relationships within this student teacher triad, it is important that we acknowledge the influence of social

learning theory (Bandura, 1986) on teacher candidates' perceptions of feedback from their supervisors. Utilizing the triadic reciprocal causation model, Bandura (1986) observed human actions as a result of an interaction among *personal, environmental, and behavior factors*. When the triadic reciprocal model for human behavior is applied to the student teacher triad, teacher candidates' perceptions of their supervisors' feedback could be influenced by all three of these factors (Figure 1). With this theoretical framework in mind, teacher candidates may change perceptions of supervisors' feedback while moving through the practicum experience. Interactions with fellow students and staff from the practicum school and university (*environment*), the relationship that teacher candidates experience with their supervisors (*personal factors*), and the interests that teacher candidates have toward the profession of teaching (*behavioral factors*) may affect their perception of feedback. As evident in Figure 1, these factors can occur in any order or direction. This qualitative research study was designed to uncover and understand teacher candidates' perceptions of feedback from practicum supervisors.

Figure 1
Application of the Student Teacher Reciprocal Learning Model From Bandura (1986) to This Study



Method

This study followed a basic qualitative research design. Merriam (2009) presented basic qualitative research as an interest in how an individual constructs reality while interacting with social factors (Merriam, 2009). Thus, this study investigated physical education teacher candidates' perceptions of feedback from cooperating teachers and university supervisors during their student teaching experience.

Participants and Setting

Participants were undergraduate students who had completed all required physical education teacher preparation coursework and were participating in their student teaching experience as the final requirement before licensure at the time of this study. Five teacher candidates (3 females, 2 males) ranging from 23 to 30 years of age participated in this study. They were enrolled in a student teaching practicum course in the Physical Education and Teacher Education (PETE) program of a public university in Puerto Rico. Each teacher candidate completed 13 weeks of practicum at a middle and high school site.

All cooperating teachers were certified teachers, had at least 3 years of experience teaching physical education, and had obtained a cooperating teacher certification as established by the Department of Education of Puerto Rico. Research in the field has examined the experiences of teacher candidates regarding the different relationships that support teacher candidates (Coker, 2017). Such relationships could be colored by the personal perspectives of teacher candidates. This study explored teacher candidates' perceived feedback received within the learning relationships inherent within the student teacher triad.

Data Collection

Qualitative interview was the primary source of data collection (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). May (2002) suggested interviews need to guide participants through a maze of life experiences. The interview consisted of questions regarding the feedback provided by the cooperating teacher and the university supervisor. Interviews were performed right after a teaching episode was evaluated by the

cooperating teacher or the university supervisor. All interviews were conducted at a convenient location for the teacher candidate and lasted between 20 and 30 min.

To obtain more information about the experience of the teacher candidates during the practicum experience, we employed daily reflections and questionnaires as a secondary source of data collection. Each candidate kept a daily reflection log throughout the 13 weeks of their practicum experience. Guidelines for the content to be included in each reflection were outlined by the student teacher program coordinator as part of the practicum course. Regarding the questionnaires, after each teaching episode evaluated by the cooperating teacher or the university supervisor, teacher candidates completed three questions about the quality of supervision. In general, teacher candidates were encouraged to write about their feelings and experiences during the practicum.

The data collection protocols were pilot tested with three teacher candidates the semester before the study was performed. On the basis of the pilot study, appropriateness of questions, language, length of questions, and clarity were revised by a panel of experts. All sources of data collection and procedures were approved by the institutional review board. All participants signed informed consent forms prior to the first day of practicum.

Procedures

The participants were provided with instructions on how to complete the questionnaires and daily reflections. After each evaluation from the cooperating teachers or the university supervisors, the teacher candidates completed a questionnaire developed for the purpose of the study and then were interviewed at the earliest convenient time. Interviews were conducted three to four times during 13 weeks. Interviews were audio-recording and conducted three to four times within 13 weeks. Transcriptions of interviews were emailed to participants for member checking. Teacher candidates were also required to submit daily reflections by email at the end of each school day. Data were collected and analyzed after each evaluation.

Data Analyses

Open, axial, and selective coding were utilized in the analysis and interpretation of interviews, daily reflections, and questionnaire data

(Neuman, 1991). During open coding, after the collected data were read through several times, labels summarizing the content were created. After this, relationships among open codes were identified and items were condensed into categories. Last, categories were condensed into themes: quality of supervision, feedback and evaluation, and satisfaction with relationship.

Results and Discussion

This study used a basic qualitative research design (Merriam, 2009) to investigate the meaning and understanding of the perceptions of physical education teacher candidates regarding feedback received from cooperating teachers and university supervisors. Throughout the semistructured interviews, daily reflections, and questionnaires, teacher candidates provided insights based on personal experience with practicum supervisors. The following categories emerged from the analysis: (a) quality of supervision, (b) feedback and evaluation, and (c) satisfaction with relationship.

Quality of Supervision

The quality of supervision theme was operationally defined as the overall perception held by teacher candidates about how well supervisors performed duties associated with supervision during the practicum experience. Teacher candidates had differences in opinion regarding the quality of supervision between each supervisor. They used phrases such as “very helpful” and “excellent performance” were used to describe supervision from university supervisors. Four out of five teacher candidates used the phrase “excellent supervisor.” On the other hand, supervision by the cooperating teacher was more commonly recounted as “poor performance,” “neutral,” “doesn’t work,” and “they did not perform the job as cooperating teacher.” Highlighting this, one teacher candidate explained how his cooperating teacher was working on other school responsibilities during his lesson:

Sincerely, he is not a good cooperating teacher. He is never in the classroom or gym, he only observed me a few times. However, when he observed me he provided valuable feedback, but what is the importance of the feedback? He

only gives me feedback once a month and is not present to see me growing as a teacher.

Interestingly, the feedback from this supervisor, although very intermittent, was still perceived as valuable. Two additional teacher candidates shared similar experiences regarding the less-than-expected amount of time the cooperating teacher spent observing their lessons: “They can go five to seven days without receiving feedback. It would be beneficial if the cooperating teacher could spend more time with me.” These perceived experiences are concerning given that Becker et al. (2019) found that cooperating teachers have the most interaction with and potential influence on teacher candidates during the practicum. Similarly, Veal and Rikard (1998) found that cooperating teachers spend approximately 400 hr with teacher candidates during practicum compared with only 20 hr with university supervisors. In this study, teacher candidates did not perceive themselves to be receiving the quantity or quality of mentorship that may be required to fully enhance their development as future physical educators.

Indicatively, three teacher candidates commented that feedback from cooperating teachers was ineffective because no specific information was provided, nor did the feedback highlight areas for improvement. One teacher candidate responded, “I didn’t feel like I did well, because I would like him to at least say, ‘you did well’ or not, but the cooperating teacher didn’t say anything.” In addition, another cooperating teacher did not offer daily feedback, with the teacher candidate, stating, “No, I haven’t received any feedback at this time.” These results somewhat contradict those in Ali and Khalid (2015), who found that cooperating teachers were significantly more helpful for teacher candidates in planning lessons and during the instruction than were the university supervisors.

This study found that university supervisor performance was helpful for teacher candidate development. A teacher candidate acknowledged,

University supervisor performance is very good, she supports me and helps me with new teaching ideas. She explained with details the areas that I have to improve to be a better teacher. If I ask something, she explained with patience.

The teacher candidate perceived that the feedback received from the university supervisor was effective even though a limited number of observations were provided. Though teacher candidates were pleased with the feedback received from university supervisors, they reported that more feedback would be helpful in supporting their development.

Feedback from both mentors could be beneficial or detrimental for the student teaching experience. A collaboration between supervisors and equality of task should exist during the student teaching experience. For example, cooperating teachers suggest that university supervisors spend more time observing in the schools to better understand the challenges that teacher candidates face during practicum (Veal & Rikard, 1998). The most valued features that teacher candidates can receive from their supervisors are interaction, relationship, respect, and support—ideally with both mentors helping teacher candidates mature and develop their teaching skills (Ediger, 2009).

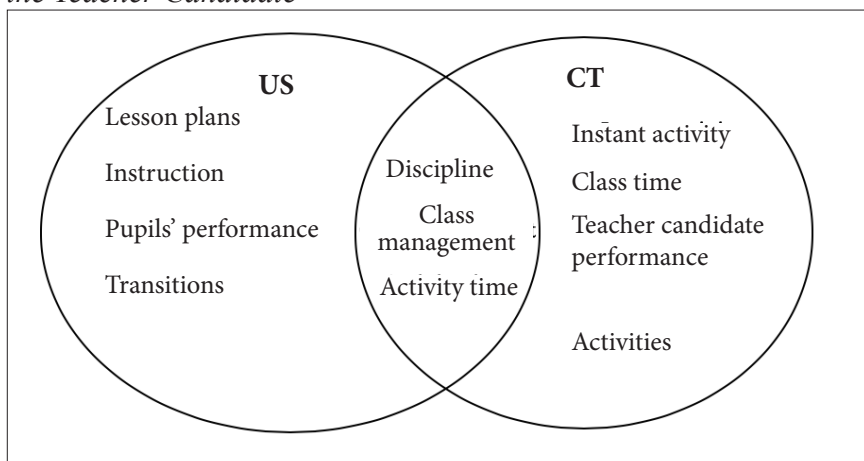
Feedback and Evaluation

Feedback is an integral part of the quality of supervision perceived by the participants in this study. Feedback here is the written and verbal information teacher candidates received from cooperating teachers and university supervisors in regard to their performance in the practicum experience. Feedback can be perceived as positive, negative, or neutral information regarding the performance of the teacher candidate. However, the provision of adequate feedback promotes the development of reflective teaching in the teacher candidate (King, 2008). The five teacher candidates constantly reflected on areas of teaching in which supervisors provided feedback (Figure 2). Both supervisors provided feedback on a variety of teaching skills. The three areas of teaching that both supervisors focused on were classroom management, discipline, and activity learning time. For example, a teacher candidate stated,

The feedback is always based on classroom management. I have a hard group, and they are in the transition from elementary to middle school. They are adapting; therefore, I don't have good classroom management.

Figure 2

Areas of Teaching That the University Supervisor (US) and Cooperating Teacher (CT) Focused on When Offering Feedback to the Teacher Candidate



When evaluated in general terms, discipline is a major area of concern for cooperating teachers and university supervisors. Managing disruptive student behavior continues to be a major area of concern in public education (Page et al., 1987) with management of undesirable behaviors being integral to the development of a positive learning environment (Graham et al., 2013).

Two teacher candidates in particular commented that the feedback from their cooperating teacher was effective but limited. One of the two explained, “On occasion, the majority of the feedback provided by my cooperating teacher is too general.” These findings are congruent with those in studies that found the quality and quantity of feedback provided from cooperating teachers may at times be limited and lacking specificity (Freiberg & Waxman, 1988; McIntyre & Killian, 1987; Richardson-Koehler, 1988; Tannehill & Zakrajsek, 1988; Veal & Rikard, 1998; Wilkins-Canter, 1997). Conversely, another candidate positively commented on his cooperating teacher being “very specific while providing feedback...it was immediate.”

When asked about areas of feedback that cooperating teachers focused on in their feedback, teacher candidates noted instant activities, classroom management, and active learning time. One teacher candidate stated, “My cooperating teacher focused on the beginning [of the lesson] and development of the lesson, classroom

management, time on task, time of the lesson, and my performance as a teacher.” These results are consistent with those in studies that indicated classroom management is a teaching area that cooperating teachers feel teacher candidates need to improve (Al-Bataineh, 2009; Imbibo & Silvernail, 1999).

Effective feedback provides teacher candidates support and direction on teaching performance (Wilhelm, 2011). Teacher candidates in this study perceived feedback from university supervisors was most effective because it assisted them in improving teaching performance, provided them suggestions for fine-tuning classroom management, and enhanced their teaching methods. One teacher candidate stated,

The feedback provided is effective because it helps me to be a better teacher and see areas that I can't see while I am teaching. The university supervisor observes my mistakes. That way I can fix them, and keep doing what I am doing well.

University supervisors also helped teacher candidates become more aware of details that may not have been at the forefront of their consciousness while teaching lessons. A candidate explained,

The university supervisor told me that I have to include more activities in my lessons, modify the tasks, and be more creative at the time of designing the activities. She provided me with websites to look for innovative activities and she also suggested to talk with a former student teacher to gather new ideas.

These results are consistent with those in studies that found feedback provided by a mentor to be effective when it is frequent, specific, and relevant to the specific needs of the teacher candidate (Acheson & Gall, 1992; Barnes & Edwards, 1984; Blank & Heathington, 1987; Morehead et al., 1988; Woolever, 1985).

One of the many responsibilities of practicum supervisors is to produce the final evaluation that a teacher candidate brings with them to their first professional assignment (Mozen, 2005). To assess and facilitate the learning process of the teacher candidate during practicum, all practicum supervisors connected to this study

employed evaluation methods. The methods used by the cooperating teacher and the university supervisor included a rubric provided by the institution and observation notes. A teacher candidate described evaluation by the university supervisor:

The objective method that my university supervisor used to evaluate me was a rubric and the subjective method was notes on her notebook. The rubric includes criteria such as the part of the lesson, lesson plan, preparation, and classroom management. The university supervisor takes notes to describe my performance in detail and to explain those areas that I didn't cover in the lesson. These notes helped me to understand why I received the score from the rubric and also offers alternatives to solve those areas that I have to improve.

Regarding the cooperating teacher, another teacher candidate stated that the cooperating teacher used an evaluation sheet: "While he was observing my lesson, he was taking notes about important areas to improve. Then he provides me a sheet with areas to improve." Nesbitt et al. (2014) suggested that even when feedback is delivered verbally, written feedback is more valuable for documentation purposes and provides additional resources for teacher candidate reflections.

Satisfaction With Relationship

Upon entering the practicum, teacher candidates may feel stressed, overwhelmed, and maybe even unprepared—all of which are legitimate feelings that influence their perceptions. With teacher candidates typically perceiving student teaching as being the most influential component of their preparation program (Ali & Khalid, 2015), both quality feedback and a supportive relationship are critical to teacher candidate development. The quality of individual relationships emerged as an influential theme in this study. Teacher candidates cited numerous areas where a better relationship among university supervisor, cooperating teacher, and teacher candidate would have made a significant difference. Liebhaber (2000) noted that practicum supervisors may help teacher candidates to discover and identify ways to improve their teaching skills. A few teacher candidates appeared to be resigned to the limited nature of their

interactions with cooperating teachers. One teacher candidate commented,

Obviously, I want to receive feedback from my cooperating teacher because he is the one who is supposed to be present and helping me, but he is never present. He is always in the office, at sports competitions, medical appointments; he is never in the classroom. I am always with the other teacher candidate. The other teacher candidate is the one who provides me feedback.

Another teacher candidate did not feel completely comfortable with the level of professionalism she perceived from her cooperating teacher and with critical statements she heard him make about students. “What I don’t like is that he speaks bad about his students, which is unprofessional. Other days he is on his cellphone.” The cooperating teacher is often the primary mentor of the teacher candidate (Becker et al., 2019; Veal & Rikard, 1998). However, teacher candidates in this study perceived that a poor relationship with the cooperating teacher resulted in lack of quality feedback.

For the quality of the student teaching experience to be enhanced, the relationship between supervisors and teacher candidates must be based on reflective dialogue and mutual trust (Beck & Kosnik, 2002; Hobson et al., 2009; Hudson, 2016; Gwyn-Paquette & Tochon, 2001). A candidate remarked,

I felt good and wasn’t nervous, since the faculty supervisor was trusting and speaks positively. He always looks for ways for me to understand. That is what a teacher candidate needs . . . to feel comfortable and calm. He always motivates me and says that I will be fine.

Another teacher candidate expressed similar appreciation regarding the quality of relationship she had with her university supervisor:

The university supervisor congratulated me for my nice work. Today, in my lesson he mentioned that I’m improving. I had to change my lesson plan because it was not developmentally appropriate. The faculty supervisor said that I shouldn’t worry about following each step of the lesson plan. It’s ok

to make necessary changes. The goal is that students learn something.

Although teacher candidates acknowledged the minimal time university supervisors spent visiting their school, the candidates were still satisfied with the quality of the relationship and feedback provided after each visit. To facilitate improvement in teaching practices, both cooperating teachers and university supervisors must be actively present during the practicum experience (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1987).

Conclusions and Implications

When done professionally, student teaching is recognized as a high-impact educational practice (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2007) that provides physical education teacher preparation majors with real-world hands-on practice that cannot be simulated in a university classroom setting. Although most teacher preparation programs strive to match teacher candidates with quality cooperating teachers within quality physical education programs, research suggests that the physical education profession may still be facing an “Easy Street” identity crisis (Bulger & Housner, 2009; Kretchmar, 2006). Challenges specific to physical education teaching include marginalization, nonteaching, overuse of traditional teaching methodologies, emotional exhaustion, role stress, and job dissatisfaction (Gaudreault et al., 2018; Richards et al., 2018; Richards et al., 2019). Areas of longstanding concern applicable to the physical education student teaching experience include curriculum content, instructional methods, social support, and measurement of student learning outcomes (Bulger & Housner, 2009).

An interesting and challenging finding from this study is the perceived lack of attention and quality of feedback received from a few of the cooperating teachers. Acknowledging the sample size and the qualitative nature of this study (relying heavily on teacher candidate perceptions), we recognize that not all cooperating teachers provide similar quality of feedback (good or bad) or develop teacher candidates in the same way. With the shared experiences of teacher candidates in this study, and with the goal to improve the quality of the student teaching experience, we recommend that university supervisors and cooperating teachers take time to reflect upon their

own interests and passions for teaching physical education, review their performance as supervisors and role models, and look for ways to further improve the overall quality of the experience within physical education student teaching.

When facing the real-world challenges of teaching physical education, teacher candidates often need immediate help and guidance. The professionals best suited to provide guidance are cooperating teachers and university supervisors. Collaboration between cooperating teachers and university supervisors is essential when it comes to feedback intended to address issues that arise during the practicum. Setting goals and expectations first and then monitoring teaching experiences could provide opportunities for congruent and relevant feedback for teacher candidates. Such learning experiences can facilitate the construction of new knowledge and develop high-quality teaching behaviors.

Based on insights and implications found throughout this report, we recommend the following strategies for enhancing student teaching experiences:

1. Encourage a collaborative and supportive environment among cooperating teachers, university supervisors, and teacher candidates. For example, implementation of an alternative model of supervision in which all three members of the triad share decision making and have an equal voice in the student teaching experience (Portelance et al., 2016; Veal & Rikard, 1998). This may include shared observation times and group (triad) feedback sessions held every other week.
2. Provide ongoing and mandatory mentoring workshops with a focus on professional development for both cooperating teachers and university supervisors with the goal to better prepare supervisors to guide teacher candidate development. It is important for cooperating teachers, university supervisors, and teacher candidates to understand the goals, roles, and expectations within the student teaching practicum experience (Russell & Russell, 2011; Tillema, 2009).
3. Address socialization factors within the physical education practicum experience including reflections and discussions on quality physical education, role stress, feeling of marginalization, and authenticity in the classroom (Cherubini,

2009; Gaudreault et al., 2018; Richards et al., 2018, 2019). Members of the student teacher triad can ask themselves, how do I contribute to a positive and productive working environment? What is the quality and quantity of feedback that I give and receive? Is the feedback immediate, consistent, and encouraging? How do my actions as a teacher candidate portray my enthusiasm for physical education? How do my actions as a supervisor portray interest in my teacher candidate's development as a future educator?

4. Examine teacher preparation curriculum to ensure that practicum coursework includes purposeful and effective assignments that link theory development with skill practice for teacher candidates (Hennissen et al., 2017). Provide additional training of all supervisors as needed to implement and hold students accountable for assignments and ultimately allow teacher candidates to develop both content knowledge and practical applications. This training includes cooperating teachers being brought into the fold as “coeducators” with knowledge about curriculum program learning goals and specific assignments linking theory to practice (Hennissen et al., 2017).
5. Focus on assisting student teachers with lesson planning, instruction, and reflection throughout the practicum experience. For example, Becker et al. (2019) support implementation of Content-Focused Coaching training sessions (e.g., working with video examples, group discussion, and role-play) during prelesson conferences and weekly seminars to enhance learning and help develop teaching competencies.
6. Provide daily (via cooperating teachers) and weekly (via university supervisors) feedback to teacher candidates. This feedback comes as formal or informal daily “debriefings” and as taking the time in weekly seminar coursework to address program learning goals and other sources of feedback (e.g., teacher candidate self-reflections). With teacher candidates needing time daily to speak with supervisors (Liebhaber, 2000), these daily or weekly debriefings may also include purposeful time set aside for teacher candidates to be able to

discuss openly and honestly their progress and their feelings about the developmental process.

Further study is needed before any conclusions about the quality of feedback provided by physical education teaching supervisors and mentors can be drawn. Hearing directly from supervisors and learning about their perceptions of their quality of feedback, and about the theory and methods behind the feedback, would be a next step in this line of inquiry. A comparison of interpretations from shared feedback between teacher candidates and supervisors certainly would also be helpful in examining interactions inherent within the triad. A study of the effectiveness of feedback (i.e., timing, delivery, interpretation) in the process of teacher candidate development is of utmost interest. This study has highlighted a clear need for the development of strategies to foster better collaboration between teacher candidates, cooperating teachers, and university supervisors (Portelance et al., 2016).

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