PATTERNS OF SUPERVISORY DISCOURSE IN POST©LESSON
PRACTICUM CONFERENCES : THE SINGAPORE EXPERIENCE

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The University of Newcastle, New South Wales, Australia

Dr. Leslie Sharpe
Senior Lecturer, Division of Policy andManagement Studies

Dr. Moo Swee Ngoh,
Senior Lecturer, Division of  InstructionalScience

Dr. Lachlan Crawford,
Lecturer, Division of Policy andManagement Studies

Prof. S. Gopinathan
Dean, School of Education

National Institute of Education,
Nanyang Technological University,
Singapore.

Further information on methodology and instrumentation is
available from,
and correspondence should be directed to :

Dr. Leslie Sharpe,
National Institute of Education,
Nanyang Technological University,
469 Bukit Timah Rd.,
Singapore 1025.

Introduction

Clearly, the question of what is said between supervisors and
student teachers, and between co™operating teachers and student
teachers in lesson conferencing goes right to the heart of
current debates about the aims, structure and control of school©based
training, and more broadly about the need to make teacher

education more relevant, and to incorporate practice©based knowledge in the teacher education curriculum  (Bartlett, L. et al. 1992;  Sharpe, L. & Gopinathan, S. 1993). It does so, because these debates  concern both the nature of the experiences that should be provided for student teachers as well as the kinds of opportunities for reflecting on and growing as a result of those experiences.  In the first case there are arguments about the correct balance between school and university©based course components, and in the second about the respective involvement of university and school staff in school©based training.   At the political level, these arguments tend to be about whose voice is more relevant and therefore whose voice shall be heard and at what cost (Bartlett, L. et al. 1992; Cornbleth, C. 1989;  Gilroy,

P. 1992); and at the pedagogical level about the kinds of knowledge, learning experiences and personnel that student teachers should be exposed to (Reynolds, M.C. 1989; Smyth,J. 1987; Woolfolk, A.E. 1989).

Surprisingly, given the large amount of literature on the practicum in general,  very few empirical studies have been conducted into practicum conferencing world©wide. Of the available studies, those conducted by Zeichner and his associates (Zeichner and Liston, 1985; Zeichner, K.M. et al. 1988) in the US are probably the best known, and we have used them as a basis for this research.  To our knowledge this research provides the first systematic data available on the conduct of post©lesson teaching practice conferences in Singapore.  The research project was an officially funded research project of the National Institute of Education and, in addition to lesson conferencing, studied the division of labour between university supervisors and school©based co™operating teachers (CTs).

Methodology

Data reported here was collected from NIE supervisors, school©based co©operating teachers and second year student teachers involved in the Diploma in Education and B.A./BSc. teaching practice held during the September term 1992.  In all, 28 Diploma in Education, 5 BA/BSc student teachers and 24 NIE staff were involved in the discourse analysis component of the research.  Students were selected at random, and invited to take part in the study.  The supervisors of those students who agreed were then approached and with the exception of one all agreed to take part in the study. Participants were invited to tape©record post©lesson conferences and, to this end, student teachers were provided with blank tape cassettes and asked to make tape©recorders available. They were asked to indicate on the tape the date, class, subject and name of their supervisor. Confidentiality was achieved by providing

stamped and addressed envelopes into which the tapes were to be
placed and sealed after recording, before posting back to NIE.
Knowing that many co©operating teachers would find our request to
tape©record their post©lesson conferences difficult to comply
with, we decided to invite them to participate on a totally
confidential basis, meaning that if they agreed to take part they
could return their tapes to us anonymously. CTs of 17 students
joined the project on this basis. This was gratifying given the
particularly invasive  nature of the project, and we wish to
express our thanks to all those involved.  Care was taken to give
only the briefest outline of the research project, and no
information was provided as to the nature of the tape analysis
itself. This was to avoid pre™structuring of the participants'
views.

On receipt at NIE, the tape recordings were transcribed and
analysed by two of the research team.  A decision was taken not
to code directly from the tapes themselves. There were two
reasons for this :  firstly,  we found this a practical
impossibility, given the poor quality of some of the tapes; and
secondly we felt that having tape transcripts would enable us to
conduct further in©depth study at a later date.  For each
transcript,  ten minute segments were chosen from either the
beginning or end of the tapes.  It was felt that this would keep
the task within manageable proportions given the number of
thought units involved.  Care was taken to ensure that at least
one segment from the beginning and one from the end of each tape

was chosen for each supervisor or CT who had completed more than
one tape recording. In all, 92 post©lesson conference tapes were
transcribed by the research team and then analysed using the
discourse inventory :   57 from NIE supervisor conferences, and
35 from CT conferences.

Though very time consuming, transcribing the tapes ourselves gave
us a better 'feel' for the data than would have been the case had
we employed others to do it for us.

3. Discourse Inventory

Analysis of the tape recordings was accomplished using a modified
version of an inventory originally constructed by Zeichner and
his associates. Whilst the essential features of this instrument
were retained, a number of important changes were made in the
light both of local conditions and our difficulties in using the
Zeichner instrument.

Like Zeichner, the key measure of discourse that we incorporated
into our discourse inventory was the "thought unit".  By this we

mean the smallest discriminable segment of verbal behaviour to
which the observer, after training, can assign a category listed
on the discourse inventory (Bales, R. 1951)  The thought unit
measurement provided us with a way of quantifying discourse. In
terms of what to measure, we also followed Zeichner in making a
distinction between the substance and manner of discourse.
Essentially, this involved a distinction between what was talked
about (substantive discourse) and how it was talked about
(practical discourse).  All told, we included 8 substantive and 4
practical categories, producing 32 possible combinations for each
thought unit recorded on the inventory.

Practical Discourse

Our final inventory (Appendix 1) contained four types of practical
discourse.  However, we decided not to take separate measures of
a number of sub©categories, as Zeichner had done, because we
found this gave the instrument a complexity that confounded us
and ruled out any possibility of achieving adequate reliability.
Thus, though we retained the subcategories of "descriptive",
"informative", and "hermeneutic" as useful descriptors of
different types of factual discourse, we decided not to collect
separate measures for them, preferring instead one overall
measure of each major category.  A similar paring down was done
for the other practical discourse categories, as discussed below.
The four major categories of factual discourse are :

(a) Factual

By factual discourse we mean discourse pertaining to "what has
occurred in a teaching situation or with what will occur in the
future". The following are typical examples of discourse
classifiedas factual in our analysis:


Supervisor: "What will you do in your lesson ?" (1 TU)

Student: "I will let three of them act it out in front of the
class (1 TU), and after that a few of them will be acting out the
different parts ( 1 TU ), and after that they'll have to finish
off their story." (1 TU)


(b) Prudential Discourse

By prudential discourse we mean discourse that " revolves around
evaluations of what has been accomplished".  It includes
instructions, advice/opinion, evaluation and support.

Typical examples of prudential discourse from our study are :

Supervisor: "O.K. I certainly enjoyed your Art and Craft lesson
just now. I thinkit's really fantastic."       (1 TU)

CT: " Now, regarding your point about your back being to the
class, now you're not supposed to write a lot of information on
the board." ( 1 TU )

(c) Justificatory Discourse.

Justificatory discourse "entails the identification of various
types of reasons and rationale underlying past, present, or
future pedagogical actions and factors related to such actions".
The following are typical examples of justificatory discourse taken
from our analyses :

Student: " That's why I told them what the passage required and
handed outthe...."  ( supervisor interrupts). ( 1 TU )

Supervisor: " You must put them in somesequence
(1 prudential TU), otherwise the children will have to hunt for
words. )
( 1 justificatory TU )

(d) Critical Discourse

We found this category the most difficult to work with.
Zeichner's definition seemed to us to be too narrow,  which might
explain the very low percentage of thought units classified as
critical in his study (only half of one percent).  We decided to
retain Zeichner's definition that critical discourse "assesses
the adequacy of rationales offered within the realm of
Justificatory Discourse", but to extend it to include discourse
intended to elicit critical reflection on, as well as student
suggestions about, alternative pedagogical action.  Critical
discourse, on this definition is about getting the student to
reflect either on the adequacy of pedagogical reasons or to
consider alternative pedagogical actions. We feel that this
should be clearly distinguished from prudential discourse where
supervisors or co©operating teachers make suggestions to the
student teacher about alternativepedagogical actions.

Examples of critical discourse taken from our study, using this
extended definition, are:

Supervisor:  "Now what ways could you revise with them other than
using a verbal feedback method that you were doing to©day?"  ( 1
TU )

CT: "What could you have done in that situation ?"   (1 TU)

Student:"...I emphasized on the new song that they are going to learn from 'Sing-a©Ling' and in the song I think the beat of the song is important, that the children feel the beat of the song." (1 Factual TU and 1 Justificatory TU)

The supervisor responds with a critical question :

Supervisor:   "Why do you say that ?" ( 1 TU )

Student:"I need to give the students more primary tasks before they couldattempt such a high level".   (1 TU)

## 5. Substantive Discourse

Substantive discourse categories are concerned with what is discussed in post©lesson conferences.  As before, we generally adopted Zeichner's categories, but added one extra category and divided a further one into two. Our final research instrument had the following eight categories :

Goals: "Discourse pertaining to the goals for the past, present, and future actions".

Curriculum and Materials: "Discourse pertaining to the content of lessons ( past, present or future ) and materials used or to be used".

Procedures: This category was divided into two parts :
Instructional Procedures: "Discourse pertaining to methods used in past, present, or future lessons," but excluding matters of classroom management.

Management: Matters pertaining to classroom management  and discipline used in past, present, or future lessons.
Lesson, General: "Discourse pertaining to past, present, or future lessons where distinctions are not made between procedures, goals, and curriculum materials."

Students: "Discourse concerning the actions, thoughts, and products of students".

Context: "Discourse concerning various factors not covered under the previous categories:classroom context, school context, community context, pupils' homes, supervisor's or student teacher's biography, student teaching seminars, educational research, co©operating teachers, and the supervisory process itself."

Student Teacher: Discourse pertaining to characteristics of the
student teacher such as voice, height and attitude.

As indicated earlier, each thought unit was coded using both
substantive and practical categories, for example as
"Goals/Factual", "Students/ Prudential" and so on. Certain
utterances were not coded,  for example concurrences in the form
of "mm", "yes"; repetition of the last words spoken by the
previous speaker; and statements such as "O.K. I'll pass you the
form." Care was also taken not to be misled by poor English and
needless repetition.

6. Inter©rater Reliability

Early trials of the discourse inventory were discouraging,
leading to recurrent problems in achieving acceptable levels of
inter©rater reliability.  There were two main problems.  The
first concerned attempts to code thought units directly from the


tape©recordings themselves, without making transcripts.  The
second was the complexity of instantaneous judgement required by
the multiple subcategories that we were trying to use.  When
combined with considerable variability in the quality of tapes
and dialogue, these problems became insurmountable, and we
decided tosimplify procedures as discussed above.

All four members of the team took part in the first stages of the
inter©rater reliability trials, but during the later stages this
was reduced to three when one of the team left on sabbatical.
Very high levels of inter©rater reliability were eventually
achieved between the three raters.  At that point, somewhat
ironically, one of the three was hospitalized leaving just two
team members totranscribe and code the tape recordings.


Results

2,292 supervisor, 1,165 CT and 1,152 student teacher thought units
were recorded, totalling 4,609
thought units in all. At this stage, we have not measured the
length of conferences, but duringÑ
our analysis of the tapes it was clear that there were marked
differences in length between
supervisor and CT conferences, with supervisor conferences on
average typically being at least
twice as long. Of the 1,152 student  thought units, 944 were
recorded in conferences with
supervisors and 208 in conferences with CTs.  Analysis of this data

has so far focussed on a
number of key questions concerning the distribution of thought
units between the three categories
of participants in different post©lesson conferences.  These will be
dealt with in turn.

Proportion of Supervisor/CT vs Student Thought Units

Taking all post lesson conferences together, student teachers were
found to have contributed
exactly 25% of the total thought units. Supervisors and CTs accounted
for 75 %.

There was a significant difference, however, in the proportion of
student TUs recorded in
supervisor and CT conferences. In supervisor conferences students
recorded 944 out of a total of
3,236 TUs ( 29 % ), whereas in CT conferences they recorded 208 out
of a total of 1,373 TUs.
( 15 % )

Substantive Categories

Table 1 shows the distribution of thought units between the
substantive categories for all post
lesson conferences. It shows that overall, talk about lesson
procedures dominated discussion,
taking up almost 40 % of time.  This is followed by  talk about
students which took up around
17 % of time, and talk about management and curriculum materials
which together accounted for
just over a further 25 % of time. The remaining four categories
accounted for fewer than 20 %


of thought units, with discussion on goals accounting for only 3%.

TABLE 1: Distribution of Thought Units between the 8 Substantive

Table 2 compares the distribution of substantive
thought units in supervisor and CT conferences.
The distributions are almost identical, with the exception of the
curriculum/materials and
instructional procedures categories.  On average a greater
proportion of the former TUs were
recorded in supervisor conferences, and a greater proportion of the
latter in CT conferences.
However, the picture is one of similarities rather than
differences.  This is further confirmed by
an analysis of student TUs which produced a similar distribution

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for both supervisor and CT
conferences.

TABLE 2 : Distribution of Substantive Thought Units in Supervisor
and CT Conferences


Practical Discourse

Table 3 shows the overall distribution of practical thought units
between the four categories. Just
over 50 % of Factual thought units were recorded, followed by 31%
Prudential, 13% Justificatory
and a tiny 3 % of Critical thought units.

TABLE 3: Overall Distribution of Practical ThoughtUnits

As Table 4 shows, however, interesting variations appear when
comparisons are made between
supervisors, CTs and students in the proportion of thought units
recorded. Though the supervisor
and CT distributions are almost identical, there are clear
differences between them and the
student teachers. Whereas supervisors and CTs recorded around 40%
Prudential Discourse,
student teachers recorded a greater proportion of Factual, as well
as Justificatory and Critical
thought units.

TABLE 4: Proportion of Practical Thought Units bySupervisors,
        Co©operating Teachers and StudentTeachers

Factual/Substantive Combinations

In practice, practical and substantive thought units were combined,
such that each thought unit
was scored on both dimensions.  Thus a thought unit might have been
recorded as Goals/Factual,
or Instructional Procedures/Prudential.  Table 5 shows, in rank
order, the ten overall highest
frequencies for these combinations. It is clear that post©lesson
conferences were dominated by
mainly factual and prudential discourse on matters to do with
instructional procedures, students
and curriculum materials.

TABLE 5 :  Most FrequentPractical©Substantive Combinations

Student Diaries

It was obvious to us from the discourse analysis that there were large variations in the quantity
and quality of discourse that the student teachers experienced. Many post©lesson conferences
were of only ten minutes' duration, and contained few memorable points. Others, in contrast, ran
to over 30 minutes and contained large quantities of information. Given this variation, we
decided that it was important to try to measure the impact of discourse on the student teachers.
Additionally, we hoped that the diaries  (Appendix 2 ) would be able to shed some light on the
reasons why the student teachers had made relatively few comments in post©lesson conferences,
and why discourse had typically been of a low level.

A random sample of 31 students from the larger sample completed the diaries. They were
requested to complete the diary after each post©lesson observation conference.  A total of 152
completed diary entries were returned to the research team at the end of the teaching practice.
79 entries were based on conferences with NIE supervisors and 73 with CTs.

Impact of Conferences on the Student Teachers

The central assumptions of post©lesson conferences are that students will remember something
of what has been said, be convinced of its relevance and  value, and will desire to change their
practice in some way.

We found that, on average, students recorded an average of 3 points per conference that they
remembered having been discussed either by their supervisor or CT.  Students stated that they
were already aware of 59% of the points made by their supervisors and 62% of the points made
by their CTs.  For the most part, then, post©lesson conferences covered ground already familiar
to the student teachers ( Turney, C. 1985  ).  Given the preponderance of factual and prudential,
over justificatory and critical discourse, this is perhaps to be expected.

With regard to how relevant and valuable the conferences had been, we asked students to

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indicate which of these points they agreed with and which they disagreed with.  The vast
majority of students ( 88% ) stated that they agreed with the points made.  Regarding specific
pieces of advice given, we found  that students indicated that they had received an average of
1.4  suggestions for each supervisor diary entry and 1.1 suggestions for each CT diary entry.

Table  6 shows how useful the students found these suggestions to be.


TABLE 6  : Students' Perception of the Usefulness of Supervisor
            and CT Suggestions


A final observation is that when asked whether
they thought that the supervisor/CT had been
pleased overall with their lesson, on 91% of occasions students
reported that their supervisors and
CTs had been pleased or quite pleased.

It seems, then, that student teachers were able to remember a
number of points made and some
of the advice given in post lesson conferences.  ( 1 )  However, few
of the points made appear
to have been new to the student teachers and for the most part
students appear to have been in
agreement with them.  Students on the whole found the advice given
to be useful, though almost
30% either thought it to have little use, or were not prepared to
comment.  Furthermore, the vast
majority felt that their efforts were appreciated by their CTs and
supervisors..

Student Silences and Low Level Discourse inPost©Lesson Conferences

As indicated earlier, only 25% of discourse was student discourse,
though a higher number of
student thought units was recorded in supervisor than in CT
conferences.  Also,  the majority
of discourse was factual.  Analysis of the diaries suggests reasons
for this.  With regard to
silence, it could be, of course, that students were silent because
for the most part they were
listening to points that they were already aware of. Alternatively,
they could have been afraid to
over©expose their own felt inadequacies and be strategically
complying (Lacey, C. 1977).   With

regard to the quality of discourse, it could be that they were
simply lacking in 'oral intelligence'
(Lowman, J. 1984). In this respect, an earlier study into
distinction teaching practice students in
Singapore had concluded that distinction students excelled in those
aspects of teaching most
heavily reliant on language skills (Sharpe, L. 1993).  When we
analysed the diaries, however, we
found that students were prepared to offer reasons for both their
agreements and disagreements.
Our impression was that for many students, the diaries offered an
opportunity for reflection not
afforded in the conferences.  For example one student remarked,  "
I agree with my supervisor's
comments that the pace of the lesson was too slow because if  the
pace was quicker then I
would maintain the pupils' enthusiasm".  Comments such as these
suggest that the student
teachers were capable of higher order, justificatory discourse and
were not as acquiescent as their
long silences in post©lesson conferences would suggest.

As we analysed the diaries, we were beginning to see that there
were differences in 'opportunity


to talk ' in the conferences and that some supervisors and CTs were
able to create and sustain
these, whilst others tended to 'close ' them down.   To test this
possibility, we identified a number
of instances of disagreements recorded in the diaries, and were
able to match them with tape
transcripts. We were particularly interested in whether the
students had voiced their disagreements
during the post©lesson conference, and, if they had not, whether
they had been given an
opportunity to do so.   The following is one of the six
disagreements we were able to match in
this way.

The student teacher recorded 4 points that she remembered
from the 8 minute long post lesson
conference on her science lesson.  She indicated disagreement with
the second point, where the
supervisor had pointed out that "slides on the different
communities are also available".   In this
case, the disagreement is located in a long passage of 11
supervisor thought units, lasting 3
minutes.   The following is the last part of this
passage:

Supervisor : "One suggestion is, I don't know whether you realize, is I think the science centre©
I'm not too sure about CDIS they offer slides on the different community.  I don't
know whether the school has bought sets of that because I've gone to Town
Convent and Town Convent has a set of that, the slides of the animals, so they
seem to show a greater variety.  But of course if the school doesn't provide all the
AZA, so we have to fit in also with what the school can offer us.  Yes, there was
something I noticed, that is some students finish off the work more quickly than
the others.  Have you planned other activities for the quicker students?

Stu. teacher: It was like five minutes before...

Supervisor : No more than that.  Some finished about 15 minutes before the end.... ( another
long passage ).

The student does not have an opportunity to explain that she had approached the CT for slides
only to find that the school did not have any and that the slide machine had broken. Despite not
having had the opportunity to discuss the availability of slides, the student teacher wrote
positively about the conference.  She correctly identified the main suggestions made, was aware
of the reasons for them, and found the suggestions helpful.

We found further evidence of a lack of opportunity for discussion in responses to the question,
'Were you asked to explain why you planned and taught the lesson in the way that you did ?'
80% indicated that they had not been asked to explain. Those


students who were asked to explain
their planning and teaching procedures had varying responses.  They included, "I planned
according to the teachers' guide"; "I had to adopt a direct approach because I was not sure how
much they knew about fractions" ; and "I wanted to convince children that water plants can
produce oxygen".  These comments suggest that the students teachers were able to provide
justifications when asked for them.  However, 80% report that no

justifications were invited by
their supervisors and CTs.

Supervisory Discourse: Some Observations

The Telling Style of SupervisionDiscourse

Supervision discourse on this teaching practice was characterised
by what we term a telling style.
In common with findings reported by Zeichner for the United States,
discourse in post©lesson
conferences was dominated by the university supervisor or
school©based co©operating teacher, and
was commonly of a factual or prudential nature. Analysis of the
tape©recordings and student
diaries revealed that co©operating teachers and university teachers
were typically eager to tell;
eager to pass on to students the wealth of experience that they had
accumulated over the years.
On average only one quarter of all talk in post©lesson conferences
was student talk.  Just as
school©teachers have been found to speak for three quarters of the
time in classrooms, both our
supervisors and co©operating teachers similarly dominated talk in
post©lesson conferences, though
this was more evident with the latter than the former.

The use of the 'thought unit' enabled us to take measures of the
substance and quality of
discourse.  Regarding substance, we found  that the dominant focus
was teaching methodology
and very little time was devoted to discourse concerning pupils,
discipline problems or contextual
matters such as the children's home background.  Student teachers,
for the most part, did not
appear to need telling how to deal with discipline on this teaching
practice.  We found this result
surprising given the general view that  discipline and survival are
the major concerns of the
student teacher.

Quality of Discourse

Our findings with regard to the quality of discourse, however, were
much more in keeping with
those reported in the literature.  Discourse was found to be
predominantly of a factual or
prudential nature, and there were few instances of justificatory or
critical discourse. In common
with others, we have characterised such factual and prudential

discourse as being 'low level'
discourse where the focus of discussion is on what is and should be


the case. In contrast,  'high
level' discourse is characterised by justificatory and critical
thought. Both supervisors and co™
operating teachers were more prone to tell, and especially to tell
what should be done, than they
were to involve themselves in discussions of why things should be
done in a particular way or
whether there might be other, better ways of doing them. Of course,
by describing discourse as
being low level, we are not decrying its quality and the undoubted
value of the observations and
professional judgements involved. What we are saying is that it
might have been moved to a
higher, more explicitly analytic level.

A comparison of university and co©operating teacher discourse
revealed that, overall, both
adopted the same telling style reported above.  Both appeared to
share what we have
characterised as an apprenticeship model of supervision.  By this we
mean that the context of
encounters was fundamentally hierarchical © between  mentor and
apprentice, the latter expected
to learn and replicate rather than criticise and innovate. Both
appeared to draw on a shared set
of ideas about what constitutes good teaching, and these ideas
tended to be rooted in the reality
of the classes under discussion.  As a consequence, we could not
detect any major differences
in the content of discourse.  For example, we did not find
university supervisors making links
with university courses and we did not find co©operating teachers
drawing on their detailed
knowledge of pupils. Both were preoccupied with the immediacy of
the classroom and the
discourse of both drew on a shared body of conventional wisdom about
teaching.

Opportunity to Talk

Supervision involves a number of tasks, but essentially it involves
talk.  For student teachers,
opportunities to talk with experienced and knowledgeable supervisors
provide an opportunity to
learn and develop.  It is difficult to say from the data exactly
how much of the time spent by

university staff and CTs was devoted to talk.   From the student questionnaire, we know that on
average CTs spent around 5.5 hrs per week helping the student teacher, and university supervisors
a further 1.5 hrs.  Presumably some of this time would have involved discussion over and above
that in post©lesson conferences.  With regard to formal post©lesson supervision conferences,
however, the data is clearer.  One quarter of the students report an average length of 10 minutes
or less, and a further 25 % an average of 20 minutes or less.  Only 14% of students report an
average post©lesson conference of 30 minutes or over.   The length of the tape recordings that
we analysed were of similar duration.  Very few pre©lesson conferences, and a negligible number


of joint meetings between supervisors, CTs and student teachers,  were held.

With regard to opportunities for students to talk
in post lesson conferences, we found that, taking
all post lesson conferences together, student teachers contributed exactly 25% of the total thought
units. Supervisors and CTs together accounted for 75 %. However, there were two important
differences between university supervisor and co©operating teacher conferences.  Firstly, the
conferences of the former were typically longer; and secondly, there was much more opportunity
for students to talk in supervisor than in co©operating teacher conferences. In supervisor
conferences students recorded 944 out of a total of 3,236 TUs ( 29 % ), whereas in CT
conferences they recorded 208 out of a total of 1,373 TUs. ( 15 % )

Closure of Talk

Despite differences in skill and role expectations, the adherence to this telling style led to a
tendency of both university staff and co©operating teachers to close down opportunities for
students to talk.  For whatever reasons, there was an urgency to tell : to tell what had taken place
and to tell what should be done to improve matters.  In extreme cases, students did not say a
single word, except for a 'thank you' at the end of the conference.  In some cases, the supervisor
clearly began with an intention of opening up discussion, as when

conferences began with an
opening question, such as, "Well, how do you think it went ?"
However, this opening gambit
rarely translated itself into a sustained discussion.  More often
than not, the supervisor took over,
working through what appeared to be a pre©arranged agenda of
observations and advice.    At
many points in the tapes we came across instances of where
discourse might have been moved
to a higher level, but was closed down prematurely.  In some cases,
students pointed to instances
in their diaries where they had wanted to justify and explain a
particular course of action but
were cut short and were unable to do so.  By closing down
opportunities to talk, ipso facto
opportunities for reflection were closed down too.  Feedback, then,
was in danger of being
restricted to a rehearsal of the status quo, instead of being an
exploration of alternative
possibilities  Of course, there were supervisors who were able to
engage their students and move
discourse to a high level.  When student teachers were given such
an opportunity to talk, they
typically used it, giving the lie to the stereotype of the reticent
Singapore student, as well as to
the assumption that student talk is inhibited by fears of
assessment.   Such supervisors used a
range of skills such as open©ended questions, 'wait time', and
prompts such as, "Did you consider
other ways of doing that ?" , "Why did you choose to do that in this


way ?".  Above all, they
seemed to value the relevance of what the student teacher had to say.


As might be expected, university supervisors were more skilled in
conducting conferences, though
we did find some co©operating teachers who were equally skillful.
This is to be expected, of
course, as CTs for the most part were not trained in supervision
skills, and, in any case, did not
see lesson conferencing as their main role.  Nevertheless,
differences in training cannot explain
the overall pattern of telling and closure that we have identified.
 It is likely that a combination
of reasons accounts for this, particularly variations in
conferencing skill, a commitment to
dialogue, as well  as the management of large supervision loads and
teaching commitments.

FOOTNOTE

1.  To date, however, we have not been able to study how the number
and quality of points
remembered might be related to variations in the style and length of
conferences.

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