



## “Oh God, She is Looking at Every Little Thing I am Doing!” Student Teachers’ Constructions of the Observation Experience

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This qualitative study examines the variance in the ways that four student teachers made meaning of the experience of being observed by their cooperating teachers and university supervisors. Using Kegan’s (1994) theory of cognitive development, the study focuses on the differences in the ways the teacher candidates constructed the prospect of being observed, and the varied ways they received and interpreted feedback. The study found that for two of the participants feedback from a mentor was very important to their teaching identity; because of this observations were both significant and anxiety inducing. However the second two participants were able to remove their identities from feedback and thus felt observations were an opportunity to think about how to improve their teaching. The participants also differed in whether they expected the post observation conference to be a time to receive expert knowledge or to discuss solutions and best practice.

*Keywords:* student teaching, university supervisor, cooperating teacher, mentor, cognitive development

Student teaching is by nature a complex endeavor. Preservice teachers enter student teaching with their own expectations for and visions of teaching, which do not often match the reality of their student teaching placement (Cole & Knowles, 1993; Doppen, 2007). Student teaching is further complicated because it involves negotiating the ideas and opinions of three key people: the student teacher, the cooperating teacher, and the university supervisor. This triumvirate, referred to as the student teaching triad, is meant to be a support system for preservice teachers as they learn how to be teachers. However connecting three people, each with his or her own ideas about the purpose of student teaching, can be a difficult endeavor. Teacher education programs expect student teachers to take initiative, and demonstrate their knowledge of best teaching practices; while cooperating teachers recognize these students as novices with much to learn (Fimian & Blanton, 1987; Koerner, Rust, &

Baumgartner, 2002). From its inception the possibility for conflicting goals and expectations in student teaching is high because the connection between the universities and the schools is weak (Zeichner, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2009).

The negotiation and communication in the student teaching triad is further complicated by the fact that university supervisors and cooperating teachers may feel that their role has not been clearly defined (Gardiner, 2009; Steadman & Brown, 2011; Valencia, Martin, Place, & Grossman, 2009). It is common for cooperating teachers to know nothing of the practices and approaches to teaching advocated at the university level, and for the supervisors to be unfamiliar with the goals and methods of the school districts (Zeichner, 2010). Although discrepancies and difficulties still arise in individual programs, as a field, we have moved toward a better picture of the university supervisor and cooperating

teacher roles in the student teaching triad. There are attempts across the country to make better connections between the schools and universities as a way to make supervisors and cooperating teachers more connected and aware of goals for best practices (Zeichner, 2010). However, with few exceptions, researchers have not been as diligent in including student teacher's voices and perspectives on this triumvirate (Clift & Brady, 2005).

Specifically there has been little research on how student teachers make meaning of the observation experience. Although the number of observations vary from program to program, having a mentor give a student teacher feedback on a lesson is generally accepted as an important part of learning to teach and learning to be a reflective practitioner (Schon, 1987). Rippon and Martin (2003) asserted that is important to consider the power structure inherent in the mentor mentee relationship; the nature of observations brings the inherent power imbalance to the forefront. Both the university supervisor and the cooperating teacher play the role of evaluator at some point, creating an inherent power imbalance in the triad in which the student teacher may feel that she is powerless in relation to the other members. Valencia et al. (2009) found that student teachers devise ways to negotiate this relationship by using teaching strategies or presenting personalities that they think align with their cooperating teachers expectations; the cooperating teachers are often unaware that the student teacher may be uncomfortable or unsure of a specific practice or method.

It has oft been lamented that in post observation discussions the members of the triad do not often engage in critical discussions of pedagogy (Borko & Mayfield, 1995; Dinkleman, 1998; Griffin, 1989; Valencia et al., 2009); this void has been attributed to the improper training and resources of the cooperating teachers and supervisors, but this might not be the only explanation. Chubbuck, Clift, Allard, and Quinian (2001) found that novice teachers were more comfortable discussing issues of pedagogy with their peers than with mentors or others in an evaluatory role. It may be that the lack of discussion has to do with the way the student teachers (or possibly other members of the triad) construct their roles and relationships in the observation and post observation conference. The purpose of this study is to examine the ways in which student teachers construct meanings of the observation experience, including the prospect of being observed, their thoughts during the observation, and the ways they value feedback from their cooperating teachers and university supervisors.

#### **Conceptual Framework**

This study uses Kegan's (1982, 1994) constructive developmental framework as a lens through which to examine student teachers' interpretations of the observation experience. Rodgers and Scott (2008) presented Kegan's (1982, 1994) constructive developmental theory as a useful lens for examining the

*internal* cognitive states of teacher candidates and understanding their personal epistemologies. Fantozzi (2012) also found that Kegan's framework could help explain the differences in the way that student teachers defined success in student teaching. Kegan's framework examines *how* individuals make sense of the influences, relationships, and sources of knowledge in their world. At the center of this framework is the idea that, as humans, each day we engage in making meaning of our experiences and relationships. Kegan delineates meaning making into five orders of consciousness with six sub-stages between each order (or threshold) of meaning making. At each order of consciousness Kegan considers how individuals construct knowledge and navigate relationships. Specifically he notes that individuals making meaning from different orders of consciousness vary in the way that they receive feedback from others, particularly how they interpret critical or constructive criticism. Kegan's focus on the way individuals make meaning of feedback makes it a useful lens for examining the way student teachers interpret the observation experience (see Kegan, 1994, for more detail).

#### **Kegan's Theory of Constructive Development**

Drawing the work of Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg, Kegan posits that the way humans make meaning of their experiences is not static, but develops over a lifetime. He separates this trajectory of meaning making into five orders of consciousness. Each order describes a threshold of meaning making which addresses an individual's ontology, epistemology, and approaches to both intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships. Kegan's stages begin in infancy and childhood (the first order of consciousness), and continue into adulthood, although individuals may never evolve to the fifth stage in their lifetime. At the second order of consciousness individuals are unable to reflect on their needs and wants; they are concerned with the "facts" and tend to see the world in dualities of "right and wrong," or "cause and effect." At the third order an individual's sense of self becomes more abstract and removed from their needs; it is instead directed toward loyalty to ideas or the groups to which one belongs. People are able to think abstractly about their ideas, but since their construction of self is co-constructed with ideas or with others, they look to external sources of authority for ideas, values, and standards. At the fourth order of consciousness individuals are the author of their inner psychological lives. People are able to separate themselves from relationships realizing that, they control their own actions, but they are not in control or responsible for others' actions or feelings. This does not lead to an ignoring of others' feelings or a lack of empathy, rather at the fourth order one is able to step back and examine the relationship with one's own internal values, beliefs, and loyalties in mind. The fifth order of consciousness individuals reflect not only on their own values, but on

the way those values and beliefs are shaped by the systems in which they participate.

As discussed later, the participants in this study were at or near the third and fourth order of consciousness. This was expected of these college aged student teachers because although constructive development is not directly tied to age, prior research indicates that most college students are functioning from the stages, and substages between and including the third and fourth order (Baxter-Magolda, 1999; Kegan 1994). The third order of consciousness is also referred to as the socialized perspective, indicating that the self is defined by the reactions and expectations of others. At this stage, individuals feel responsible for others' feelings and hold others responsible for their feelings. Of particular note in this study, at the third order criticism is received as commentary on the self not on the actions, as those operating from the socialized perspective do not divorce others' opinions of their actions from their identity.

The fourth order of consciousness is also referred to as a self-authoring perspective because, at this stage, an individual's values and beliefs are central to the self. Relationships, affiliations and outside perspectives are separate from one's identity and as such are more easily reflected upon and manipulated. Criticism is received as a point of view to take into account along with other points of view and ones' own assessment. At the fourth order, individuals have a clear sense of self and thus are able to distinguish others' evaluations and expectations from their own internal standards and gauge how they match up. Perhaps more importantly for student teachers, at the fourth order individuals are able to divorce the other's opinions or expectations from their constructed identities. Feedback then is received as a comment on the act or event that was observed rather than a judgment of the individual.

Kegan (1994) argued that the modern world demands self-authorship from people. Rodgers and Scott (2008) suggested that teacher education programs may have a hidden expectation that their teacher candidates are functioning from the fourth order of consciousness. It seems functioning in this way would be an asset in navigating the student teaching triad relationships, particularly when considering the power relationships inherent in student teaching, and specifically in the observation experience. The very structure of student teaching positions the cooperating teacher in particular, but also the university supervisor, as authorities on teacher knowledge and practice. In placing students in specific classrooms and assigning them a liaison to the university, a teacher education program marks these mentors as experts on teaching (Davies, 2005; Butler & Cuenca, 2012). Teacher education programs, however, would like student teachers to make instructional decisions independent from or at the least in concert with their expert mentors.

Examining these authorities using Kegan's constructive developmental theory highlights the difficulty student teachers operating from the third order consciousness might have. At the third order or socialized perspective, one's identity is intertwined with external authority, making disapproval or the possibility of disapproval difficult and anxiety inducing. From this perspective the power differential inherent in student teaching is difficult to navigate, and may be one that they choose not to try, but rather choose to align themselves with their cooperating teachers. From a fourth order perspective, mentors are still acknowledged as an authority, but their identity is not intertwined with external approval, but with their own beliefs and values. Disapproval or feedback from a mentor is less costly to their developing identities, rather they are able to see feedback as a part of their learning, and thus able to receive or reject it. The observation experience brings the hidden expectation of fourth order consciousness to the forefront. In a way a student teacher must be able to receive criticism as removed from the self in order to get the most benefit from post observation feedback. Student teaching, and particularly observations, seems to have an intrinsic power structure and an expectation that students will be able to adeptly navigate this structure. This study aims to use Kegan's theory as a framework to examine the similarities and differences in the ways student teachers' who were operating at differing orders of consciousness make meaning of the observation experience.

### **Methods**

This was a qualitative study using the Subject Object Interview (SOI), an instrument developed by Kegan and colleagues (Lahey, Souvaine, Kegan, Goodman, & Felix, 1988) to measure an individual's order of consciousness, and using analytic induction with Kegan's framework as a guide, to examine themes both within and across cases. This study was not only focused on the results of the SOI, but also ensuring that the data represented the teacher candidate's interpretation of their experiences over the course of their student teaching. As such I gathered data through focus groups and interviews multiple times in the study.

### **Context**

The participants in this study were enrolled in a nationally recognized Secondary Education program at a mid-Atlantic state university; all teacher candidates in this five-year program work towards a bachelor's degree in a content area and a master's of arts in teaching. The student teaching internship in this program took place over the course of 16 weeks in a high or middle school placement in the surrounding county.

Each participant had one cooperating teacher and one university supervisor who observed, evaluated, and advised them throughout the placement. None of the participants shared a cooperating teacher, but some shared

a university supervisor. The cooperating teachers were provided with a manual describing their and the student teacher's responsibilities and suggesting possible timelines for student teachers to gradually take responsibility for instruction as well as release it back to the cooperating teacher. The cooperating teachers were all invited to a professional development session on supporting student teachers in their classrooms. The university supervisors were all graduate students who had completed a two-day training session in observing and supporting student teachers; this training was supplemented by follow up meetings during the semester to discuss successes and challenges. In this case, each university supervisor was in their second year of supervising student teachers. Following the expectations of the program their university supervisors completed six formal observations, collected weekly journals, and met with the student teacher and cooperating teacher for three triad meetings. Both the university supervisor and the cooperating teacher completed midterm and final evaluations of their respective student teachers.

At the time of the study I was a graduate student at this institution and as such I had some access to the student participants. Although I was not a secondary university supervisor, I had knowledge of the program language and expectations, and had supervised elementary student teachers. My experiences with these students also let me see that cooperating teachers, university supervisors and student teachers do not necessarily interpret of the events of student teaching in the same way. Rather than balance the differing perspectives I chose to privilege the interpretations of the student teachers, and as such I purposely did not have any contact with the cooperating teachers or university supervisors. Instead I focused on gathering the student teachers' constructions through multiple focus groups and interviews.

### **Participants**

There were four participants in this study. All were white women in their early twenties, and history majors in the Social Studies Education program in a school of education recognized for its excellence (Darling-Hammond, 2006). With the exception of Katelyn, each student teacher was observed by both her cooperating teacher and her university supervisor; Katelyn's cooperating teacher never completed a formal observation. Their university supervisors were doctoral students in the Social Studies education department at the school of education. In addition, Kara and Jamie shared the same university supervisor, as did Katelyn and Jessica.

### **Data Collection**

I gathered data through two methods: focus groups and interviews. The four focus groups occurred about a month apart throughout the duration of the teacher candidates' student teaching internships. The three semi-

structured interviews, the SOI (Lahey et al., 1988), and two follow up interviews, took place at the middle and end of their student teaching.

Kegan and his colleagues developed the SOI as a means of testing the validity of Kegan's theory and as a tool for further research. The SOI interview process uses a set of ten cards with one or two words on each (for example, "anxious," "torn" or "success"). Each participant was given the set of ten cards and was then asked to recall or jot down a short note about a recent experience related to the word on the card. For example, when the participant was given the card "success," she was prompted with the following: "If you were to think of some times when you felt triumphant or that you had achieved something that was difficult for you or especially satisfying, that you were afraid might come out another way, or a sense that you had overcome something, recall or jot down a few words to remind you of those times." After the participant thought about all ten cards, I asked her to choose one of the ten cards to talk about. Probing questions were used to clarify the structure of the participants' answers, not the content. For example, if a participant said she felt success when she received an award, the interviewer might have asked, "Why did this award make you feel successful?" or "What would have happened if you did not have this award?" The questions attempted to elucidate *why* something is important, or *how* the participant constructed meaning rather than to focus on the *what* of events or feelings.

The focus groups and second and third interviews were semi-structured. The questions focused on the participants' experiences in student teaching and evolved as the study progressed. The questions for subsequent interviews and focus groups were written in response to the comments the participants had made during earlier focus groups and interviews. This evolution of questions helped establish the content of each student teaching experience, including their thoughts and feelings about the relationships in the student teaching triad. In addition, I also asked follow up questions based on the SOI, such as "why does that bother you?" or "what about that made it an indicator of success?" to probe the way they made meaning. Each interview and focus group was audio-taped; the taping was then transcribed and sent to the appropriate teacher candidate for member checking.

### **Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed using two processes: SOI scoring (Lahey et al., 1988) and analytic induction (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The SOI is a tool used to investigate the meaning making structures of individuals' constructive developmental perspective, otherwise referred to as their order of consciousness. Therefore, as I analyzed the SOI interviews, I read and reread the transcript of the interview, looking for patterns in the structure of an individual's meaning making rather than the content of their statements. I marked off sections of

text that gave evidence for a certain underlying order of consciousness and made note of the order I thought it evidenced or if it seemed to rule out another order of consciousness. After this initial reading, I made a hypothesis about the interviewee's order of consciousness. Then, I went back through the transcript searching for evidence to negate this hypothesis. I then gave the interviewee a score based on my analysis of the transcript. Each SOI interview was also scored by an independent rater. My co-rater was a trained, reliable rater, and has worked with Dr. Kegan and colleagues on a longitudinal study of validity of the SOI. She rated each of participants' SOIs without the knowledge of my scores. I then compared respective scores and used her notes to reconcile any discrepancies in our analysis. The SOI has 21 possible scores representing the five orders of consciousness and the six distinctions that can be made between any two orders.

Reliability for this measure has been evidenced by Lahey's (1986) example of test-retest reliability ( $r = .836$ ,  $p = .0001$ ), and Villegas's (1988) example of inter-item consistency (.96). In addition, studies using the measure have found acceptable levels of inter-rater reliability ranging from 63% to 100% agreement within 1/5 of a stage (Bar Yam, 1991; Lahey, 1986; Villegas, 1988; Villegas-Reimers, 1996). I checked my scoring of the interviews with an independent trained reliable rater. For the larger study this rater and I scored within 2/5 of a stage on 100% of the interviews, within 1/5 of a stage on 75% of the interviews and were an exact match on 50% of the interviews.

The data from the focus groups and second and third interviews was analyzed using a process of analytic induction (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Data were examined for themes both relating to the content of their experiences (relationships with their cooperating teacher, university supervisor, observations, moments of success, or failure), and evidence of the way they made meaning of these experiences and relationships. The data corps was read and reread in multiple iterations both during and after data collection. Using cross case comparisons, I formed hypotheses about the way the difference in their order of consciousness was, or was not, related to the way they made meaning of the observation experience. I tested each hypothesis by looking through the data for supporting evidence and also evidence to disprove the hypothesis.

### **Findings**

All of the women identified their cooperating teachers and university supervisors as important actors in their student teaching internships. In addition, they all discussed observations as important events. Part of the importance of observations may have been due to the design of the program's evaluation of student teaching. As in many teacher education programs, the formal observations are used as a form of evaluation for the

teacher candidates; although they do not receive grades on these evaluations, if a teacher candidate were to perform poorly repeatedly with no signs of improvement or learning, she would not pass her student teaching. Beyond this, however, the participants all identified the observations as an opportunity to learn and grow as teachers. They differed however in their emotional reactions to the prospect of being observed and in the ways they thought they could learn from feedback. These differences were related to the variance in their orders of consciousness. The results of the SOI showed that two of the women, Kara and Katelyn (all names are pseudonyms), were operating firmly at the third order of consciousness, and that two, Jessica and Jamie were operating at a middle stage between the third and fourth order (3/4) where there were some signs of fourth order consciousness, but many of the third order ways of making meaning are still present.

### **The Prospect of Being Observed**

**Third order perspective.** For Kara and Katelyn, both operating from the third order of consciousness, the observations by either their cooperating teachers or university supervisors were at the same time critical to their development as teachers, and what they described as nerve-racking experiences. As Kegan (1994) explains, "the ultimate goal [from the perspective of the third order] is being in alignment with – being in good faith with - a value-creating surround" (p.171); as such those operating from the third order perspective are ardently aware of evaluators around them and strive to be in alignment with expectations.

Kara was keenly aware of her cooperating teacher's presence in the classroom; she noted her anxiety on several occasions:

When I have been teaching she will usually sit there and observe and type up notes, which is sometimes kind of nerve racking because I think "Oh God she is looking at every little thing that I am doing!"

I just, I feel like I'm always scared that I am messing up ... I think, "I hope she doesn't think I am saying something really stupid right now."

If I do say something kind of off she sometimes will jump in and say, "Oh no this is it" so the students are still getting the info they need and they're still learning the right stuff. So I am not worried about that, I just don't want to I don't know come across as being a bad teacher, I guess.

I feel like when she is there, there is always kind of in the back of my mind – don't mess up, don't mess up.

Kara was very concerned about her cooperating teacher's opinion of her as a teacher. She did not want a possible mistake to cause her cooperating teacher to think that she was a bad teacher. Her concerns were not related to specific feedback or comments her cooperating teacher had made, but rather a general sense that she did not want her cooperating teacher to disapprove of something that she did. She even acknowledged that if she made a mistake her teacher would not reprimand her or be upset, but the prospect of "messing up" in front of her cooperating teacher was still a daunting prospect. Operating from the third order of consciousness, others' opinions are part of the self, and this makes the prospect disappointing a mentor anxiety inducing.

At the same time the prospect of an observation was also an opportunity to confirm alignment with expectations. Observations were very important for Kara because she used these as an opportunity to define her success as a teacher.

(My university supervisor will say) 'You have really great teacher presence' and it's good to know that somebody, my university supervisor, thinks that and it kind of makes me more confident and I think, ok now I know I can do this.

The feedback Kara received helped her define herself as a teacher, so her university supervisors comment that she had good presence, helped her confirm that she was successful in the classroom.

Like Kara, observations were a cause for anxiety for Katelyn; she was so nervous before her university supervisor's first observation she could barely eat the day before. In constructing the observation she focused on a didactic notion of success. When asked why observations were important to her she said, "(It's important) that my (university supervisor) thinks that I do a good job, I mean as simple as that." Katelyn wanted the general sense of approval that she had done a "good job" or was a good teacher. Observations then are not solely constructed as times to learn, but as opportunities to confirm or (in a prospect that caused anxiety) dissuade the idea that she was a good teacher and was meeting expectations.

Katelyn had a different relationship with her cooperating teacher because she was often out of the room and never did a formal observation of Katelyn. She was both upset by her cooperating teacher's absence because she thought she was missing opportunities for feedback, and somewhat grateful because she knew that the presence of her cooperating teacher would occupy her mind. She said, "I just would not want to be thinking, 'Ok, is what I said right? Oh my gosh is she giving me a look?' I feel like my entire focus would be on that instead of on the kids and what they are doing." Like Kara, when Katelyn is observed she is nervous and her thoughts are occupied with what the observer is thinking about her, to the point where she wonders what a gesture or a glance

might be. Perhaps because of this, when Katelyn's university supervisor suggested that she specifically ask her teacher to observe her she did not want to saying that she "would probably say no anyway."

**3/4 perspective.** Jessica and Jamie, however, saw the prospect of being observed much differently than Katelyn and Kara. They were both more at ease with their cooperating teachers and with their university supervisors, and saw observations as an opportunity to get a different perspective. Neither of the women had a cooperating teacher that they would have described as overbearing. Jessica reported that her cooperating teacher complimented her teaching. She felt confident in her teaching and felt her cooperating teacher shared this confidence. She said, "(My cooperating teacher) writes me emails saying 'good job', and tells me to let her know if I am doing something interesting so she can watch." Her teacher expresses confidence in her and Jessica shares that confidence.

Jamie reported that her cooperating teacher was often out of the classroom. Whereas Katelyn balked at her university supervisor's suggestion to ask her cooperating teacher to observe a lesson, Jamie was not nervous about asking for help. She said:

(My cooperating teacher) is the type of person where you have to ask for her opinions or her critique and then she is willing to give it but I had to ask "Hey Mary, can you observe me tomorrow during this period? I am having trouble with this" And then she will; she will sit down and watch and then afterwards we'll talk about it.

Jamie saw her teacher as a resource that she could draw on if she needed help with an aspect of teaching. Moving towards a fourth order perspective in which she was more able to see herself and her actions as removed from other's opinions, Jamie's construction is markedly different from Kara and Katelyn's because she saw the her teaching practice, not her identity as a good teacher, as the focus of the observation and the subsequent feedback. This makes the prospect of feedback much less daunting, and Jamie does not only ask to be observed, but is able to ask her teacher to observe something that she thinks she might not be doing well.

Perhaps because of this different view neither Jessica nor Jamie were nervous about their university supervisors visits. Jamie specifically said that she knows that some student teachers get nervous about observations, but she felt differently. She said:

It doesn't bother me... knowing that (the university supervisor) is there to help you, they are not grading you. It's not a grade they are just giving you feedback so even if you mess up it doesn't matter because they are going to have good advice for helping you fix the problem.

Jamie was very matter of fact in her approach to being observed by her university supervisor, her presence did not cause her anxiety. Much like her approach to her cooperating teacher, she saw her university supervisor’s visits as opportunities to get support and outside advice. Jessica also valued outside advice, and like Jamie was not nervous about being observed by either her cooperating teacher or university supervisor, but she constructed the opportunity of being observed slightly differently. She said:

The only way *you* are going to grow as a teacher is if you are forced to make a list of what is going well and what is not going well. I thought that to an extent every day anyway, but it’s more of a – yes that went well but why did it go well?... It worked because of this so I can continue doing that next time. (emphasis added)

Like Jamie, she saw observations as an opportunity for growth, and she also placed slightly more emphasis on her role in this opportunity. Where Jamie focused on the help she is would receive in the observation, Jessica saw observations as a push to remind her to be reflective in her practice, and figure out not just that she was successful, but what, in particular, was effective practice.

#### **Learning from and Receiving Feedback**

The student teachers all acknowledged that the purpose of the observations was to receive advice from their university supervisors or cooperating teachers. However, the ways they constructed the post-observation conference varied according to their orders of consciousness. Baxter Magolda (1999) and Perry (1970) note that college age students tend to share an epistemological perspective of knowledge as static and as held by external experts. This epistemic viewpoint can make certain activities, such as self reflection, which asks the student teachers to be the creator, or co-creator of knowledge can be difficult and even frustrating for students because it challenges their view of the way knowledge (and by way of that learning) should take place. Baxter Magolda (1999) links this specifically to students’ orders of consciousness noting that students at the third order begin with a static epistemic view and must be supported in evolving towards the fourth order with an epistemology which involves a more constructive view of knowledge and one that identifies the individual as a creator and evaluator of knowledge. This difference in epistemologies is reflected in the way an individual receives and participates in receiving feedback.

**Third order perspective.** Katelyn saw feedback as an opportunity to improve as a teacher, something which she did not think that she would be able to do on her own. She said:

I really crave feedback so that I can get better and this is like the one shot of getting better

because who is going to observe me when I am a teacher, like an administrator once a year? So I really wanted that feedback so I could remember “Ok do this, this way now” because every time (my university supervisor) gave me feedback I could incorporate it.

Katelyn feared that this was her “one shot” at learning how to be a teacher, and that she would not be a better teacher without this feedback. This statement demonstrates her desire for direction, rather than aid with reflection and constructing her own solutions. She wanted to be given expectations to meet and guidance on how to become a better teacher. Indicative of the third order epistemological perspective, Katelyn did not see herself as an source of knowledge about teaching, even about her own challenges with teaching. One of her anxieties about asking her cooperating teacher to observe her was her university supervisor’s suggestion that she ask her to come observe something specific. Katelyn did not feel able to make this request, as she said, “every time (my university supervisor) comes he pulls out stuff I have never even thought of so it’s like you can’t ask for something – I have no idea of anything to ask her specifically to look at.” She felt, that without others, it was difficult even to find the areas of teaching with which she struggled. Katelyn valued the feedback she received after observations because she did not feel that she would be able to gain new knowledge about teaching without an outside evaluator or authority giving her new knowledge or insights about her practice.

Kara also looked to her teacher education program and to her cooperating teacher to tell her how to become a better teacher. She exemplified this in the way she talked about her difficulties in teaching her students how to respond to a Document Based Question (a form of essay used in history classes, particularly AP history classes). She realized that some of her students had problems formulating a thesis, but found that she had no direct strategies for addressing this; she said, “I wish (my social studies methods teacher) had given us methods to do because this is very different than any other writing they will do.” She also looked to her cooperating teacher for help, they did not plan the first lesson together, but Kara hoped “next time we do a big writing assignment we’ll collaborate more because she has been doing this and she knows kind of what they should be doing.” Kara was able to recognize that she had a problem, but did not see herself as a part of finding the solution; instead she sought out knowledge from those she saw as authorities on the subject. She respected her methods teacher and she appreciated the knowledge her cooperating teacher has from experience. Like Katelyn, and from a third order perspective, Kara did not position herself as a co-creator in developing her teaching, but rather looked to others to

give her better methods. As such the post observation conferences were times to receive ideas, tips, and tricks for teaching.

While Kara did appreciate and value the ideas she received from her cooperating teacher and university supervisor, at times it was difficult for her to receive the feedback if it was critical or constructive. She readily acknowledged that her cooperating teacher was not a harsh critic and gave good feedback, but the critical feedback she received was still hard for her. She said:

It's just one of those things where it's a blow to your confidence I guess. Where you think, "This is a pretty good idea, I think it's going to work, and I think the kids are going to like it"... It's just hard to have somebody be like "yeah your big plan you had didn't really work – it's just like ugh (*sounds like she just received a punch in the stomach*).

Observations and the feedback she received helped Kara define herself as a student teacher. As such, the feedback she received was not just a comment about a lesson, but about her identity as a good teacher; critical feedback was an assault on her sense of self. Kara was also not an active evaluator of this feedback, if someone (in this case her cooperating teacher or her university supervisor) said that her plan would not work, then she accepted this; she did not talk about what she thought of the lesson or what she brought to the evaluation. Feedback was a one-way street; she received it, as truth, from her mentors.

**3/4 perspective.** For Jessica and Jamie the feedback they received from their cooperating teachers and university supervisors was part of a more transactional relationship, one in which they would take part in evaluating their teaching, rather than just be evaluated. Jessica explained that the feedback was particularly helpful if a lesson did not go well. She said, "Maybe I don't think (a lesson) went well and (my university supervisor) can help me figure out why it didn't go over well and what we can change for next time." Jessica constructed her role as an active participant in evaluating her own teaching. In her statement she marked herself as the person who will decide that a lesson did not go well and referred to "we" in the process of deciding what to do for next time. For Jessica feedback and the solutions to her identified problems would be co-constructed. She did not deny that feedback is useful to her, but she also was not simply a passive receiver of her supervisor's advice.

Jamie also positioned herself as an active participant in solving any problems she might encounter with her teaching. She often talked about meeting with her cooperating teacher and with other teachers on her grade level team. In fact she seemed to view it quite simply, "we have a meeting and...we discuss the problem and discuss the solution like as a whole so I don't feel like I ever have to figure something out on my own that is

beyond my capability." Jamie did feel the need to get outside opinions, but like Jessica she used the word "we" in her descriptions of working to find a solution. She also noted that she has a certain level of capability to begin with. While not completely self-authors, both Jamie and Jessica saw themselves as participants in creating their growing knowledge of teaching.

In addition, both women felt that they could evaluate feedback in order to reject it or to manipulate it. Jessica in particular liked her cooperating teacher, but felt that her teacher could do more engaging activities with the students. Her cooperating teacher often said that the students would not be able to understand or behave in some of the cooperative learning Jessica planned. Jessica was undaunted, despite even her students' initial protests.

I had a sense that... my students could try a little bit more because you really don't know until you try it. And while some of the things we've done may have required a little more guidance on my part with them; they have also been able to accomplish a lot more than my cooperating teacher said they would be able to.

While her teachers' opinion is certainly still important to her, Jessica felt that she had her own values about teaching, and that she could apply those values despite her cooperating teachers resistance. Jamie was less bold than Jessica, but she also felt that the teaching in the class was shared and that she could be a contributor to improving instruction. Unlike Jessica however, Jamie felt she had to be careful with her feedback.

I don't contradict [my cooperating teacher] really, but I just give a suggestion, like 'Maybe tonight we should write the directions on the board and have them write them down'... I mean she listens, she is receptive I just kind of state things maybe we should do this because I've heard about this – or I kind of like maybe oh someone told me this works really well.

Jamie demonstrated that she did not want to upset her cooperating teacher, she still valued her cooperating teacher's opinion of her, but she was still able to offer suggestions for improvement. Both Jessica and Jamie wanted their mentors' approval of their teaching, but at the same time they also had developing teaching beliefs that were important to their teaching selves; they negotiated the line of seeking approval and staying true to what they thought was best practice.

### Discussion

Each of the participants discussed observations as an important part of their student teaching. They all reported that the feedback they received was helpful and supported them in becoming better teachers.

Kara: I feel like [all the student teachers in the cohort] say, "Oh my god... it's going to



be awful they are coming to observe me!”, but it’s really not a bad thing at all... it’s actually probably the most helpful thing.

Katelyn: I like that there is someone who is like cheering me on to be better and you know helping me and giving me resources.

Jessica: Just the validation that you know that you are doing a good job. Because you can think all you want that you are a good teacher, but you are never really going to know unless someone else can give you some kind of feedback of that sort.

Jamie: I think also getting observed it definitely helped me feel more confident ...its affirming that I am not crazy (laughs)... these kids aren’t going to fail out or anything.

The women shared a common theme of observations as a positive part of their student teaching experience, but the way they talked about observations and the feedback they received, or wanted, varied according to their order of consciousness. From the third order perspective, observations were viewed in a didactic manner; they could either go well and prove that they were good teachers, or it could be a crushing blow. Despite the fact that they both felt that they could learn from feedback, the prospect of earning the disapproval of their mentors from a failed lesson was daunting for Kara and Katelyn. The way they felt about student teaching and defined their success was closely tied to their mentor’s feedback. From the 3/4 perspective, Jamie and Jessica still highly valued outside perspective as a way to know that they were good teachers, but they saw the observations as more transactional experiences. They could receive feedback, evaluate it, and add their own thoughts. In this way the observations were inherently less stressful, the prospect of failing was not one that either of the women hoped for, but at the same time they knew that if this did happen they could learn from the experience. For Kara and Katelyn, observations were constructed as situations in which they will get feedback that would define their teaching. For Jamie and Jessica, the feedback they received was just one source (although an important source) of a myriad of sources of information that they would use to make their own decisions about their teaching. The four women where participating in student teaching with similar power structures, however the ways that they navigated these structures, or asserted their own power, varied according to their order of consciousness.

Teacher educators lament that post observation discussions and triad meetings focus more on the microissues of teaching rather than dealing with larger pedagogical issues and approaches (Borko & Mayfield,

1995; Dinkleman, 1998; Griffin, 1989; Valencia et al., 2009). Rather than focus on the short fallings of the cooperating teachers, there is some evidence in these findings to suggest that part of this phenomenon might be that the cooperating teachers and university supervisors are giving their student teachers the type of feedback they desire. Kara and Katelyn, operating from the third order, had an epistemological view of teaching knowledge as something they would receive from experts. They expected that they would get advice, teaching tips and techniques from those in the authoritative positions in their student teaching internships. From this perspective the post-observation conference was not a time to discuss larger issues, but to receive authoritative feedback. Moving towards the fourth order of consciousness, Jamie and Jessica saw themselves as more active participants in the post observation conference. Certainly they were also looking for advice, but as they constructed themselves as able evaluators of their own teaching and pedagogical methods, they seemed more prepared to have discussions about larger pedagogical issues. These conferences were not recorded so I cannot know if their post-observation discussion delved into more significant educational issues than the participants reported; this is an area for further study.

Rodgers and Scott (2008) assert that a teacher’s developmental capacity is not necessarily an indicator of success in teacher education; “to determine whether developmental capacity... is an asset or a risk, consideration must be given to the developmental demands of the context... and the available supports” (p. 742). Reviewing the findings of this study, it does seem that operating at a higher order of consciousness helped the student teachers in this study to have less anxiety about being observed, and report that they have a more active role in evaluating their teaching. This does not mean that Kara or Katelyn were not successful in their student teaching both women expressed satisfaction with their performance and learning in student teaching, and both were evaluated as successful by their teacher education program. There is, however, some question as to whether their order of consciousness was an asset or risk considering “developmental demands of the contexts... and *the available supports*” (Rodgers & Scott, 2008, p. 742). The women in this study shared university supervisors and a common structure for the post observation context, but they had different ways of interpreting the feedback they received, as well as varying concerns and anxieties associated with the observation experience.

It may be useful for teacher education programs to explore differentiated support for student teachers; going beyond increasing or decreasing the number of observations, but also considering the way that students engage in the feedback and reflection process. Kegan (1994) states:

The requirement to be self-evaluating and self-correcting demands an internal standard... it requires a theory of philosophy of what makes something valuable, a meta-leap beyond the third order. Our loyalty is transformed from adherence to a value to the process of originating or inventing what is valuable. (p. 169)

Using Kegan's lens we can see that the self-reflection that is often expected of student teachers sets an expectation for clear internal teaching values and philosophies; it is a hidden expectation that student teachers are at least moving towards fourth order consciousness. Jamie and Jessica reported being ready and able to engage in reflective discussions of their practice, while Kara and Katelyn seemed to be waiting for solutions. It seems that they might benefit from differentiated approaches to the post observational conferences and reflective journals; approaches that took into account differences in their epistemological views on teaching, and their readiness to reflect on their teaching practices.

#### **Conclusion**

Cognitive development is not static, but it also does not progress without any impetus to do so. Cognitive growth can occur when an individual is given appropriate challenges and support (Kegan, 1994). Studying another form of cognitive development, Theis-Sprinthall (1984) found that inservice teachers who were involved in a program that provided supportive opportunities for the students to role play, continuous and guided reflections, classroom and field experiences, increased their cognitive awareness of the complexity of their situation and augmented self-awareness about their role in creating their situations. Likewise, Glassberg and Sprinthall (1980) found that preservice teachers who took part in a teacher education program designed to promote reflection in a variety of forms were more likely to increase their stage of ego development, ethical development, and have an internal locus of control. These two studies suggest that teachers can progress to higher levels of cognitive development through the use of strategies and supports provided by teacher educators.

Indeed, Reiman and Theis-Sprinthall (1998) suggest that cognitive development should be taken into account by teacher supervisors as they consider the type of support the preservice teacher needs. Rogers and Scott (2008), however, caution that teacher educators should not assume that a higher level of cognitive development will necessarily result in a better experience in student teaching or in the teacher education program as a whole. There is a need for more research into the ways a teacher candidates' cognitive developmental perspective relates to their experiences and performance as student and novice teachers.

Despite the need for more research, there is evidence from this study suggesting that teacher

education programs might revisit their procedures for observations in student teaching to question whether the structure of this process is supportive for all of their student teachers, or whether a differentiated approach is more appropriate. It may be useful for programs to explore various approaches to the post-observation conference including one that supports student teachers who may be expecting tips and tricks rather than participating in creating solutions to their teaching dilemmas. Further, programs might explore a variety of forms for reflection. The most common reflective journal operates with the assumption that student teachers are drawing an internal system of teaching beliefs and values to evaluate their performance, and that they see themselves as able evaluators of performance. This assumption may not be apt for all student teachers. Alternative options such as individual reflective interviews or scaffolded reflective journaling could include supporting questions such as: What was successful in this lesson? Why was this evidence of success for you? Or, What important goal or value do you keep in mind when you reflect on a lesson? How did this lesson reflect those values or goals? These kinds of supports might support student teachers operating from a third order perspective to begin to reflect on their own beliefs and the way that their teaching actions align with these beliefs.

Finally, this study is limited in its focus on four student teachers in a specific context, and limited in that I did not interview other members of a triad or observe observations or post-observation conferences. However in these limitations may lie the freedom to focus on how these observations are meaningful for the teacher candidates; the observations were no less or more powerful to the students because I did not see them, and they were no less real because I could not triangulate their experiences with my observations. It is very possible and probable that the participants' cooperating teachers and university supervisors would have given decidedly different pictures of the observations. Ultimately, despite our procedures and intentions, our interactions with student teachers will be interpreted and constructed through the lens of their meaning making structures. As such, the way teacher candidates make meaning of student teaching must be valued and examined as an inherent part of the student teaching internship, and a part of improving student teaching.

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