Teachers' Perspectives on Post Observation Conferences: A Study at a Saudi Arabian University

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Abstract—This article explores the perceptions of teachers regarding post observation conferences in a preparatory year English language program in a university in Saudi Arabia. Semi-standardized interviews were used to gather qualitative data from ten teachers. Five themes emerged from the interview data after qualitative analysis: (1) Concerns about the means-oriented view of some observers (2) Blurring of lines between developmental supervision and evaluation (3) Post observation conference as a formality (4) Concerns about the difference of opinion between teachers and observers (5) Concerns about supervisors' credentials, training and experience in supervision. These themes are discussed in detail with reference to current literature on supervision.

Index Terms—post-observation conferences, feedback sessions, teacher development, resistance, supervision

Many teachers view classroom visits from supervisors with dread because a supervisor usually has to perform unpleasant duties such as providing negative feedback (Bailey, 2006, pp. 5-6). Researchers in different contexts have commented on this (Aubusson, Steele, Dinham, & Brady, 2007; Borich, 1994; Gebhard & Oprandy, 1999; Kilbourn, Keating, Murray, & Ross, 2005). Blumberg (1980, p. 5) called the ongoing supervisory relation a 'private cold war' (cited in Bailey, 2006).

Just as the classroom observer has expectations about how the post observation conference might proceed, teachers also arrive for the post observation conference with specific beliefs and expectations which are peculiar to them, and it is according to these that they react during the post observation conference. The importance of understanding the beliefs and expectations of teachers regarding the post observation conference could not be overstated because any modifications in the post observation conference by trainer/observer without bringing into consideration the beliefs and expectations of the teachers would be like taking action without evidence.

In the following pages, I will state the problem and review the literature. After that, I will outline the methodology of the study by discussing issues related to sampling, data collection and data analysis. This will be followed by the discussion section in which I will discuss the five themes that emerged from the data. After that is the conclusion, in which I will summarize the five themes and propose concrete suggestions on how to make changes in the supervision cycle to address teachers' concerns about post observation conferences.

I. RESEARCH QUESTION

What are the beliefs and expectations of teachers of a preparatory year program in Saudi Arabia about the post-observation conference?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The subject of the current study is relatively under-researched (Copland, 2012). From the time when Goldhammer (1969) and Cogan's (1973) seminal works made 'clinical supervision' (of which post observation conferences are an integral part) an intellectual tradition (Garman, 1990), different aspects of teacher supervision have been looked at closely. Some researchers directed their focus on post observation conferences and different elements that affect the dynamics of supervisor/teacher relationship during post observation conferences. Looking closely at these elements allows us to develop an understanding of the beliefs and expectations of teachers regarding post observation conferences and their effect on professional development. The current study aims to look at dyadic post observation conferences (one trainer with one trainee) in an in-service context. Therefore, different research studies will have varying degrees of relevance for the current study, depending on the transferability of phenomena under investigation and the contexts and settings in which they were conducted, with some studies looking at conferences that were not dyadic or in-service, such as pre-service conferences, multi-party conferences and conferences during intensive TESOL certificate courses (Brandt, 2008; Copland, 2010, 2012). It must be noted that I did not find any published material on

teachers' perspectives about post observation conferences in a Saudi Arabian context and I will try to review studies that were conducted in different contexts that are relevant to the topic of the current study.

Chamberlin (2000) investigated the effect of supervisors' non-verbal behavior and communication style during post observation conferences on teachers' perception of trust. Trust leads to self-disclosure on the part of the teacher, which in turn leads to discussion and reflection. Therefore, if teachers are to discuss their teaching practices, they should be able to "trust supervisors enough to disclose opinions without thinking that their comments will be used against them in the future."(ibid.: p.658). Trust is not the only element connected with self-disclosure. Another element is that of teacher control of the conference. Supervisors' dominance of the post observation conferences could limit the opportunities of teachers to introduce topics of their concern, which could severely limit teacher reflection (Waite, 1992).

While teachers might not be aware of this consciously in all cases, there are patterns of supervisory behavior which help them decide how actively they should participate in post observation conferences. According to A. Blumberg and Jonas (1987), in institutions where teachers do not have the authority to prevent supervisors from observing their classes, they can still limit the supervisor's access to their 'teacherhood' by creating a façade of interest for the sake of civility and go through the motions of the post observation conference without the slightest intention of acting on any of the suggestions (pp.59-60). Teachers interviewed by Blumberg and Jonas (ibid.:p.61) spoke of supervisory behaviors/qualities that made the supervisory experience highly productive for them by persuading them to grant the supervisor access to their 'teacherhood', i.e., discussing their teaching philosophies and practices openly and honestly. Forty one descriptors were grouped under eleven themes and three categories. One of the categories was the supervisor's own competence as an educator. This appears to be logical, considering the fact that the assumption behind the concept of post observation conferences is for supervisors to help teachers bring some kind of improvement (Bailey, 2006, p. 141). Nevertheless, teachers expect to be treated with respect, even if the trainer has to provide negative feedback. Trainers are not unaware of this; according to the results of a study conducted by Wajnryb (as cited in Bailey, 2006), supervisors were concerned about the impact of their words on teachers' face and morale and mitigated their discourse to avoid committing face-threatening acts. Furthermore, teachers prefer informational language as opposed to controlling and directive language when recommendations for changes are made (E. Pajak & Glickman, 1989).

Zeichner and Tabachnick (as cited in Zeichner & Liston, 1985) discuss the contrast between the formally stated procedures and goals of an institution to the reality on the ground:

…teacher educators should not take it for granted that, because a practice or procedure is described in a particular way by program planners, its implementation takes the form and has the social meaning that its originators intended…the essential characteristics of teacher education programs are not to be found in public statements of intention, but through examinations of the experiences themselves. (p. 156)

Zepeda and Ponticell (1998) discuss this phenomenon in their qualitative study. Participants spoke at length about how their beliefs and perceptions of trainer-trainee interaction were affected by the seemingly irrational forms supervision had come to assume in their context, which certainly could not have been intended or envisaged by those who designed the program. Some of the quotes from the participants discuss quite candidly haunting realities that could resonate with teachers in different contexts. For some of the participants, supervision was a 'dog and pony show' (p.77), with the teachers required to produce two performances a year, one in spring and one in fall. Trying to deliver a real lesson during the observation was risky; it was far safer to jam all the required skills that were part of the checklist used as an observation instrument to demonstrate 'good' teaching. One teacher wrote how he received a very high score by employing this strategy, despite the fact that when he returned to the topics taught during the observation afterwards, students had not developed competence in the content. Some supervisors used evaluation visits as weapons to keep teachers humble and punish perceived disloyalty. These and other elements led the teachers to view some aspects of supervision to have limited value. Perhaps in all of these points, we have the answer to the question posed by Kilbourn et al. (2005) when they said:

Veteran teachers typically support the idea of feedback but seldom welcome the actual practice of it… Still, conventional wisdom and casual observation suggest that both novices and veterans could sometimes benefit from high-quality, constructive feedback. Why are teachers nervous about feedback while extolling its virtues … for someone else? (pp. 298-299)

When the lines between developmental supervision and evaluation become blurred, it becomes hard to convince teachers of the developmental benefits of supervisory visits and trainer-trainee interaction. In Zepeda and Ponticell's study, the perspectives of teachers indicated that for them, supervision was synonymous with traditional teacher evaluation (p.84). This leads the teachers to approach supervisory conferences with a set mind, leaving little room for professional development. The field of supervision attempts to differentiate between developmental supervision and evaluation, but in the words of Hazi (as cited in Zepeda & Ponticell, 1998, p. 85), 'no amount of linguistic maneuvering will reconcile the two for teachers' as long as the reality on the ground does not change. Smyth (1988) touches on the topic by saying that the concept of clinical supervision, as conceived by Goldhammer and Cogan, has become 'twisted and tarnished' and that in practice, it has 'taken on many of the features of a sinister and sophisticated form of teacher surveillance and inspection.' (p. 136)

Cogan (1972) does not view the supervisory conference as either the culmination of supervision nor as the most important part of a clinical supervision program (as cited in Garman, 1990, p. 210). It is part of a cycle and is related to what happens before and after it. Garman further states her belief that the conference is 'vastly overrated' as an educative event in the literature on supervision. She does not advocate eliminating supervisory conferences, but merely states that too much educative stock is put in the conference because 'We assume that the conference is the place where we are going to help the teacher do different things in the classroom.' (ibid)

The approach where supervisors assume a directive stance during post observation conferences and try to evaluate and prescribe teaching has a lot in common with 'the factory-derived notions of scientific management from whence they emanate.' (Smyth, 1988, p. 137). To illustrate his point, Smyth produces a rather provocative quote from Frederick Taylor, who is credited with the development of "scientific management" as an idea:

One of the first requirements for a man who is fit to handle pig iron is that he shall be so stupid and so phlegmatic that he more nearly resembles the ox than any other type...He must consequently be trained by a man more intelligent than himself. (ibid)

Smyth states that while people 'may not openly espouse such a degrading point of view, they are through their actions implicitly endorsing a way of working that is deeply embedded in Taylor's ideology.' (ibid). The abuse of post observation conferences by treating teachers like passive recipients of advice from an 'expert' supervisor might also foster a feeling of mistrust and dissatisfaction among teachers. It is not the accountability or advice that teachers resent or fear. 'They resent being an object rather than a partner in the process.' (Zepeda & Ponticell, 1998, p. 77)

The current study aims to look at the effect of the 'other' member of the dyadic post observation conference on the proceedings of trainer trainee interaction: the teacher. This is quite distinct from the goals of studies which aimed to investigate the effect of supervisor behavior on post observation conferences, either in simulated conditions involving actors (Chamberlin, 2000; E. Pajak & Glickman, 1989) or in real conditions (Wajnryb, as cited in Bailey, 2006; A. Blumberg & Jonas, 1987; Vásquez, 2004; Waite, 1992).

In this section, I have reviewed research studies that are relevant to the current study because they discuss teachers' beliefs, perceptions and concerns about supervision and post observation conferences. In the following section, I will expand on the purpose and significance of the current study and its place in the literature.

III. KNOWLEDGE CONTRIBUTION

Waite (1993, p. 676) states that 'efforts aimed at understanding supervision and supervisory conferences have given little attention to the role *teachers* play in the process.' (Italics from the original). After analysing ten books on supervision published between 1985 and 1995, Reitzug (1997) asserts that the teacher's voice is lacking from the discussions about supervision. For Edward F Pajak (1986), a sincere attempt to understand the teacher's point of view as fully as possible is the 'initial step' toward establishing a productive supervisory relationship aimed at developing her/his professional identity. He further states that this is consistent with Goldhammer and Cogan's recommendations, who first outlined the steps of clinical supervision, in spite of the fact that those who try to assume a prescriptive approach of enforcing techniques and organizational policy find it 'unconscionably equivocal'. (p.129) Zepeda and Ponticell (1998) call for more research investigating teachers' perspectives about supervision, positing that there is a dearth of research on this topic. Referring to three studies on this topic, they state that those studies may have been influenced by the context in which they were conducted. In their words:

Given the breadth and length of discourse among scholars and policymakers regarding the supervision of teachers, the field of supervision should not be satisfied with just three studies representing the perspectives of teachers. Far more research is needed from many contexts examining teachers' perspectives on supervision. (p.71)

IV. METHOD AND DESIGN

In this section, the methods and methodology of the study will be described, starting with a discussion about the sample followed by discussions about the data collection instrument and data analysis. It must be noted that the current study is located within the interpretive paradigm and all of the steps were influenced by an interpretive outlook. The aim was to conduct a fine-grained study about teachers' beliefs and perspectives, which could be explored best with an interpretive methodology.

A. Sampling

For the purpose of this study, ten male foundation year teachers in the men's section of a university in Saudi Arabia were chosen. The supervisory team of the English language program observes each teacher twice in an academic year. The first observation is developmental while the second is evaluative. Teachers are graded from one to five based on their performance during the observed lesson, one being unsatisfactory and five being outstanding. Below is a table with some basic information about the teachers:

Participant	Nationality	Teaching Qualifications (Degree - Training)	Country of Education	Teaching Experience
Teacher 1	Egyptian	MA Applied linguistics & TESOL - Diploma in TEFL	Egypt & England	13 years
Teacher 2	English	MA Applied linguistics & TESOL - CELTA	England	6 years
Teacher 3	Pakistani	MA Linguistics & literature - TEFL short courses	Pakistan	5 years
Teacher 4	Pakistani	MA Linguistics, MA English - CELTA	Pakistan	9 years
Teacher 5	Tunisian	Diploma in teaching	Tunisia	30 years
Teacher 6	South African	B Ed Honors - CELTA	South Africa	32 years
Teacher 7	English	MA Applied linguistics - PGCE	England	20 years
Teacher 8	South African	MA Economics - CELTA & TEFL short course	South Africa	12 years
Teacher 9	Pakistani	MA English, MA TEFL and MPhil English - CELTA	Pakistan & England	10 years
Teacher 10	American	BA - CELTA	America	9 years

The participants of the study were selected according to purposeful sampling strategy. The intention was to collect detailed data via interviews; therefore, information-rich cases that were expected to yield data of central importance for the purpose of the study were chosen (Patton, 2002, p. 230). Morse's criteria (as cited in Flick, 2009) of a 'good informant' were used as a guide to select information-rich cases (p.123). These criteria require that participants should (a) have the necessary knowledge and experience of the issue or object at their disposal for answering the questions in the interview (b) have the capability to reflect and articulate (c) be ready to participate in the study (d) have time to participate in the study.

B. Data Collection Instrument

Data were collected via interviews. An interview guide was developed for conducting semi-standardized interviews. This particular approach was adopted for this study because it allows the researcher sufficient freedom to pursue different lines of inquiry without straying off the topic. It was preferred over an informal conversational interview and a standardized open ended interview because the former might produce masses of data that are difficult to analyse (Patton, 2002, p. 343) and the latter because, not knowing the kind of data that the interviews would yield, the standard open ended interview could end up becoming a straitjacket that could make it difficult to explore important topics as they arise during the interview. As mentioned very cogently by Richards (2003), "…the interviewer must be responsive to nuance and opportunity as the interview progresses." (pp.64-65).

C. Data Collection Instrument Design

Interview guides can be developed in more or less detail, depending on the extent to which the interviewer is able to specify important issues in advance and the extent to which it is important to ask questions in the same order to all respondents. (Patton, 2002, p. 344)

The interview guide that was used for this study consisted of three broad categories. Each category had a list of topics that were to be investigated. The exact wording and sequence of questions and the degree to which each topic was to be probed varied depending on the responses of interviewees. The intention was not to cover each and every topic within the three categories with the same amount of detail; rather, the topics acted as starters to help the interviewer gather rich data. The approach was not to "[drag] an unwilling victim through every nook and cranny of an interrogatory masterplan but by listening to what they have to say and how they say it." (Richards, 2003, p. 65). The interview guide was piloted and some very minor amendments were made in terms of sequencing. Some areas were moved closer to the beginning as it was felt that the change would make the flow of conversation more logical.

D. Data Analysis

The interview data were analysed by adapting the steps mentioned in Creswell (2012, pp. 236-245). There were three steps:

1. An initial reading of the transcripts for preliminary exploratory analysis to obtain a general sense of the data.

2. A second, more thorough reading to code the transcripts; the recommendations of Tesch (1990) and Creswell (2007), (as cited in Creswell, 2011, pp.244-245) were used as guides during the coding process.

3. Broad themes were developed from the codes.

After analysing the interview data according to the above mentioned steps in QSR NVivo 10, the themes and the codes that they consist of were interpreted to make sense of the data. Below is a list of codes that had ten or more references in the interview data:

No.	Codes	Sources	References
1	elements that rendered POCs ineffective	9	32
2	disagreeing with the observer	10	28
3	duration of the feedback session	10	20
4	observer's personality	10	19
5	difference of opinion	10	18
6	observer's education, training and experience	10	18
7	focus of the feedback session	10	15
8	elements that made POCs successful	8	13
9	final grade vs verbal feedback	5	10
10	structure of the POC	7	10

These codes were collapsed under five themes which are enlarged upon in the discussion section.

V. DISCUSSION

In this section, five major themes that emerged from the interview data will be discussed.

A. Concerns about the Means-oriented Focus of Some Observers

One of the themes that emerged was the insistence on the part of the observers that the teachers exhibit prescribed techniques during the observed lessons. The concern was about the fact that the presence of prescribed actions and techniques was given more importance than the actual learning process. In the words of Teacher 4:

That's all they talk about: you. 'You did this.', 'You did that.', 'You should do it this way.', 'You should do it that way.', but without any ground realities; they have no reason for those activities; if they are recommending something, they don't give any reason for that. They just say 'You should have done that.', but why should I do that? When this thing works for me, why should I do something else? It was my class. I know how to handle them.

There are echoes here of the concerns voiced by teachers interviewed by Zepeda and Ponticell (1998), with their main concern being the need for targeting the desired steps or indicators on the observer's checklist (pp.77-78). One teacher interviewed by them said:

I decided it was time to show how I really conduct a class—cooperative groups, teacher facilitating student self-direction and evaluation, and all. My principal rated this lesson very low; she said a "perfect class" following the required indicators was much easier for her to evaluate. The next time she expected me to "join the family" and teach "the real lesson." I felt humiliated, but I learned to deliver the appropriate show. (ibid)

The participants of the current study viewed this prescriptive attitude of certain observers as unnatural and unnecessary. This is not dissimilar to situations alluded to by Kilbourn et al. (2005) when they state that in teacher supervision, 'categorical views of "good teaching" [are] imposed on teachers with little regard for the unique qualities of their particular situation' (p.299). What was required, the participants felt, was a holistic approach that prioritizes the goals of teaching instead of the means of achieving those goals. The following quote from Teacher 1 sums this up most appropriately:

…teaching is teaching. [It] is a … process that takes place inside a classroom that has a target. So, as long as you had your point, reached your target at the end of the day, and you are an inventive person who can do this in a [certain] way… this is supposed not to affect the situation because…you can get back to books and references you will easily find out that there is no best way for things to happen…

If supervisors limit their attention only to predetermined techniques, it impedes their ability to look at the teaching process itself. Garman (1986) states that such a model provides security for incompetent supervisors who are incapable of understanding the essence of teaching and calls the stringent adherence to such a model coupled with the refusal of intellectual inquiry 'the most insidious form of pretense and quackery in supervision.' (p.154).

B. Blurring of Lines between Developmental Supervision and Evaluation

The effect of the evaluative aspect and fears for job security on the post observation conference is best summed up by this quote from Teacher 9:

Here the observation itself and the feedback, it's all basically linked with the job and job security, so in that situation, of course people are always offended when they are observed and when they are given feedback…**When somebody is**

already defensive and not ready to listen, [or if he is] not listening to understand, [but] just listening to react, in that situation you need not to embarrass that person…

It is hard to imagine a teacher listening intently and impartially to constructive criticism during the post observation conference and thinking about working collaboratively with the observer to come up with a developmental plan when he has the sword of Damocles hanging over his head. More likely, as evidenced by the quote above, teachers' beliefs about the way the observation report might affect their job will have a significant impact on how they would approach the post observation conference. As mentioned earlier, in the institution where the current study was undertaken, teachers are observed twice a year, with the first observation being developmental and the second one both developmental and evaluative. Although the espoused goal of the supervision team is to work collaboratively with the teachers to improve teaching practice, the evaluative aspect looms large on the minds of teachers. One reason for this is the changing role of the observation report on decisions regarding contract renewal. When observations first started in the institution under study, the evaluation report played the most important role in determining whether a teacher was to be retained, terminated or transferred to a rural campus. At that time, observations were purely evaluative and many decisions were made about termination of contracts and transfers to rural campuses based on those observations. Over time, more factors have become part of annual instructor evaluation. At the time of this study, the observation report is one of five factors, the others being professionalism, development, service to the institute and student evaluation. It must be noted that of the two annual observations, only the second one has a bearing on the evaluation process; the first is purely developmental and has no bearing on the evaluation process whatsoever. However, the spectre of the observer bearing down on a teacher somewhat like the headless horseman with the aim of determining his fate still haunts the supervisory conference. This is not to imply that teachers refused to view the post observation conference as a platform for development. The following quote from Teacher 7 captures the essence of what most teachers said they expect from the post observation conference:

…the feedback session should start with the positives, because the positives are what every individual, every teacher builds on. Once the positives are covered, it relaxes the person, and then the feedback should move on to areas of development; and, that's the meaty bit of the feedback [session], because feedback which just relies on positives, does not help anybody, necessarily; and feedback that concentrates on the negatives all the time, does not help the person either, because it [makes them] lose their confidence…

However, it is the blurring of lines between development and evaluation which makes the situation complicated. This is what Teacher 5 had to say:

…if [the] observation is an informal one, it doesn't have to do with my career, my contract here, there is no problem. I can listen to him (the observer), and it's ok. But if it's a formal observation and he will grade me, so in this case, I can't imagine that I would accept [his inaccurate estimations] because it is something that has to do with my, job, my life, my contract.

This quote is interesting because it shows that while the teacher is open to receiving constructive criticism with the aim of discussion in a formative setting, the evaluative aspect makes him assume what Waite (1993) called an adversarial role; in a previous research study, Zeichner and Tabachnick (1985) called it the social strategy of unsuccessful strategic redefinition, whereby the teacher and the supervisor bring strong agendas and the teacher refuses to capitulate (cited in Waite, 1993).

Garman (1986) calls for a clear distinction between developmental supervision and evaluation. If in-class supervision is indeed for developmental purposes, then the challenge of this 'awesome mission' should be accepted. However, if it is evaluative, then this fact should be communicated clearly and the supervisors who claim to know about effective teaching should be held accountable for their expertise. In her words, 'Educational careers are too precious, and people can be seriously hurt.' (p.115). It is a sad reality of the field of supervision that those in supervisory roles who always expound its virtues in front of teachers and pontificate at length about the need for trainer-trainee conferences do not always call for *themselves* to be supervised. Referring to this paradox, Goldhammer (1969) said:

If what's good for the goose is inadequate for the gander, in this field, then something is the matter, for it is all but impossible to imagine a rational double standard that could free supervisors from the necessity of being supervised themselves. (cited in Smyth, 1988, p. 141)

C. Post Observation Conference as a Formality

Clinical supervision is not a concept invented at a particular moment in time; it is a name given to a set of procedures aimed at supervision and teacher development that were first described in methodological form by Morris Cogan and Robert Goldhammer who used a grounded theory approach to compartmentalize the basic events of supervisory practice, which were labeled *phases* by Cogan and *stages* by Goldhammer (Garman, 1990). However, it appears that in some cases there is a proclivity among supervisors and administrators to construe clinical supervision as merely a set of phases or stages to be enacted as ends in themselves. In the current study, the theme of the post observation conference as a formality kept recurring. Teacher 4 said:

I never have any disagreement with my [observer during the post observation conference]. The reason is that so many things are decided already, like, you can't change them, they have already decided, they have done it, they have written that. So in that case I personally feel that it's a…futile activity.

Teacher 10 stated:

I think…there's an idea that somehow it's more fair to sit and discuss with the person so that they can have an opportunity to defend themselves; but I don't necessarily think I need to defend myself, and I also don't think that's the best format for it either. I think, if you're going to defend yourself about something, literally, you should do it with textual evidence, and research and support for your position, and I think that you are much better disposed to do that on your own on a computer, typing it out, thinking the thought through and sharing it, having that kind of a discourse than this, sort of, combative, off the cuff type of reality. So, I don't see any point in the post observation conference being of any real benefit towards me and my teaching practice; I think it's a formality that is just there.

Some teachers approached the post observation conference with a fatalistic view, as can be seen from the following quote from Teacher 6: 'I know it [discussion with the supervisor] is not going to change anything, save, it's going to hurt me, in every possible manner. So, actually, I've learned to go with the flow.' Reading the comments above, one does not get the feeling that teachers are approaching the post observation conference in eager anticipation of an intellectual feast. Instead, it seems they just want to go through the motions because, as one of the teachers said, it is just there and has to be dealt with.

Teacher 3 commented that his observer 'didn't talk about anything; he simply came to the areas for development, and explained those to me, got my signature and finished his feedback. And that feedback didn't last for more than seven minutes.' It is hard to comprehend what purpose a post observation conference such as this could fulfill except compliance with organizational requirements. In fact, it looks like a classic example of adherence to 'the age-old rituals of visitation, judgment, and prescription' (Garman, 1986 p.148). The supervisors have to try and change the situation so that teachers drop the façade of docile acquiescence and see the benefit of becoming actively involved in the post observation conference. For this to happen we have to 'go beyond the procedural nature of events themselves.' (Garman, 1990, p. 204). Smyth (1988) also makes a similar call when he states that instead of focusing on the procedural events, we should be more concerned with important issues such as assisting 'teachers to achieve forms of teaching that contribute to ways of learning that are more realistic, practical, and just for our students.' (p.145). To further strengthen his point, he cites Sergiovanni (1974): 'The intellectual capital inherent in clinical supervision is ... more important than its workflow as articulated into steps, strategies, and procedures' (ibid).

D. Concerns about the Difference of Opinion between Teachers & Observers

This was a significant theme that emerged from the data. The university where this study was conducted is one of the biggest in the Middle East, and strives to hire highly qualified ELT professionals with many years of experience of teaching at the highest level. In most cases, there is not a lot of difference in terms of credentials and experience between the teachers and the members of the supervision team. Some teachers have also worked as observers/supervisors previously, both at the current university and at other institutions. Therefore, the gap in knowledge and experience that one would normally expect between the supervisor and the teacher is mostly non-existent. As a result, there was concern about the issue of difference of opinion with the supervisor. According to Teacher 2:

Sometimes I don't agree with him because he's looking at the observation from one angle and I'm looking at it from another angle, and being the part and parcel of that class, and being the teacher of that class, I know my students well, and if I plan something, I know the level…of my students, so I base all my lesson and my activities on that. Perhaps he is not aware of that and he gives me [a grade] which I don't agree with. I [would] humbly give him my suggestion; if he agrees, fine, but, you know, the truth is that his decision will be final.

This teacher is drawing on a tenet of teacher culture: The teacher knows the students best (Waite, 1993). Discussing the topic, Feiman-Nemser and Floden (1986, p.517) write: 'Some teachers resent the fact that the person responsible for judging their competence observes them infrequently and knows less than they do about what is going on in their room.' (cited in Waite, 1993, p. 694). Teacher 1 said that 'For the observer to work as a professional, he should support what he says scientifically, practically inside classroom…If he cannot support this, I think that it's better not to tell.'

This issue is not limited to the fact that teachers call for observers to substantiate their recommendations. There was a feeling that in the case of difference of opinion, the teacher would usually come out as the loser. Teacher 4 commented: 'If you follow his rules, if you follow his belief, if you are from the same school of thought, that's well and good. If you are not, obviously you are going to suffer.' It is hard enough to come up with generalizations and 'one size fits all' blanket theories about anything, but in teaching, it is even more challenging, given the difference in students across cultures, religions, countries, institutions, and classes within a single institution. The following quote from Teacher 8 sums this point up:

No one can maybe prove that your way or my way is the best. You see that's the thing. There is no… secret, there's no one way of doing things. There are many possible ways to do it, to get the job done; so, yeah, it can definitely be an issue. That's why, you know, observations can be a tricky thing…If there's just one correct way then it will be so easy, right? Then it will be a completely different business, teaching English.

Another point was that of transparency; if the observation criteria are clear and they are shared with the teachers before the observation, the post observation conference would not be so much about arguing for and against a particular educational viewpoint. Teacher 10 commented:

If the institution is allowing people to be assessed by certain criteria, then it's upon the institution to inform the assessor and the assessed what those principles or criteria are so that we can refer to them…if the assessor has a

perspective about something and demotes the amounts of points that I receive…he should ideally be doing that within a framework sanctioned by the institute that I am aware of. If he, on the other hand, has a perspective of disagreement that is outside the scope of policy… then we are free to be able to discuss that. But it is not fair, to either party, that the assessor is given the right to determine what policy should or should not be implemented based upon his personal perspective about best teaching practice; that should be defined by the institute...

Another quote from Teacher 10 is relevant to the same issue:

…when [we] agree to take a post at an institute, if that institute has a particular way of teaching and we've agreed to follow that particular way of teaching, so at that point we [can't] say we disagree; if we do we should work for a policy change, not use the post observation conference as a platform for that.

E. Concerns about Supervisors' Credentials, Training and Experience in Supervision

This theme is directly related with the previous one and emerged under the specific line of questioning about the reasons for concerns regarding difference of opinion between the teacher and the supervisor. It was a major factor in helping teachers decide to what extent they would become active members of the post observation conference and, as A. Blumberg and Jonas (1987) would say, give the supervisor access to their teacherhood. If the supervisor was not trained and did not have experience of observing teachers, there was a feeling of unease on the part of the teachers and there was not a lot of expectation of the post observation conference being very productive. This is what Teacher 9 said about this area:

This is the first thing… an observer must be a qualified person who has better knowledge of the field, who must have training in that particular area, and he must have been observed while observing…that is very important, the way a person is observing…I don't think…a very good teacher can [necessarily] be a good observer; these are 2 different jobs.

He further gave a colorful example of how he views the situation of a teacher being debriefed by an observer who is less qualified than him: 'It's like a lawyer who is arguing a case in front of a judge who has no knowledge of the law'. In the institution where this study was conducted, observation reports were a part of the evaluation process. Therefore, the concerns about the supervisors' training were not limited to the fact that being observed by an incompetent supervisor would not lead to any learning; they were also related to issues of job security, as Teacher 8 mentioned: 'You do need a little bit of specific observation training…maybe they can use it to fire people…so you should know what you're doing.'

This theme is by no means peculiar to the context of the current study. Bailey (2006) mentions that in her first supervisory job in Korea in the summer of 1973 teachers complained about her lack of skills or training as a supervisor. She also states:

Teacher supervision [is] a profession that many teachers enter almost by accident. Teachers can be promoted into supervisory positions for many reasons: they are excellent teachers, they have experience, they have "people skills," they are seen as loyal to the administration, they have seniority, and so on. Seldom are teachers made supervisors because they have had specific professional preparation for the role.

She further states that 'It is often assumed that teachers who are promoted to supervisorial positions will automatically know how to supervise' (p.3). With no formal professional training, supervisors might work 'at an instinctive level ... or at the level of folk models about what supervisors do' (Wajnryb, 1995 p.8).

VI. Conclusion

There was some optimism among the teachers because of the efforts of the supervision team to bring improvements in the observation program. However, unpleasant memories of the past linger on, and it would take a lot of perseverance and sincere effort over a period of time on the part of the supervision team to persuade the teachers that the entire supervision cycle is not about making prescriptions after finding deficiencies in the teachers' practice; rather, it is about working together with the teacher to come up with possible ways of dealing with issues that the teacher feels are most important for him. The following suggestions could help achieve this aspiration:

A. There Should Be a Clear Distinction between Development and Evaluation

Until just a few months ago, teachers were only observed twice a year without any training activities, workshops or support being provided to teachers to work on areas they were supposed to improve. Therefore, the developmental observation was just viewed as a precursor for the 'real thing'. This should be remedied by providing more training opportunities before and after the developmental observation by

i. Conducting workshops on topics identified by teachers

ii. Organizing discussion groups on some issues that are generally regarded to be problematic

iii. Compiling a separate list of resources on each of the areas that observers are required to look at and make them available to teachers.

Only after these steps are taken will the post observation conference become an educative encounter in which the trainer and the teacher could refer to the points raised in the aforementioned activities and resources instead of engaging in a debate about what was right or wrong in a lesson based on the trainer's judgment. A post observation conference of

a developmental observation without developmental activities before and after it is like a story without a beginning and an end: it does not make sense to anybody.

B. Teachers Should Be Given the Opportunity to Provide Input in How the Evaluation Rubric Is Designed and Interpreted

The supervision team uses a sixteen item observation instrument and rates each area from a scale of one (unsatisfactory) to five (outstanding). Supervisors have to refer to the detailed evaluation rubric which has the guidelines in the form of three to six bullet points for rating each item. This evaluation rubric was implemented without any input from teachers. In fact, for about two years, only the supervisors had access to and it was not made available to the teachers. Teachers would only see their evaluation report without any knowledge of the criteria that were used to score the sixteen items on the form. As part of the recent changes in the supervisory procedures, the detailed evaluation rubric is made available to the teachers prior to the observation so that they know exactly what the observers are required to look at. However, there is still considerable disagreement on how the evaluation rubric is designed and interpreted because it usually calls on the observer to make subjective opinions or judgments about the lesson. The following examples of the differences between a four (above average) and a five (outstanding) in the area of *'Building rapport with learners'* accentuate this problem:

5. Outstanding	4. Above Average
• Teacher is ***very*** pleasant & friendly	• Teacher is pleasant & friendly
• Teacher is ***very*** sensitive to the learners' culture, needs & level	• Teacher is sensitive to the learners' culture, needs & level
• Teacher is ***very*** patient with the learners	• Teacher is patient with the learners
• Teacher ***almost always*** calls learners by name and makes them feel comfortable	• Teacher often calls learners by name

Discussions between the trainer and trainee during post observation conferences on topics such as how the observer decides if a teacher is *sensitive* or *very sensitive* to learners' culture, needs and level have the tendency to descend into futile arguments. Therefore, teachers' input should be sought to make certain changes and design an evaluation rubric which places more importance on the actual learning process instead of the subjective opinions of observers. This could be achieved by a five step process:

i. A committee comprising of teachers with experience and training in observations should be organized.

ii. Under the auspices of the supervision team, the committee should hold discussion groups with teachers who are willing to propose changes to the rubric.

iii. Taking on board the ideas from the teachers, the supervision team and the committee should make changes in the rubric and circulate it among the faculty.

iv. The new rubric should be piloted with two or more observers observing each class and comparing notes afterwards.

v. If required in the light of pilot observations, final changes should be made in the rubric.

C. Supervisors Should Have a Continuous Trainer Development Program

As part of the recent changes in the supervision program, only people who have at least a master's degree in an ELT related field (TEFL, TESL, TESOL, applied linguistics etc) are selected as trainers. This is an improvement on previous arbitrary induction criteria which allowed people with backgrounds in fields such as engineering to observe language teachers. However, this change in itself could not be sufficient because becoming a trainer without specific training is like becoming a teacher without training. The supervision team regularly alerts teachers about training courses and workshops and attending these counts towards the annual instructor evaluation. Similarly, the supervision team should also attend courses aimed at trainer development and this should be considered in their annual faculty evaluation.

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