Observation and Feedback in Walkthrough Visits:

Traditional vs. Distance Supervision Settings

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Abstract

During student teaching, many on-site university supervisors implement quick observations in order to gather more informal data about the classrooms in which they observe and better understand the role student teachers are playing at different points within the semester. While these short walkthrough observations are effective at the beginning of the semester, the data quickly becomes unbalanced between student teachers, and supervisors often have to begin scheduling the visits in order to collect more specific, balanced information. This article examines the effectiveness of the on-site walkthrough when compared to video walkthrough observations implemented within a distance supervision model.

Traditionally, university supervisors conduct a variety of observations during the student teacher's internship. Some supervisors work on-site with the students, while other programs hire a supervisor to make multiple visits to the school buildings throughout the semester. Most students are observed through face-to-face interactions, and feedback is provided through handwritten or typed notes. Universities adopt and use an evaluation instrument to provide evidence of teaching proficiency during formal observations.

While traditional models are still the mainstay of supervision protocol, some universities are designing and implementing distance supervision models to allow for student teachers to be placed in schools outside of a university supervisor's physical reach. With the development of quality, cost efficient technology, students can easily record and upload videos, and supervisors can use cloud based platforms to provide feedback to students.

During the 2015 – 2016 academic school year, thirty-eight Kansas State University students participated in a distance supervision model. These students were supervised using Swivl robots, the Swivl capture app, and communication was conducted through the Swivl cloud based platform and Zoom conferencing.

This article will provide a look at the differences between the ease of observation and the effectiveness of feedback between traditional and distance supervision models in relation to a short walk through observation.

While there is value to the early visits, unannounced walkthroughs can quickly become an ineffective use of time for a supervisor as the semester progresses. Once the purpose of documenting evidence changes, data collection for each student teacher becomes unbalanced. As supervisors begin to collect pedagogical data on both the planning and instructional side of teaching, specific walkthroughs might go really well, while other times, the supervisor continues to collect the same data as was collected during previous visits.

Figure 1 is an example of anecdotal data collected during one morning of on-site walkthrough visits during the fourth week of a 16-week student teaching internship.

Figure 1

Anecdotal Data – 15 Minute On-Site Morning Walkthroughs – Week 4

Classroom 1: Morning Meeting – Student Teacher leading and talking about the daily schedule and objectives for learning; Students sitting in a circle; 16/18 students had eyes on teacher; 2/18 students were having a side conversation

Classroom 2: Recess – Student Teacher standing on the playground watching students

Classroom 3: Silent Reading – Student Teacher walking around for 10 minutes watching students

Classroom 4: English/Language Arts (Mentor Teacher leading mini – lesson) – Student Teacher sitting on the carpet with students watching the Mentor Teacher leading the discussion

After several weeks of unbalanced data collection, on site supervisors might decide that, in order to draw conclusions about student teachers, unscheduled walkthroughs need to become scheduled. Once the student teacher knows the supervisor is coming, the data collected might not be as authentic or meaningful.

Distance Walkthrough Observations

For a distance supervisor, a classroom walkthrough can be a simpler experience. The distance supervision protocol at Kansas State University outlines expectations for student teachers that include uploading at least one video per week. Videos should not be cropped or edited, and generally, student teachers don't know if the supervisor will

be watching the entire video or portions of the video. Therefore, the student teacher still does not know when their supervisor will be observing. Unlike on-site walkthrough visits that become more ineffective as the weeks pass by, distance walkthroughs can continue to provide useful data long after the initial general data-gathering weeks. Distance supervisors can change their purpose as the semester progresses, choosing to focus on timeline appropriate components.

Just like an onsite supervisor attempts to capture different parts of the day and different responsibilities of the student teacher, distance supervisors have the same intentions. Through the use of video recorded evidence, distance supervisors have a much higher chance of observing the student teacher in the desired capacity. Supervisors could watch the first 15 minutes of every student's recorded video or scan through the video with the intent of observing a transition, lesson opening, lesson closing, direct instruction, or how the student teacher facilitates cooperative learning. The observation could be more domain specific, focusing on student engagement, behavior management, questioning, or even how the student teacher interacts with support personnel. Supervisors might look for evidence of co-teaching or a glimpse at how the mentor teacher provides student support.

Video walkthrough observations might even be preferred by the student. The student teacher can upload the required video(s) each week, and the supervisor can view all student videos on his or her own schedule. This also allows students to reflect when it is convenient for them. Another positive is that the student teachers aren't nervous because the technology is always on, so they don't have to experience anxiety of an on-site visit when their supervisor enters the classroom. As Allen and Goodson (2014) note, it is not "unreasonable to assume electronic supervision could provide a more authentic glimpse into the workings of the classroom."

Figure 2 is an example of anecdotal data collected during week four of a 16-week student teaching internship. The distance supervisor watched fifteen minutes of each video, specifically scanning for a portion that involved managing a transition.

Figure 2

Anecdotal Data – 15 Minute Distance Walkthroughs (Students Uploaded 1.5 Hours of Video; Supervisor Focused on Transitions) – Week 4

Classroom 1: Morning Meeting with Transition to Reading Block – Student Teacher leading and talking about the daily schedule and objectives for learning; Students sitting in a circle; 16/18 students had eyes on teacher; 2/18 students were having a side conversation; Timer used for transition with expectations presented for voice level and movement – students met expectations.

Classroom 2: Reading Block with Transition to Specials – Student Teacher supporting Mentor Teacher by walking around and redirecting off task behavior. After closure, Student Teacher called for class to line up and go to specials. "Everyone line up!" Students moved quickly. Noise level became higher as students started laughing and calling out across the room. Chairs were left pulled out from desks and Student Teacher left with the class as they were still talking to go to specials.

Classroom 3: Guided Reading with Transition to Silent Reading – Student Teacher provides closure to the reading lesson by referring back to lesson objectives; Before dismissing students to their silent reading spots, "When I'm finished talking, I'd like for you to…" Students waited for directions to be complete before moving quietly to reading spots. Student Teacher walking around for 5 minutes during the beginning of silent reading watching students.

Classroom 4: Math with Transition to Stations – Student Teacher leading "Number Talks;" asking students to show a non-verbal sign at chest once they've solved the problem; called on five students to share – all five solved the problem the same way; Asked the students to go to their math stations "quickly." After 4 minutes, students were still walking around the room.

On-Site Walkthrough Feedback

While the main purpose of the walkthrough is to collect data, university supervisors can also can use the information gathered to provide feedback. Typically, feedback is given informally after a supervisor conducts an on-site walkthrough. Supervisors provide praise along with observation and suggestions. Student teachers are nervous and lack the confidence of veteran teachers. Students want to be recognized for what is going well; they want to be noticed for taking initiative. They are more likely to accept judgment and evaluation later in the semester if they feel they are doing an acceptable job starting out in the classroom. Just like the purpose of a walk through changes throughout the semester, the purpose for feedback changes, as well. Several weeks into the walkthrough visits, more constructive feedback is given by supervisors to start facilitating growth and eliciting change from their student teachers.

On-site supervisors might leave a handwritten note or observation form for the student. Sometimes an email might be sent by the supervisor after returning to her or his office. Students might respond to the emails, observations might be discussed informally in passing, but generally, it is hard to know if students read, understood, or learned something from walkthrough feedback.

Distance Walkthrough Feedback

For distance video walkthroughs, supervisors can provide the same types of feedback, beginning with praise and observation and gradually moving toward constructive feedback, suggestions and possibly questions on why they made specific planning, classroom management or instructional choices. Students upload their videos and share them with their supervisors, allowing the supervisor to select and view the portion of the video that best meets their purpose for "visiting" their classroom. Within the specific video, comments can be typed and imbedded with a time stamp. Distance supervisors can leave feedback or ask the questions needed to facilitate meaningful reflection.

Student teachers can be asked to review the block of time observed by the distance supervisor and respond to the comments. Asking students to respond ensures reflection, though the depth of that reflection can vary. Then, the document can be exported for students to save and use for reference throughout the semester.

Summary

Short, focused walkthrough visits can be an effective use of time for an onsite University Supervisor; however, as the semester progresses, the data collection can sometimes become unbalanced. As Kansas State University continues to develop and refine a distance model for supervision, supervisors are beginning to see the great value in observing through video. Distance supervisors have a much higher chance of observing the student teacher in the desired capacity, and feedback can be presented in a more organized, meaningful way.

References

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