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Mind the Gap. Combining Theory and Practice in a field experience

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In this article we describe a collegial case study conducted in one Finnish university during the last field experience in primary school teacher education program and discuss pedagogy of supervision from university supervisors’ perspectives. The aim of the study was to clarify the role of university supervisors and try out a collegial supervision approach to combine theory and practice in a field experience. We aimed to develop student teachers’ understanding of curriculum as an enacted phenomenon in which they have agency, and enhance their understanding of the development of language skills when working with young children. Our supervision was based on the importance of situated learning and Kolb’s experiential learning model. The results showed that theory-based approach is possible and collegial supervision can add extra value to supervision. The student teachers became more aware of the different levels of curriculum and their meaning in teachers’ planning processes. They also gained more comprehensive understanding of primary school teacher’s possibilities to develop children’s language skills everyday and in all subjects.

**Keywords:** university supervisor, collegiality, experiential learning model, curriculum, language skills, teacher researcher, action research

**Introduction**

In Finland, teacher education is situated in universities and the basic qualification for primary and secondary school teachers is a Master’s degree (Jakku-Sihvonen & Niemi, 2006). As in most other countries, teacher education in Finland consists of theoretical and practical studies including subject content, teaching methods, educational studies, and field experiences. Field
experiences are considered an essential part of teacher education. They aim to promote student teachers’ development towards expertise with constant research and development of their work (Finnish Ministry of Education, 2007). The proportion of field experiences in primary school teacher education is one of the highest in Europe (ETUCE/CSEE, 2008).

The meaning and importance of field experiences in teacher education is evident in many studies, but there is a lack of research and development activities and much of their potential value is not exploited (see e.g. Kaasila & Lauriala, 2010; McKenzie & Santiago, 2005; Ojanen & Lauriala, 2006; Rich & Hannafin, 2008). In spite of the small amount of research, some problems have been indicated. The major problems are related to duration and timing of field experiences and other studies, insufficient resources, and lack of communication between university supervisors and mentor-teachers in schools (McKenzie & Santiago, 2005). Cuenca (2010a, 2010b) also points out that the pedagogical work of university supervisors engaged in field experiences has not received much attention in teacher education literature and research.

The aims of this study emerged from the question of the authors’ roles as university supervisors in field experiences. Field experiences should contain dynamic interaction between theory and practice (Ojanen & Lauriala, 2006) and we thought that this could be a task for us as university supervisors. Utilizing our different expertises we built our supervision into the interface of curriculum and the development of eight-year old children’s language skills. We were both Senior Lecturers in our own subjects: Early Years Education and Literacy, and had doctorates from two different academic subjects: Education and Linguistics. Literacy† formed a concrete content for our supervision. Language has an important role in a child’s cognitive and social development. It is both a target and a tool and

† In Finnish: Aidinkieli ja kirjallisuus [Mother Tongue and Literature]. Mother Tongue and Literature is considered as an academic, practical and arts subject. The content comes from linguistics, literature, and communication studies. (Finnish National Board of Education, 2004)

Language is present every day in all subjects and teaching and learning situations. Therefore it was a good way to try out supervision aiming to deepen the student teachers’ understanding of curriculum and a comprehensive approach to pedagogy when working with young children.

**Theoretical framework**

Field experiences in teacher education can be considered as situated learning possibilities. As Brown, Collins and Duguid (1989) have indicated, effective learning is situated in authentic worlds. They compare knowledge to tools which can only be fully understood by using them. Using conceptual tools in real-world situations produces authentic activities, which enable student teachers to build up strategic knowledge of educational practices (Kim & Hannafin, 2008). Field experiences provide opportunities to participate in the social interaction and conversations -talk about practice- which is essential for learning (Brown et al., 1989; Lave & Wenger, 1991). As Brown et al. (1989, p. 40) indicate, they provide a space in which “the students no longer behave as students, but as practitioners, and develop their conceptual understanding through social interaction and collaboration in the culture of the domain”.

The importance of authentic activities is evident in Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning model. It has been widely used in studies on teacher education field experiences in Finland (Jarvinen, 1990; Lakkala, 2008; Ojanen, 2006; Turunen, 2008b). In Kolb’s model learning is regarded as a process of experience, reflection, cognitive processing, and applying new knowledge in new situations.
During field experiences, student teachers meet with everyday life at school and teachers’ profession and reflect on them on their own, with other students, mentor-teachers and university supervisors. In this process the experiences are transformed to new understanding. Using Vygotsky’s (Hakkarainen, Lonka, & Lipponen, 2006; Vygotsky, 1962) concept of a zone of proximal development, student teachers act in the area in which they are moving from their actual knowing to a zone of potential learning. In Kolb’s model this is the phase of abstract conceptualization in which cognitive skills and new knowledge develop (Hakkarainen et al., 2006). The potential development can be reached through support from more skilful people (Vygotsky, 1978). Such scaffolding could be an important task of a university supervisor. The supervisor should help student teachers with their reflecting and conceptualizing processes and their application of theoretical concepts to everyday work in schools. During these processes student teachers not only compare their experiences to their previous knowledge and understanding, but also develop new concepts and theories of practice.
Context of the study

The study was conducted during a primary school teacher education course at the University of Lapland, Finland. A total of six student teachers participated in a field experience subject in 2008-2009. In Autumn, 2008 we piloted the collegial supervision approach with two students, and in Spring, 2009 we developed the approach further with four students. The subject, called Advanced Practicum, was the fourth and last field experience in the teacher education program (Lapin yliopisto, 2008). Upon successful completion of this subject, the student teachers graduated as Masters of Education.

Advanced Practicum was organized twice during the academic year; identically in Autumn and Spring terms and the student teachers participated in it once. The duration of Advanced Practicum was five weeks and the focus was on a comprehensive approach to the teaching profession and continuous development as a teacher. The first week was dedicated to planning and the rest of Advanced Practicum to teaching and other teacher’s tasks. The student teachers worked in pairs planning and working together in year two classes with eight-year old children. Before Advanced Practicum we explained the meaning and implementation of the study and collected signed consent forms from the students allocated to our supervision. The supervision started before Advanced Practicum with email contacts. During Advanced Practicum we had three tutorials: at the beginning, in the middle and at the end. In addition to the tutorials, we observed some of the student teachers’ lessons in the field school and had feedback sessions after the lessons with them.

Methodology

An action research approach was used to investigate and develop our practices as teacher educators. As Trevitt (2005, 2008) and Walker (2001) demonstrate, action research is a good way to improve teaching practices in universities. Following Kemmis and McTaggart (2005)
and Carr and Kemmis (1986) ideas we considered our study as a self-reflective learning process, in which we gained better understanding and developed our practices. The study contained features of participatory action research: it was a social process, practical and collaborative, included reflexive and reflective thinking, and aimed to transform theory and practice (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). Together we formed a team with a shared interest and worked together to investigate how to improve our practices (Sagor, 1992). The project became a shared adventure in which we were “jointly involved in developing the study and learning through collaborative experiences” (Loughran & Northfield, 1998, pp., 14). Our study followed the self-reflective cycles of action research from planning to acting and observing, then to reflecting and replanning and via acting to the next cycle (Kemmis, 1982; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005).

As teacher researchers we had a double role, which can cause ambiguity and conflicts between the roles (Nolen & Putten, 2007). We were aware of this ethical challenge and understood that we were always teachers and should first and foremost work in the best interests of the student teachers (Nolen & Putten, 2007). When working with the student teachers we were teachers and in planning sessions and discussions we acted more as researchers. This was considered as an important ethical choice.

Typically for action research, the data generated were diverse. They contained email correspondence between us and student teachers, notes, memos and plans from planning and reflection sessions, and our narratives after the first action step. The student teachers also gave us written feedback. We had two planning sessions with the mentor-teachers, and the first one-hour session was audio recorded. The tutorials with the student teachers were video recorded and about six hours of video material was gathered. The video recording was used to identify the speaker during transcription. The data analysis was based on the principles of action research. During the study we used critical and self-evaluating perspectives to learn
from our experiences and change our practices as supervisors (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002). We drew attention to following issues: What was our co-operation like during the tutorials? How had the tutorials proceeded? What did we talk about with the student teachers? How were the ideas of curriculum and literacy transferred into practice in student teachers’ lessons? Data analysis occurred in individual and collegial reflection sessions and guided us to the next action step.

**Curriculum and Literacy**

In Finland the *National Core Curriculum for Basic Education* is the framework from which local curricula are formulated (Finnish National Board of Education, 2004). Participating in the curriculum writing and school development processes are parts of a teacher’s profession and the teacher education in University of Lapland contains theoretical studies in curriculum, assessment and school development (Lapin yliopisto, 2008). During their studies the student teachers familiarize themselves with *National Core Curriculum for Basic Education*. They learn to understand it as a legal, normative document and to plan their work on the basis of it. The student teachers also explore the implementation of *National Core Curriculum* in local curricula and text books.

During Advanced Practicum the aim of our supervision was to help the student teachers to develop their understanding of curriculum and its meaning in planning and everyday situations. We wanted to guide the student teachers to consider curriculum from a critical point of view and as a tool for teachers. They should develop their concept of curriculum from a fidelity approach to curriculum enactment approach. Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery and Taubman (2004) trace out the distinction between these two approaches based on, among others, Snyder, Bolin, and Zumwalt (1992), Fullan (1985) and Paris (1989) work.
The fidelity approach is founded on the assumption that a curriculum is developed by experts and teachers just implement it (Snyder, Bolin, & Zumwalt, 1992). The implementation has been successful if planned objectives have been met. The curriculum enactment approach emphasizes teachers and students as important executors of a written curriculum. Curriculum is developed, expressed and implemented in the context, which gives it meaning and significance (Ayers, Quinn, Stovall, & Scheiern, 2008). It cannot be implemented in classrooms as such, but is an individually situated, interpreted and changing experience. When considering curriculum as an enacted phenomenon, curriculum knowledge extends beyond the written document to the situated knowledge of teaching and learning spaces. It also includes the idea of teachers as creators and adaptors of their own curricula (Pinar et al., 2004). Paris (1989, p. 23) describes this process as curriculum change located to “multiple and often conflicting contexts that include ongoing practices, histories, and dominant ideologies of organization and individuals”. Curriculum change occurs when teachers make decisions (Pinar et al., 2004). In curriculum enactment approach this decision-making gives teachers agency in their profession -teachers are not just implementing a readymade document, but developing curriculum and bringing it alive in their classrooms (Snyder et al., 1992). They are self-reflexive professionals who take into account their students, academic disciplines and the society in which they teach, and thus produce multiple curriculum designs (Pinar, 2004).

Besides curriculum, we also aimed to strengthen the student teachers’ awareness of the teacher’s role in developing children’s language skills, especially at the beginning of primary school education. We wanted to enable the student teachers to develop a comprehensive understanding of language learning: language is not only learnt during Literacy lessons, but in all subjects and in different kinds of interactions throughout the school day. According to the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2004 (Finnish
National Board of Education, 2004) the key task of teaching in Literacy at the beginning of primary school, is to continue the language learning that has begun in prior to-school settings and at home. Instruction is considered as a comprehensive process where children learn concepts with which to approach the world and their own thoughts in words. Literacy consists of oral and written communication connected with the pupil’s everyday life (Finnish National Board of Education, 2004). At school a child’s awareness of the forms and meaning of the written language increases and sharpens (Pullen & Justice, 2003). Pragmatic dimensions develop and a child learns that language can be used for different functions (Halliday, 1973).

**Planning and the first action step**

The idea of collegial supervision emerged in March, 2008 when we discussed our roles as university supervisors in Advanced Practicum. We shared the feeling that the impact of university supervisors’ guidance had decreased over the years and that the focus of our work was not clear. Seija described this feeling in her narrative as follows:

> Especially in Advanced Practicum the role of university lecturers has decreased. … I have had a feeling of being part of a ritual. A good theory or model has been lacking from my guidance. What am I actually aiming at? What is the situation based on? What kind of supervisor am I? Do I have an identity as a supervisor? (Extract from Seija’s narrative)

The need to develop our practices raised the idea of collegial supervision. When trying to find new perspectives, cooperation with a colleague was important: it made us think aloud, share ideas and listen to each other.
The planning phase continued in August, 2008 with discussions aiming to set up shared understanding. We decided to focus on curriculum, comprehensive planning and the development of children’s language skills. We also had a meeting with the two mentor-teachers in whose classes the student teachers were going to practice. They were responsive and aroused many practical issues which helped us to put the project into the context of everyday life in the classrooms.

Advanced Practicum started in September, 2008 with the student teachers’ planning week and we invited the two student teachers to the first tutorial. In the invitation we told them that we would supervise them together, asked them to have a look at the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2004 and the school’s curriculum, and bring their own plans with them to the tutorial. We had planned the tutorial beforehand and aimed to talk about the differences between the written and implemented curriculum and also remind the student teachers about pupils’ language learning possibilities in every subject. In the beginning of the tutorial both student teachers gave us sheaves of their plans and we gave them a couple of papers on curriculum and Literacy. The beginning of the session was spent fussing with all the papers, but then we proceeded to discussion about the levels of curriculum and their counterparts in the student teachers’ planning. We encouraged the student teachers to try a comprehensive planning approach. Afterwards, Seija reflected on the tutorial:

We failed to discuss about the student teachers’ plans during the tutorial. This was possibly a surprise and also a disappointment to the student teachers. The main offering for us as supervisors was the gelling of shared language and understanding. (Seija’s notes)

After the first tutorial the student teachers started their teaching and we observed their lessons at school individually. In our feedback after the lessons, we emphasised curriculum
and Literacy issues discussed during the tutorial. Each of the student teachers also held a discussion with one of us. These discussions were of a “traditional” nature about subject specific topics and practical issues.

At the end of Advanced Practicum we had a shared tutorial with the student teachers where we talked about the implemented curriculum and pupils’ experiences of it. Seija also asked if the student teachers could justify that all lessons with young pupils are actually Literacy lessons. They did not deny this but could not give any practical examples. Overall the student teachers said that they had learnt many new things about curriculum, children’s language skills and Literacy. They had also reached a wider approach to their planning. The university supervisors’ collegial guidance had given them ample opportunities to gain multiple perspectives.

At the end of the year we had a meeting with mentor-teachers at the school and they told us that our collegial supervision had been a positive experience. We all agreed that this new way of working had clarified the different tasks of the mentor-teachers and the university supervisors and had benefitted the student teachers. We planned the forthcoming Advanced Practicum and aimed to strengthen the concept of curriculum as a student teacher’s tool in their planning. This required new practices at the school as well. The mentor-teachers were to change a tradition of giving subject topics to student teachers. Rather, they would tell the student teachers what had already been studied in their classes and then advise them to review the curriculum to identify the next themes.

**Reflecting**

The first action step had mostly been a positive experience for all participants. Collegial supervision was a new thing for us and every now and then we had been confused and had a feeling that we were just surviving. We were not sure if we were going to right direction. We
gained experiences on collegial supervision and our co-operation started to gel. During the planning and putting into practice we learned to trust each other and understood the value of working together. After the first action step we wrote narratives in which we reflected our experiences:

Working together with a colleague taught me to listen. It demanded careful listening to verbal and nonverbal communication of the students, but also sensitive listening to the other University Lecturer. The listening and respect between us modeled to the student teachers what collegial work could be. We talked together a lot before Advanced Practicum and tutorials and listening to the ideas of a colleague gave me many issues to think about. Working together taught also me humility. Compared with working alone, the collegiality was demanding but at the same time very refreshing. (Extract from Tuija’s narrative)

Working together opened new, valuable views to supervision. I started to understand the complexity of curriculum and gained confidence in the power of co-operation. Also the trust to continue was aroused: We can do this together. (Extract from Seija’s narrative)

The new way of doing things was challenging but the first action step vindicated that collegial co-operation was possible and beneficial for student teachers. The other challenge was to find ways to convert the theoretical concepts into the everyday language of teaching and learning and make it all accessible to the student teachers. We shared a feeling that we had taken the first steps in developing theory-based and analytic supervision practices and had moved from practical, subject specific issues towards a more conceptual approach.
Revised plan

After reflecting on the first action step we designed a revised plan for the next Advanced Practicum in March, 2009. We needed to be more explicit and precise in our approach.

To enhance the student teachers’ reflection and encourage conceptualization we developed a model of curriculum levels (Figure 2) and their counterparts in the student teachers’ planning.

This model follows Kelly (2004) and Turunen’s (2008a) ideas of the distinction between planned, official curriculum and the actual, realized and received one, and emphasises teachers as important agents in the process.

![Curriculum Levels Diagram]

Figure 2. The planning process of the teacher students

As indicated in Figure 2, the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education and the curriculum of the school represent a level of written curriculum: official documents which the student teachers needed to follow. The general plan is the student teacher’s interpretation of
the official documents. It should be a comprehensive plan with overall targets for the whole Advanced Practicum and, at its best, could be a map for all the student teacher’s activities with children. In the intended level, the planning comes closer to every day practices: the student teacher’s weekly and daily plans are based on the general plan and the pedagogical needs and progress in the classroom in different content areas. The fourth level is the implementation of the plans in the classroom situations and the last level is a child’s experiences at school. In the classroom the student teacher and children confront the student teacher’s interpretation of the written curriculum and curriculum becomes a mediated and social experience: social practice in the classroom (Pinar et al., 2004).

We also wanted to strengthen the aspect of the importance of language in the beginning of the primary school and primary school teacher’s responsibilities to develop young children’s language skills, especially in Literacy, but also in other subjects. To do that, we decided to ask the student teachers to include reference to the importance of language in their general plans. During the tutorials and in individual feedbacks we planned to pay attention to Literacy and linguistic situations in other subjects.

The second action step

The second action step started at the end of March, 2009 with four student teachers, different from those in the first action step. At the beginning of Advanced Practicum we sent an email and asked the student teachers, in pairs, to write a general plan.

We ask you to send us your jointly written plan by 9 a.m. Wednesday morning. It can reflect where you are up to in your thinking. We do not expect any subject-specific plans, but a general plan. It should be based on the school curriculum, the descriptions of good performances in national core curriculum, and the mentor-teacher’s briefing about previous teaching and learning and her
wishes concerning foci and next steps. The plan should most of all be helpful to yourselves! In the general plan you can describe aims for your teaching. For example, they can be written using the following: children’s working; social and researching skills; and language as a tool of learning and understanding the world. You can describe some concrete content and methods you are going to use to reach your aims. (Email to the students)

The first plans were lists of targets and contents for different subjects; sets of unconnected subjects and lessons. In their first attempts, the student teachers did not consider their planning as a comprehensive process, and the written curriculum was not evident in their plans. The aspect of language was also missing. In fact, one of the pairs refused to produce a general plan:

We didn’t write a general plan but went straight ahead to the subject-specific sequence plans, which we think will best help our teaching. (Email from the students)

At the end of the planning week we met both pairs in tutorials. We asked about their planning process and how they had made decisions when writing their general plan or choosing not to write a general plan. The discussion covered the student teachers’ understanding of a general plan, the meaning and structure of it and what they should take into account when writing it. We also talked about language learning, and possibilities for having a comprehensive approach to it. The aim was to convert these fairly abstract concepts to concrete activities. This can be seen, for example, in the following extract from the tutorial, where we talked about the target of developing children’s research skills:

Tuija: You can think of all the themes where you can develop these research skills.
Seija: In Literacy, especially with literature, it can be researching children’s own thinking…. And with expression skills it might mean researching themselves and their social interactions.

Tuija: The research skills might be used with fairy tales. What might it mean? It could be studying the structure of a fairy tale. How do they normally start and end?

At the end of the tutorials we asked the student teachers to rewrite their plans. The next versions were more structured and cohesive than the first ones. The student teachers had comprehended the idea of the general plan. The plans were based on the written curriculum and language was stated as a conceptual working and understanding tool for children. These aspects can be seen in the following extracts from the plans:

The pupils practice comprehensive use of language by reading, talking and writing in both fictional and fact based texts. In Math the pupils learn to use efficient mathematical processes, in Science they practice to conceptualize and record their discoveries. In Handicraft the pupils practice following written instructions and evaluating their working skills.

The theme of Advanced Practicum is to discuss together with the pupils. We aim to get the pupils to ponder and express their thinking. The target is to enrich children’s language in many ways. For example, in Math this means talking about mathematical thinking. In Art and Handicraft it is telling and writing about pupils’ own art works… The school curriculum indicates that the teaching methods should promote learning through interactions between pupils and improve social skills and shared responsibility. We strive for these targets by using plays, games and group work.
Using the general plan as a guide, the student teachers created weekly and daily plans. During the lessons we observed the targets the student teachers had written in their general plans.

Do the targets for the lesson follow the general plan? In the general plan it is stated that they aim to develop children’s research skills and in the lesson plan she has written down making observations as a target. She guides the children to write down things they can see and then observe what happens in the experiment. At the end of the lesson children write a report on their observations. Writing fact-based text is in their general plan but not written down in her lesson plan. (Tuija’s notes from a student teacher’s lesson)

The second tutorials were in the middle of Advanced Practicum when all the student teachers had begun teaching. Therefore, it was natural to base the discussions on the student teachers’ experiences and reflections. We discussed about the usefulness of the general plan, how the aims written in it had been implemented and whether there had been some issues about which the student teachers had not thought in advance. We also revisited the levels of curriculum and tried to locate the student teachers’ planning in these levels. The general plan as a process was also discussed.

Tuija: Now we are in middle [of Advanced Practicum], so do you have something to discuss related to the general plan: something to change; add; remove; define; emphasize? Is there anything that you have been doing that is not written in your plan?

Student 1: This came so quickly. For example there have been the planning skills, but they were not something we had thought about.
Student 2: They [the planning skills] are probably like that. We have used them, but not paid much attention.

Student 1: We did not see that.

Tuija: This general plan is a process, you know, and is never actually completed.

Seija: Just a bit like process writing. The [general] plan is a text in which you can add and remove things.

Related to language learning we talked about multiple classroom situations where the student teachers had noticed opportunities to teach language-related issues and how they had realised that all lessons provided possibilities for language learning. During the discussion one student teacher stated the following about the meaning of language:

I have also realized that the statement or the phrase ”The limits of the language mean the limits of the world” is true at least with children. In my class there is a bilingual pupil, and if there is only one word he doesn’t understand then the whole thing collapses.

**Evaluating**

The final tutorials were at the end of Advanced Practicum and the discussions reflected the student teachers’ experiences, reflections and conceptualizations about curriculum and children’s language development. This provided a natural basis to combine theory and practice. The general plan and a comprehensive planning approach had been the basis of our supervision and in the last tutorials the student teachers commented on this:

It [planning] is kind of comprehensive all the time. Like the general plan, it is valid in everything.
I really liked this system [the general plan]. It piled it up, it didn’t become unconnected sequences in different subjects with different objectives. Although they were sequences we had, there were those subject-specific objectives and then the general plan.

One pair’s general plan has been very much based on separated subjects. At the end of Advanced Practicum they were pleased to be developing a more comprehensive concept of curriculum. They reflected their learning in the following extract:

It was lovely to teach that way, so that we did not have a text book in every subject. It is then that the curriculum defines what we do. You don’t have to go to a double page per day.

The concept of curriculum helped the student teachers to identify their work within a more comprehensive picture and facilitated the conceptualization of their planning. Curriculum theory linked with teacher’s practical work and the student teachers started to realize their agency and the meaning of curriculum design and school development in the teaching profession. They made a distinction between the fidelity and enactment approaches and described their changing conceptions of curriculum:

It is an instrument.

Earlier it [curriculum] was like a ghost. I knew it was important but I had a kind of critical attitude towards it. … When I started the studies [in teacher education] I thought it was a book. Now it is not that any more. You follow the curriculum rather than a text book. You can model it yourself; make it a tool for yourself.
The other aim was to support the student teachers’ consciousness about the meaning of language in the first years of primary school education. Through Advanced Practicum, the student teachers’ understanding of language and Literacy teaching and learning increased. They realized that language is a part of every subject and a primary school teacher can systematically use all the educational situations to teach language skills to young children. The diversity of language usage was also recognized. In the final tutorials the student teachers described their thinking about teaching language skills, and pupils as language learners, as follows:

At least one thing I have not thought about before is that language is everywhere. If you start to think about it, the same things come for example in science.

They [pupils] talked about language, really, so that they knew many language related concepts. There was that kind of discussion: What would be worth of writing? and How to sum it up?

When we reflected back to our experiences about collegial supervision, we thought that together we had gained a more analytical and theory-based orientation to our work. Without the colleague and the collegial work it would not have been possible. The understanding of our role in Advanced Practicum had changed and we felt that we had been able to give a different perspective to the student teachers than the mentor-teachers at school. In their feedback the student teachers confirmed our self-evaluation. They had realized the different roles of mentor-teachers and university supervisors and appreciated it:
The collegial guidance was good because it gave multiple perspectives. The supervision of mentor-teachers was definitely the most important. University supervisors promoted it because they helped us to conceptualize our work… In their tutorials we looked at concrete examples from our lessons and considered them in a theoretical framework.

During the sessions with the university supervisors we did not talk about single lessons but moved beyond the classroom situations and the implemented curriculum. Across the discussions we looked at them from a wider perspective.

**Discussion**

Kemmis and Smith (2008) have indicated that field experiences in teacher education should include opportunities for student teachers to develop theoretical and critical understanding and knowledge to interpret educational situations. It should also include possibilities for thoughtful reflection on action and experience. In this project we studied one way of supervision to create those opportunities. The framework of curriculum and language development focused the guidance and formulated the connecting thread. Curriculum theory was situated in everyday world of the student teachers’ practice (Pinar, 2004). We aimed to broaden student teachers’ thinking about the issues influencing curriculum and teacher’s planning processes. We wanted to help them to recognize their agency and encouraged them to think about the curriculum from a critical point of view, not just to implement it (Pinar et al., 2004).

Advanced Practicum started with a request to the student teachers to produce a general plan. This was their first experience in comprehensive planning. The concept of
curriculum levels was applied into a real-world situation and was regarded as a tool to make sense of the student teachers’ planning processes (Brown et al., 1989). In the tutorials the student teachers reflected on their planning experiences. As university supervisors, we regarded our main task to be to scaffold the student teachers’ learning processes and help them to reach their potential development zone (Hakkarainen et al., 2006; Vygotsky, 1978). In tutorials we promoted the student teachers’ reflecting and conceptualizing processes and guided them to apply the theoretical concepts to their everyday work at school. When we followed the lessons at school, we were more like coaches, who observed the student teachers and provided help when necessary (McLellan, 1996). This created good possibilities for situated learning. At the beginning it was not easy but during Advanced Practicum the student teachers started to realize the complexity of teachers’ planning processes and the importance of children’s language development. They began to understand their role as teachers. To enhance this we actively brought theoretical aspects into the tutorials and encouraged the interaction between the student teachers’ experiences and the theoretical framework. Gradually the student teachers applied their learning to classroom situations and gained experiences which they could then reflect on from the perspective of their new understanding.

**Conclusions**

This study describes one example of theory-based supervision on the final field experience in primary school teacher education. On the basis of our study we can claim that this example could be modified for the needs of other field experiences in primary school teacher education. For further development we suggest that curriculum and curriculum thinking can provide the basis in which the collaboration can be built. Besides curriculum, the other area can be any subject or cross-curricular theme like media education, science or art. The
essential goal of teacher education and field experiences could be that in the future the teachers are professionals in planning and school development. They should not only remain objects who read and follow the curriculum and text books as a given truth.

For us as university lecturers and supervisors the new way of working was not only refreshing, but also expanded and deepened our understanding and conceptualization of field experiences. When we started our shared adventure, we hoped that the collegial approach would open up new opportunities to understand our practice (Coia & Taylor, 2009). Besides this, we realized that our personal thinking and understanding were professionally and constructively challenged and made more explicit (Loughran & Northfield, 1998). One aim of the study was to crystallize our roles as university lecturers. Kolb’s (1984) model of experiential learning had a double role. It helped us to understand the student teachers’ learning during Advanced Practicum and adjust our guidance to it. Our own learning can also be described via the model. We had shared experiences, reflected them alone and together and conceptualized the guidance during the project. From us it required positions of learner and listener, it took time and meant discussions, sharing and compromising. Both student teachers and university supervisors benefited from the experience and we commend it to our teacher education colleagues.

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