

One-day-per-week school attachment: Voices of Supporting Teachers and Year One student teachers

(A tentative draft for presentation, please do not quote)

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Abstract

The Bachelor of Education (Languages) Programme (BEdL) of the Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIEd) was first implemented in 2001-02. As an integral part of the programme, the design of the Field Experience curriculum has its own characteristics. In addition to the traditional practice on classroom teaching, ranging from collaborative to independent teaching from Year Two onwards, the programme provides student teachers with opportunities for school visit and attachments through which they can better understand the requirements of language teaching in school contexts. Among all school attachments, the one-day-per-week attachment to a local secondary school in the second semester of Year One has received controversial feedback from various stakeholders. Such feedback reflects diversified considerations from schoolteachers involved about whether they will continue to support similar activities. Based on the feedback received in the past two years, this paper will first synthesize voices of current Supporting Teachers and student teachers of the BEd(L). Then the authors will discuss the effectiveness of such a mode of school attachment in preparing student teachers for classroom teaching. Taking the voices of Supporting Teachers and student teachers into consideration, we hope that this paper could help reveal a comprehensive evaluation of the design, and more important, enhance the quality of Field Experience with a view to forging a closer professional partnership between the Institute and schools.

Background

The importance of partnership between schools and teacher education institutions in preparing teachers has always been an indisputable fact. The HKIEd has worked closely with schools on exploring and providing practical field-based learning opportunities for student teachers (STs). Along with the development of BEd and

PGDE programmes in the Institute, various types of Field Experiences (FE) activities such as one-off education visits, attachment visits, and block classroom teaching practice have been in implementation, the success and effectiveness of which depend very much on the significant contributions from schools. The conducting of school attachment visits prior to independent block teaching practice is in line with the Institute's emphasis to practice a *developmental and gradual induction approach* to pre-service teacher education. STs are offered opportunities for visits to relevant educational organizations and school attachments before they start formal classroom teaching practices.

From our experience, the success and effectiveness of such school attachment activities hinge on a complementary performance of the Supporting Teachers (SPTs), also previously known as Cooperating Teachers and Honorary Teaching Advisers. SPTs perform the work of a teaching mentor. In addition to guiding and supporting the STs to learn through practice, SPTs are expected, in particular, to work together with STs while they are at the placement schools (e.g., collaborative lesson planning, preparation, and teaching, organizing extra-curricular activities), and evaluate with them the effectiveness of the collaborations afterwards. Collaborations between SPTs and STs are the most invaluable learning conditions through which STs can gain access to experienced teachers' craft knowledge, the thinking which underlies experienced teachers' classroom practice (Arthur, Davison, & Moss, 1997; McIntyre & Hagger, 1993). Furthermore, STs also consult their SPTs for advice on school routines, relationships with school children and staff, and implementation of school policies. Therefore, SPTs are significant figures often playing a role-modelling effect in the professional growth of STs.

The purpose of the current paper is to present feedback from SPTs and STs across two years on a One-day-per-week Secondary School Attachment Scheme under the Bachelor of Education (Languages) programme (BEdL). There is no doubt that feedback from schools and student teachers on these FE activities is valued as important reference for improving the quality of various teacher education programmes. In the following parts of the paper, we will first introduce briefly the Secondary School Attachment Scheme (the Scheme hereafter) of the BEdL programme. We will then present significant feedback from the SPTs and the STs. Finally, we will discuss the implications of the feedback on the subsequent implementation of the Scheme and propose ways forward to improve the Scheme.

The rationale and the implementation of the one-day-per-week Attachment Scheme in BEd(L)

As an integral part of the BEd(L) programme, the FE component is designed to allow students to gradually transform from a student of teaching to a competent, independent and reflective beginning teacher of Chinese or English. Based on suggestions for improving the quality of FE for STs (Adams, Shea, Liston, & Deever, 1998; Bullough & Gitlin, 1995; Elliott, 1993; Furlong & Maynard, 1995; Griffiths & Tann, 1992; Knowles & Cole, 1996; Posner, 1996), the underlying principles of this Attachment Scheme include an inquiry orientation, the provision of multi-faceted school experiences through school-institute partnership and the promotion of student teachers as novice researchers.

In order to facilitate STs' inquiry into a broader context and culture of teaching and learning, the programme liaise with schools to explore opportunities for exposing STs to classroom-based as well as school-based experiences from junior primary to the end of secondary. Moreover, the FE arrangement is not confined to traditional block teaching practices or occasional educational visits. A One-day-per-week Secondary School Attachment Scheme is introduced in Year One of the programme. In the second semester of Year One, at least two STs are attached to one local secondary school every Wednesday for about seven consecutive weeks to observe and/or assist SPTs in classroom teaching and other school duties. By conducting a 'legitimate peripheral participation' (Lave & Wenger, 1992) in various teaching and non-teaching duties at the placement schools, STs can acquire insights into the multifarious and complex roles of a teacher, carry out situated learning, and establish greater psychological and professional preparation before actually embarking on independent teaching. In addition, in the light of the theoretical knowledge learned from studies in the Institute, STs can gather evidence, analyze it and synthesize their insights in a form which informs their subsequent decisions during different phases of FE. Such a design not only allows module teaching and learning in the Institute to be responsive to initial problems and issues that alert STs in real school contexts, but also eases the transition at the end by familiarizing the STs with the requirements for teaching before they take up the role of teacher in school settings. The merits of school visits conducted on one-day-per-week instead of seven consecutive days in a week lie in the fact that STs can integrate theoretical learning at the Institute with more practical knowledge application in schools as an on-going process rather than a one-off exercise. On the part of the attachment schools, manpower resources will also be increased by having a group of energetic young professionals coming to schools regularly on an extended

period to assist professional and academic activities, etc.

Method of data collection and analysis

Both SPTs and STs at the placement schools involved were asked to fill out a feedback form and a record of work respectively as part of the programme evaluation mechanism. On the feedback form (e.g., Appendix 1), SPTs are invited to comment on the overall arrangement/requirement of the attachment, the STs and the Supporting Teacher scheme to make suggestions for improving the arrangement and to indicate their willingness of continuing to be a SPT. On the other hand, STs are required to keep a record of work during their secondary school attachment (e.g., Appendix 2). They were asked to elaborate on what they have learned from contacts with school personnel, SPTs and students, and from participating in various activities.

Adopting a content analysis approach (Neuendorf, 2002), the FE Coordinators (FECs) first read through the data independently to detect if there were any emerging themes and then compared each other's initial analysis. Since the SPTs and STs were asked to express their opinions according to the pre-determined categories, the focus of data analysis was mainly on looking for answers to the following questions:

- Is the One-day-per-week Attachment Scheme effective? Are there any constraints?
- What are the SPTs' perceptions of the attachment arrangement? What are those of the STs?

Preliminary findings

There were altogether 45 Year One student teachers in the 2001-02 cohort and 98 in 2002-03. It must be mentioned that STs of the 02-03 cohort could only complete four to five days of their attachment due to class suspension caused by SARS. When the attachment was first launched, there were five schools involved. In the following year, three schools continued to offer placements for the programme, and altogether 22 schools admitted our STs for school attachment.

Voices of Supporting Teachers

Forty-five SPTs (100 %) from 2001-02 and 57 SPTs (58.2 %) from 02-03 returned their feedback on the Scheme. Feedback across the two years was highly similar. We will report the feedback under three topics, namely the mode of the Scheme, the role of the

Supporting Teachers, and the performance of the student teachers.

Mode of the Scheme

Most of the respondents acknowledged the value and usefulness of such an arrangement to engage STs in attachment visits to schools so that they would be better prepared for their subsequent block practice. Here is a representative piece of feedback:

This scheme is worthwhile for the students as they can see and learn a lot. My responsibility as an honorary teaching adviser, is to show as much reality of the classroom to the student, the same for the workload. (original in English, LFH5, 02¹)

However, while most respondents supported the Scheme in principle, they had expressed reservations about the current mode of operation. A frequently recurring piece of feedback concerns *the lack of continuity* of the present one-day-per-week mode of visits. Almost every other respondent (particularly so for the 2001-02 cohort) commented that the Scheme would be more effective and that STs would obtain a more comprehensive picture of the daily life of a teacher if they could come consecutively, and the length suggested varies from five days to two weeks. Here are some typical examples:

I prefer to have the students attached to the school for a week, so that I can make better plans. The student can get a more complete picture of a teacher's work and he/she can assist the teacher in planning some lessons which would be meaningful to him/her. (original in English, MST1, 02)

Having student teachers at the school only one day per week for 8 weeks does not provide continuity. They do not see the follow-up to lessons and do not really see the day-to-day activities of the school. (original in English, MMW1, 03)

Three teachers (6.66%) from the first cohort indicated that they would not consider offering support to the Scheme under the current one-day-per-week mode. However, there were still 26 teachers (57.78%) from cohort one and 41 teachers (41.8%) from cohort two who indicated that they would be willing to continue to serve as Supporting Teachers because this is a meaningful task and some of them mentioned how they also

¹ The coding of the quotations from SPTs reflects the initials of the school and the number of the SPT from the school. '02' means the 2001-02 cohort, and '03' means the 02-03 cohort.

benefited from the Scheme, e.g., by receiving feedback on their teaching from the fresh eyes of the STs.

It must be mentioned that about one-third of the respondents were very satisfied with the present arrangement. A couple of respondents were able to see the merits of the current one-day-per-week mode:

This scheme adopts a progressive mode which could enable student teachers to gradually get used to the secondary school environment, the duties of a teacher, and nature of students. It should be more effective than having a one-off block practice.” (original in Chinese, LFH1, 03)

A couple, on the other hand, see the pros and cons in this way:

The merit of this Scheme lies in the fact that the student teachers only visit the school once every week. This has the least effect on the operation of the school. However, such an arrangement lacks continuity and it is difficult to plan activities. Perhaps visiting the school for 5 consecutive days would be better. (original in Chinese, HT1, 03)

In general, the majority of the SPTs seemed to be in support of the spirit and rationale for providing a pre-block-practice attachment. However, they also saw constraints in the present mode of having STs visit the school for only once a week.

The role of the Supporting Teachers

The effectiveness of the current attachment scheme depends very much on how the SPTs perform their role. Most SPTs, however, did not feel that they understood their role and HKIED’s expectations on them very well. Quite a number of respondents pointed out the insufficient details of the guidelines provided by the Institute concerning what they should do to help the student teachers, e.g., how many lessons should be observed, can STs be asked to teach, etc.:

More specific requirement of the programme should be given to schools. The responsibility and the role of the advisor should be clearly stated so that the participating teacher advisers could prepare for that. We really had no idea what to do with the programme until the arrival of the students. (original in English, MST2, 02)

Some SPTs also pointed out the same problem with the STs. When the STs visited the schools, they did not seem to understand their roles and obligations very well. This point about the lack of a thorough understanding of the Scheme on the part of the STs has also been raised several times by respondents from the second cohort.

Like the number of SPTs who was able to appreciate the rationale behind the One-day-per-week Scheme, only a couple of teachers showed their understanding of the expectations on the SPTs under this mode:

Being a mentor, I tried my best to help the student teacher to understand the life of a teacher and the daily operation of a school. I also helped the student teacher to understand students' needs and performance during lessons through allowing them to observe my class. (original in Chinese, CCH1, 03)

A few others, on the other hand, while showing understanding of the expected roles of being a SPT, expressed their concern of increased workload:

As the honorary teacher adviser, I had to plan my lessons and even my free periods on the attachment day well beforehand. I must think of some assignment for the student so that she would find her time in the school fruitful. As a result, I had extra workload and was busier than other schooldays. Though the student helped me with some markings, I needed to find time to show my lessons and my work to her. (original in English, MST1, 02)

Similar comments have also been made by a few other SPTs from the same school which admitted ten STs of the first cohort.

Lesson observation seems to be the attachment activity that has caused the greatest controversy among the SPTs, particularly from the first cohort:

Teachers are always busy with their own teaching and thus lack time to advise and converse with student teachers. Lesson observation, if not a must, can be flexibly conducted. (original in English, MST3, 02)

I have the impression that the HKIEd would prefer students to observe ALL lessons of the Honorary teacher. I don't think it should be this rigid. There should be flexibility, as far as I let the student observe my lesson every time she is here and I make sure that she is doing something conducive to her, (when she is not observing my lesson), then I don't see there is any problem. (original in English, HMT2, 02)

The fallacy of the impression about HKIEd's requirement mentioned in the last feedback above points to the need for more communications between HKIEd and the schools.

It should also be noted that a few SPTs mentioned how they benefited from having their lessons being observed by a novice teacher trainee because the latter could bring in new perspectives. This issue of lesson observation was seldom touched on by the second cohort, probably because of the reduced attachment period due to SARS.

The performance of the student teachers

None of the students on the first cohort received any negative evaluation from the SPTs, while two Chinese and three English majors from the second cohort (N=98) received unfavourable comments concerning their learning attitude and readiness to take up duties.

Most of the respondents complimented on the STs' politeness, punctuality, friendliness to the students and willingness to learn. These were perhaps felt to be basic personal qualities expected from a prospective teacher. While most SPTs highly commended the STs' personal qualities, a few indirectly criticized their inadequacies as a ST. The key issue concerned their *lack of initiative* and *active participation* in some of the duties:

[he is] punctual and has a mission. It would be better if he could do some advance preparation before lesson observation and put forward more comments. (original in Chinese, ST1, 03)

... punctual, able to follow instructions; can be more initiated [sic]; can try to have more contact with students (original in English, LFH2, 03)

In general, the SPTs mentioned a very positive impression of the STs. A few even specified what some STs had performed during the attachment:

XX has good attitude towards the attachment and is willing to learn. She has also contributed to the S.1 phonics course for elite students. (original in English, MMW2, 03)

XX has a very high sense of responsibility and a very friendly personality. ...She

is also very helpful in assisting my teaching and giving a helping hand to the lower achievers in my classes. (original in English, LFH3, 03)

XX is a highly motivated student teacher. She is punctual, responsible and observant. The worksheet she designed for our students reflected that she has a clear concept of English teaching. I've enjoyed her stay with us. (original in English, KC1, 03)

She is willing to learn and help me and my students in terms of preparing for teaching materials, short quizzes, checking workbooks and conducting small group conversation after school. (original in English, HW1, 02)

She is willing to try. She had led the S.4 students to play a memory game. (original in Chinese, LFH5, 03)

It should be noted that some SPTs, while appreciating the STs' positive attitude to learning, pointed out the need for the STs to obtain more background understanding of basic principles of teaching and learning in order to benefit from the attachment visits:

... student teachers should acquire more theory and principles about teaching and learning before beginning the attachment visits. This would enhance the practical usefulness of the scheme to the student teachers (original in Chinese, MST4, 02)

This feedback about STs' insufficient background knowledge of teaching suggests the need to consider when the optimal time is for the STs to conduct their attachment visits. Some respondents suggested scheduling the visits in the STs' second year of study.

From SPTs' feedback reported above, it seems that the effective implementation of the Scheme depends on the following key factors: (1) a thorough and congruent understanding of the rationale and merits of the present mode of the Scheme on the part of the SPTs and STs; (2) a willingness to view mentoring novice teacher trainees as an integral part of a teacher's job, and not a one-off item of perfect show-case performance; and it must be noted that such a commitment requires support and resources from relevant parties including the Institute and the school management; (3) an ability of the STs to provide effective assistance to the SPTs so that the latter would view the attachment visits as a mutually beneficial practice.

Voices of student teachers

All STs returned a record of work upon the completion of the Scheme. Although the experiences the STs gained from different placement schools varied, most STs reported positive learning experience. On the whole, most STs had met kind, caring and empathetic SPTs. Yet, some of the STs in both cohorts (8.9% in 2001; 3.1% in 2002) did not seem to be satisfied with the experiences they obtained from the one-day-per-week school attachment. The STs' mixed feelings about learning from the Scheme are categorized into three constructs, i.e., "learning a lot versus learning little", "feeling like a member versus feeling like a worker", and "following role models versus trying to avoid disappointing examples".

Learning a lot versus learning little

Despite the time limit in one school day per week, the STs reported quite a variety of teaching and non-teaching activities during the seven-week attachment period. They helped the SPTs prepare teaching materials, observed their SPTs' classroom teaching, assisted in classroom activities and excursions, marked students' exercises and shared duties at assemblies and extra-curricular activities, etc. The contradictory impressions of "learning a lot" versus "learning little" differed not only in terms of the frequency and the variety of activities the STs were involved in at schools, but also in terms of the *quality of guidance* they received from their SPTs. For instances:

Both Ms XX and Miss YY had given me caring and thoughtful guidance during the attachment.... Ms XX has taught me how to evaluate students' work in class. She has given me the opportunities to mark different exercises that were done by students (e.g. book reports, workbook, compositions, etc.). Miss YY, on the other hand, guided me to the field of setting questions for different levels of students, which is very practical and important to a teacher. These were all valuable experiences to me and were very essential for my future career. (original in English, 02-34-NHM²)

I learnt how to set question paper for the ERS (extensive reading scheme). I did not have a chance to observe Ms ZZ's class because she is a senior teacher and

² Sources of all extracts are given a code name to ensure anonymity- the first two digits stand for the academic year, the second pair stands for the numerical code assigned to each ST, and the alphabets are the abbreviations for the ST.

she said we could only observe junior class.... I only talked to two teachers for less than 5 minutes after I observed their lessons. (original in English, 03-58-CPL)

As shown in the above extracts, the work mentioned by different STs was similar in nature. However, in the eyes of the STs, guidance from SPTs mattered most. This is not to suggest that SPTs should “tell” the STs what to do. Rather, the STs expected SPTs to be someone they have something (e.g., a common interest of how to teach and how to teach well) to share with, and someone they could turn to when they had queries at the placement schools (02-23-LLF). Among the positive feedback, the STs found discussions with SPTs before and after a classroom observation extremely useful because these helped them understand the rationale underlying the SPT’s instructional design (02-23-LLF; 02-13-FYK). In some occasions, STs were encouraged to try to teach. In addition to discussion on the teaching content, some SPTs even commented on the STs’ performance and reminded them of not making the same mistakes (02-21-LWS).

On the other hand, if the STs were not assigned any tasks or not allowed to observe normal classroom teaching, they simply did not have any opportunity to achieve the objectives of the Scheme (03-60-GLL). The following extract is almost a complaint from a ST:

I am very disappointed to (sic) the arrangement of the school. I do (sic) not have enough chance to observe lesson, I had to “beg” the teachers to give me a chance. After requesting and negotiating, I only have chance to observe 1 “normal lesson” and that is NOT ENOUGH because I had assignments which had to base on class observation. This BADLY AFFECT my assignment performance, and I had to bear the full cost. My supporting teacher misunderstood I was in the school to have TEACHING PRACTICE, but in fact what I needed was chance to OBSERVE lessons. I explained to her many times but she seemed not understand. I do not think IEd had enough communication with the supporting teacher on the aim of school attachment and our role in the school. NOTHING learned on how to TEACH, or different teaching approaches. Except having an encouraging relationship with students. A waste of time. (boldface in the original, 03-91-WCC)

Although this is only one side of the coin, WCC did raise an important issue which determines the effectiveness of the Scheme – a common understanding of the rationale between the SPTs and the STs. To some school teachers, this one-day-per-week

attachment could be considerably different from the mode of teaching practice they had conducted when they received teacher education. On the other hand, the STs may as well need to adjust their own expectations of this field experience activity – while learning how to teach is crucial, classroom teaching is not the sole duty of a teacher; and classroom observation is not the only means of learning to teach. The impact of the STs' perceptions on their learning from the Scheme should be further investigated.

Feeling like a member versus feeling like a worker

Strictly speaking, most STs were strangers to the placement schools and the placement schools could be a new place where the STs had never been to. The STs' records of work suggest that some of them have developed a good rapport with the SPTs and began to have a sense of belonging to the placement schools. Typical remarks on their precious field experiences in this regard include:

The SPT is very patient and helpful during the attachment. She shared her experience in teaching with me and at the same time asked my opinion on her lessons.... (original in English, 02-37-CKM)

The unforgettable things are his comments and encouragement for me.... I will try my best to become a good teacher so as to thank him for his support and expectations.... (original in Chinese, 02-40-WWP)

These extracts reveal, to a great extent, how the STs were accepted as members of the particular schools, or at least, as a working partner of the SPT. In CKM's case, although the ST was inexperienced, the SPT still invited feedback on her own teaching from the ST. This is not only a significant sign of acceptance, but also a strong indicator of the SPT's awareness of the importance of professional growth and exchange. Although the STs did not expect SPTs to tailor any teaching activity for meeting the requirements of their study, the SPT's inquiry about the assignment requirements was perceived as care and concern (03-95-WYK).

It is evident from the STs' records that the more trust schools and SPTs had in the STs, the stronger the STs' commitment to the attachment. Things as simple as exchanging e-mail addresses with the SPTs, and being allowed to enter the staff room to talk to the SPTs were already deeply appreciated by the STs (03-49-CKY). In order that the quality of the STs' learning from the One-day-per-week Scheme can be best revealed, the following afterthought of a ST is worth quoting in length:

We were given an opportunity to hold a Hall Assembly with 800 students on 26th March, 2003, and this was certainly a very valuable experience for all of us. We have to plan everything, from deciding the topic, preparing the scripts and activities and even controlling the discipline of 800 students. I was assigned to do the scripts and to be one of the MC in the assembly. Although I used to give speeches and I wasn't afraid of giving a speech in front of so many people, I learnt, after having the assembly, I MUST learn how to establish the authority of a teacher which each teacher should already acquired. Although I knew how to create a good atmosphere and I did it in the assembly, I found that my tone of speech was not appropriate to use, especially in the occasion of having assembly. That is really a must and necessity for me to improve and I am very glad that I discover this at this early stage as I still have time to improve. I think I will pay more attention to those teachers whom have authority during lessons and discuss with them to improve my situation. And I will also pay more attention to the tone they use in order to learn the skill. (original in English, 03-95-WYK)

Nevertheless, because of limited exposure to the varieties of learning opportunities at some placement schools, some STs had a feeling that they were only temporary workers there to accomplish the assigned duties.

We have never been formally introduced to students in the school, so the students took no notice of us...(original in Chinese, 02-44-YYF)

We didn't attend any extra-curricular activities or school functions.... We rarely contacted with (sic) students as we spent most of our time doing marking...(original in English, 03-74-LCN)

Worse still, some STs were not assigned any other tasks apart from occasional classroom observations.

I have only observed a total of two lessons in six weeks.... I have no opportunity to contact students other than classroom observation...(original in Chinese, 02-06-CHL)

As a result, these STs could only work on their own without benefiting much from being situated in the school contexts. If CHL's remark presents the whole picture of her one-day-per-week attachment, the cost-effectiveness of such a scheme should be

thoroughly reviewed.

Following role models versus trying to avoid disappointing examples

During the seven-week attachment period, most of the STs have observed and participated in the real life in secondary school settings. Issues that struck the STs included challenges in classroom teaching (e.g., various learning needs of students, classroom management, etc.), leading extra-curricular activities and coping with school work such as invigilation because they were also supposed to collect information for module discussion and assignments. Most STs reported that their SPTs had become their role models. According to the STs, all these SPTs possessed the characteristics of good teachers (e.g., willing to help, enthusiastic, caring, considerate, humourous and patient) (Ericksen, 1984). They were not only kind to the school students but also to the STs. For instance,

By doing the work some teachers assigned to us, I learnt what is the daily task needed to be done by the teachers, for instance, they have to prepared (sic) worksheet, decide (sic) special lesson on how to teach some students which are weak in English. She also showed us how to handle a class. She told us the difficulties and the happiness she come across while teaching. She works as a model for our further teaching practice. She is also friendly to students and builds up a good image for the students. (original in English, 03-80-LNW)

Dr XX is very kind and helpful. On the first visit, he already introduced to me everything about the school. I felt very comfortable to work with him. There were a lot of interaction between us. We exchanged ideas and perceptions on teaching and students. It's my honour to have been working with such an easy-going, co-operative and helpful supporting teacher. I learned much from him in terms of teaching strategies as well. I was also given the chance to mark and grade students' work. I got the taste of being a genuine teacher. (original in English, 03-49- IKH)

It is evident from the above extracts that the STs had recognized the basic duties teachers are required to resume. More important, through working with the SPTs, the STs were influenced by the SPTs' enthusiasm and commitment to teaching. In addition to teaching preparation (e.g., lesson plan, teaching materials, learning activities, drafting test paper), the STs also realized the importance of classroom management techniques and a good teacher-student relationship.

Apart from learning from the SPTs, especially when the SPTs were not available, the STs in both years reported that meeting with other teachers, the Link Teacher or the principal at the placement school was helpful. For instances:

Not only our supporting teachers, but also the principal and the other teachers help us in many ways. They treat us like their colleagues. This makes us feel very comfortable, and this also helps me learn more in this field experience. The experience was challenging and valuable, it really helped me to well prepare myself to be a good teacher (sic). (original in English, 03-57-CKM)

I found that discussion with school staff was particularly helpful in recognizing more about the operation of the school as a whole. Having understood the development of being a teacher, I become clearer about my future career prospect. In addition, they shared with us their methods for dealing with discipline problems of students in school. This will be very valuable when we come across any similar occasion. (original in English, 03-88-TMP)

Furthermore, through contacts with other school personnel, some STs generated very insightful observations on teaching effectiveness which they could only gain within the school context. For instance,

A mutually supportive and harmonious relationship among teaching staff is as important as a good teacher-student relationship. (original in Chinese, 03-21-LSY)

Some STs saw the significant role played by the school principal. The authority of a school principal was highly respected (03-23-LLS) whereas a principal's friendly attitude could leave the STs with a good impression for the school administration (original in Chinese, 03-21-LL).

As mentioned in the previous section, some SPTs were not as supportive as expected by the STs. A few STs reported rather negatively in their records:

Totally disappointed with the attachment. Those teachers do not know the aim of our visit and they seem to be unwilling for us to visit during their lesson (sic). (original in English, 03-24-LNK)

While LNK accused the SPTs of not being supportive enough, it seems unrealistic to expect SPTs to be prepared for being observed in every lesson. In fact, the SPTs are not expected to “coach” the STs on how to teach or to commit any fixed period for sharing with the STs. The rationale of the Scheme is to allow as much freedom as possible for the SPTs and the STs to negotiate a feasible way of co-working that is mutually beneficial to both parties. LNK’s disappointment clearly indicates that she had counted solely on the SPT to take the initiative without considering a more active role which she could have played. Nevertheless, among the disappointed STs, some were still grateful for the SPTs’ hard attempts and willingness to share their experiences:

I have observed three lessons. There were too few classroom observation opportunities. My SPT had talked with me about the teaching content. But because of her busy teaching schedule, our discussion was in a hurry. My SPT had talked to me as much as possible. (original in Chinese, 02-18-YSM)

The crux of the problem appears to be more a matter of the interpersonal relationship between the particular STs and their SPTs. While a few STs reported that they were being neglected during the attachment, they also seemed to be in need of guidance on how they could maximize their learning at the placement schools.

Discussion and conclusions

Based on the feedback collected from the SPTs and the STs, we can probably agree that the current one-day-per-week attachment arrangement is a sensible way of preparing STs for conducting subsequent block teaching practices. First, through observing and/or assisting teaching in different classroom settings, the STs of BEd(L) became aware of the practical challenges teachers confront in everyday classroom teaching. Before their actual block practice, the STs could raise their concerns, discuss with their peer, and seek advice from their Institute tutors and SPTs. Second, by taking up non-teaching duties, the STs gained insights into the complexity of teachers’ roles. Third, conversations with students, teachers, administrators and non-teaching support staff after class broadened their perspectives of school context and culture.

Not only did the STs benefit from the attachment, but also the SPTs. Instead of being merely an extra “burden” to the existing demanding work of daily teaching, the Scheme was taken by some SPTs as a means of their own professional development. Their willingness to share their experiences with the STs and to listen to the STs’ feedback on their teaching demonstrated the spirit of mutual support among teachers and provided

convincing examples for the STs to follow. The influence of the SPTs on the STs' professional growth could be far-reaching. Therefore, the importance of the roles of SPTs during the Scheme could not be under-estimated. The Institute should be responsible for ensuring that all SPTs are fully prepared for and supported in their significant roles.

Undoubtedly, the success of the Scheme depends critically on a common understanding of the roles of all parties involved including the Institute, the SPTs and the STs. "Voices" of the SPTs and the STs in the above sections suggest that if the objectives of the attachment had been made "clearer", both the SPTs and the STs might have been able to see more flexibility and possibilities in the implementation of the Scheme in different school contexts without reducing its educational value. The question remains what modes of communication are considered effective by all parties. On the part of HKIEd, communication of key messages was done through FE seminars for STs, initial contacts with the principal, a briefing seminar for SPTs conducted at HKIEd, written documents (FE Handbook and supplements), and a special date for the STs to meet with principals and SPTs before the start of the Scheme. If these were felt to be not enough, we need to consider other more effective channels.

From our experience of working with local teachers, those SPTs who felt stressful at lesson observations may arise from their strong professional conscience and a conventional concern about not to lose face as an "expert" in front of a "novice". Thus, they felt obliged to "perform" a good show for the "audience". While we deeply appreciate SPTs' professional commitment, they could perhaps be relaxed a bit as the success and effectiveness of a lesson are determined by a combination of factors some of which may be beyond our control. Besides, we learn equally significantly from successful and not-so-successful lessons by being reflective in our practices.

Furthermore, the records of work by the STs of BEd(L) suggest that the STs did not expect to observe flawless lessons. As first year undergraduates, the STs were undergoing a "transition" from students to student-teachers. Their mixed feelings about the Scheme emphasizing the *affective domains* of their impressions of their field experiences support the claim that "teaching is a relation" (Loughran, 1996). According to their records of work, the recurring characteristics of the SPTs to whom the STs were thankful were kind, caring, enthusiastic attitude, willingness to share experiences, etc. While teaching skills and classroom management techniques were also focuses of interest, the STs had not commented much on the subject content of the lessons. It was the SPTs' attitudes towards teaching rather than the content they taught and pedagogical approaches they employed that earned the STs' respects and

gratitude during the attachment. When the STs met enthusiastic SPTs, they were inspired to develop not only a strong sense of obligation to the placement schools but also a determination to serve in the teaching profession. If our observations are valid, the most significant part of the SPTs' roles in this Attachment Scheme lies in their ability to socialize the STs into a community of practitioners with good "teacher"(versus "teaching") practices, something which concerns the quality of the whole person of the teacher, instead of the effectiveness of individual lesson performances.

In conclusion, this paper has highlighted some typical feedback from the SPTs and the STs of BEd(L) on the effectiveness of the One-day-per-week School Attachment Scheme. The SPTs' comments and concerns are revealed and the STs' expectations on the Scheme are analyzed. We have gained a better understanding of the constraints that hinder the implementation of the Scheme. Our experiences could serve as reference for other teacher education programmes. To optimize STs' learning from the Scheme in due course, we hope to emphasize the significant influence of the SPTs on the professional development of STs and sincerely invite schoolteachers to join our mutual beneficial learning community.

Finally, the One-day-per-week Scheme for the BEd(L) will soon take place in the coming semester. On the basis of the feedback discussed above, we plan to take the following initiatives for improving the communication among the Institute, SPTs and STs. First, lecturing staff of the programme will conduct interim attachment visits to the placement schools to clarify the expectations of the Institute for FE; to listen to school personnel about the difficulties and concern about supporting the FE activities; to discuss with SPTs and explore possibilities of optimizing the STs' learning at and contribution to the placement schools. Second, STs of the current Year One cohort will be guided to present a personal profile to introduce themselves to the placement school. By listing out their strengths, professional knowledge acquired, and expectations, etc., the STs will provide more information for the placement schools to arrange appropriate opportunities for them to assist in the teaching and learning of school students. On the part of the BEd(L) programme, we hope all our attempts can facilitate a better communication among the Institute, SPTs and STs and, eventually, contribute to the development of quality teacher education in the community.

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