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Through the Spattered Windshield: A Visually Impaired Teacher's Internship

This article shows how Holly, a visually impaired student teacher, successfully completed a 16-week internship. During her student teaching Holly's cooperating teachers revealed their uncertainty in knowing how to support and evaluate her teaching. During her internship, however, Holly's cooperating teachers and her college supervisor learned how to adapt the traditional expectations to Holly's abilities. Implications for educators include empowering interns to determine their own solutions to problems, modifying instructional methods to accommodate their differences, and developing forthright communication. University educators should embrace opportunities to achieve educational equity for all.

Cet article explique la façon dont Holly, une stagiaire avec une déficience visuelle, a réussi un internat d'enseignement de 16 semaines. Pendant le stage de Holly, ses enseignants coopérants ont exprimé leur incertitude quant à la manière d'appuyer et d'évaluer la stagiaire. Pendant son internat par contre, les enseignants coopérants et l'évaluateur du collège ont appris à adapter les attentes traditionnelles qu'ils avaient face aux compétences de Holly. Parmi les implications de cette étude pour les enseignants, l'on cite l'importance d'habiliter le stagiaire pour qu'il trouve lui-même les solutions à ses problèmes, d'adapter les méthodes pédagogiques pour respecter les différences de chacun et de développer un système de communication franche et sincère. Les professeurs à l'université se doivent d'accueillir de telles occasions qui favorisent l'équité éducationnelle pour tous.

"Excitement, encouragement, and perseverance: these are the words that describe my internship." As I wrote her words that ended my interview with the visually impaired intern teacher, I reflected how she persevered in seeing beyond the spattered windshield of her disabilities and how her capabilities enabled her to find excitement in her internship and encouragement from her college and school supervisors. What was her experience, and how did educators assist her?

The following case study chronicles how the intern with a visual impairment quoted above (pseudonym Holly) successfully completed her internship. She gained satisfaction with her college and school mentors despite their inexperience in working with disabled interns.

Background

Holly, who was enrolled in the Saskatchewan's College of Education four-year concurrent (arts/sciences and education courses) program, completed course work in her major subjects, general education, and subject methods, and finished two rounds of student teaching. As the academic coordinator responsible for the internship program content and research, I documented her experience as she completed her internship in the fall term of her final year. My

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10-year experience supervising Aboriginal interns and concerns about equitable opportunity for all offered little help as I considered how to support a visually impaired intern within our normal operations.

Lynn, the administrative coordinator of school-based experience, places interns according to a subject or grade-level match with cooperating teachers. The teachers provide the classroom and students, model instruction, and coach the interns' planning and teaching as they progress from teaching a single lesson to two weeks of full-time teaching. The cooperating teachers complete a daily cycle of supervision with the intern and supply comments to guide the intern's growth. They also attend three full-day seminars (September to November) with the intern and complete the intern's final evaluation. A successful internship evaluation and completion of the BEd requirements qualify the intern to teach in the province.

Blaine, Holly's college supervisor, established a relationship with her and outlined college expectations at an orientation meeting.

Sixteen weeks before, Lynn said, "We have a new challenge this fall. Do you have any experience supervising interns with a visual impairment? How should we supervise?" I replied, "One, 14 years ago—and I know nothing about supervision except to be open-minded and responsive to her needs."

Because of the low incidence of student teachers with visual impairments (Holly was the first of 4,000 interns that we had served), neither of us had other exemplary experience or precepts to guide our means of supporting this intern. I felt compelled to track and document her experience so that our college would be better prepared to accommodate future interns with different physical capabilities.

When Holly identified her special needs, Lynn informed a school division director about Holly's conditions and requested a teaching placement. The director recommended two teachers, and the field office coordinated an interview between Holly and the two instructors. Following the interview Holly phoned Lynn and told her that the interview had gone well and that she would serve her 16-week internship with them the following fall. Then Holly presented her physician's letter stating that she could begin an internship despite her loss of central vision through Stargardt's disease. I probed for further explanation of the condition.

During an interview with me, Holly explained that parts of her central vision were missing and other parts were unfocused, as if she were looking through a spattered lens that had been smeared with Vaseline. I came closer to understanding her filtered view while sitting in a carwash. The windshield had been sprayed with soap that was now separating into spatters. Then a square of color lighted up. I knew it was an illuminated word, for I could see parts of the letters. I lowered my head and moved side to side to see around the soap screen. I filled in the missing letter parts from memory. Then, joining seen with unseen parts, I concluded the sign said "soaking." At that moment I had some small understanding of her interrupted vision and the time it took to interpret this visual message. Her personal explanation of her limitations had led to my approximation of what visual limitations might mean.

Holly was placed in an elementary school that housed regular and special needs students from the surrounding rural district. The physical layout of the

school and town were known to her, as she had completed a previous 10-day block of student teaching in another school in the town. Because her husband's farm was nearby, she was used to shopping and navigating in that environment.

Student Teacher Assessments

I examined Holly's previous student teaching assessments: one revealed below average and two showed above average assessments. The records highlight some of the uncertainty cooperating teachers had in knowing how to support and evaluate student teachers with disabilities.

In the 10 weekly visits of her Year 2 student teaching practice, the cooperating teacher rated Holly below the required competence level for this stage in professionalism, planning, and teaching skills. Although her cooperating teacher listed Holly's positive qualities of attentive listening, caring manner, and willingness to help students, she noted,

Holly appears enthusiastic although her quiet shy personality made it harder to draw out ideas and have a lot of meaningful discussions.

I didn't see evidence of her consulting resource materials. (Maybe I wasn't pushing her to do more. I found it hard to decide on how hard I should push).

Teaching is a concern for me. With her visual handicap and personality, this area will need attention with step-by-step guidance. Please note this is my opinion and I don't have much to base it on as time was limited. (Year 2: Student Teaching Assessment)

In her second student teaching experience, a 10-day block, her cooperating teacher rated her above or at the level of competence for this stage in professionalism, planning, and teaching. She commented,

Holly has displayed enthusiasm for her work and taken a sincere interest in learning as much as she can about the school, the students, and teaching in general.

This teacher comments that Holly is aware of the purpose of her lessons and strives to teach the content so that all students understand, but adds

I have discussed some of the possible problems I have noticed with her vision disability (reading smaller print such as newsletters, forms, notes from parents, children's work, storybooks, etc.) but she has many strategies that she hopes to use. With her *determination*, I feel success is certainly a possibility. (Year 3: Student Teaching Assessment)

In these pre-internship assessments both teachers identified Holly's potential but asked if her limitations would prevent her from completing all required teaching tasks. Holly's performance was constrained by the time frame of student teaching. She had little opportunity to become familiar with the school and classroom physical layout in either of her 10-day practices, and she had little time to locate or enlarge resources on her home computer. We see her described both as a "quiet shy" person and as a student teacher with the "determination" to succeed

Literature Review

Next I searched the university, teachers' federation, Saskatchewan Post-Secondary, and *The Student Slate* (the voice of organized blind students in America) resources. The search first highlighted the importance of field experience in teacher development.

Field experience was considered the most important component in teacher preparation (Zahorik, 1988). Current literature on trends in reshaping teacher education included greater intern involvement in schools (Bines & Welton, 1995; Darling-Hammond, 1994; Fullan, 1995). Success in internship was seen as a significant influence in prospects for gaining employment and in learning to think like a teacher (Furlong & Maynard, 1995).

Interns' difficulties were related to making connections between campus learning and school practice (Campbell-Evans & Maloney, 1998). In a five-year study, Saskatchewan interns most frequently withdrew from the internship because of difficulties with lesson planning and classroom management (Smith, 1999). Our college responded by emphasizing planning in methods classes, internship seminars, and in creating an interactive lesson planning Web page. We also provided a distance education management course that enabled interns to apply management theory to real classroom challenges.

The studies on visual impairment included interns' overcoming negative self-concept barriers, correcting educators' misconceptions, recommending support, and valuing self-determining dialogue. Funk and Fletcher (1981), Merchant, Coriell, Gilmore, Merchant, and Moore (1980), and Schroeder (1998) stressed the importance of the visually impaired person moving from feelings of inferiority to belief in their own capacity. Similarly, other writers suggested freeing university educators and school division administrators from misconceptions about the limitations of visually impaired students (Funk & Fletcher, 1981; Howard, 1998; Koenig, 1998; Miller, 1982).

Several reports outlined how college instructors might adjust methods (Chang, Richard, & Jackson, 1996; Cole, 1997; Gerber, 1992; Keller, Karp, & Simula, 1992), use recorders, magnifiers, and computers (Hurst, 1997), or employ readers (Bell, 1998). Various writers emphasized the importance of college educators engaging the intern in empowering dialogue to support the self-determination of their needs and capabilities (Bassett et al., 1996; Howard, 1998; Keller et al., 1992; Lichtenstein, 1997).

Keller et al.'s (1992) paper offered a conceptual framework from Dawis and Lofquist's (1984) theory of work adjustment that would be used to analyze intern and intern evaluator satisfaction. This "type of person-environment fit theory of career development" involved two satisfaction perspectives: satisfactoriness in completing the work as viewed by others, and satisfaction as perceived by the individual as they perform the job in a particular work environment. Keller et al. (1992) explain:

Satisfactoriness depends upon the correspondence between the individual's abilities and the job's ability requirements, while satisfaction follows from the correspondence between the individual's needs and what the job requirements can do to meet those needs. For persons with disabilities the satisfactoriness revolves around the question: Can the preservice educator with disabilities perform the responsibilities required of the profession? Judgment of satisfaction

by preservice educators with disabilities poses the question: Will the education institution supply the support, resources, adaptations and accommodation I need. (p. 7)

Internship Context

I wondered if our University of Saskatchewan teacher education institution would provide the support needed for Holly to complete her 16-week internship. How would the information and activities provided in the four internship seminars and classroom management telecasts be adapted to her capabilities? How would college and cooperating teacher supervision accommodate her diversity? Would our supervisor meet her needs?

Two cooperating teachers had agreed to host her. Despite previous experience supervising interns, they expressed initial misgivings and felt unprepared to provide her with needed support. Their fears diminished over time as they realized that with two teachers involved they were less liable to make mistakes. They discussed mutual concerns, sought ideas from the intern, and solved emerging dilemmas. One of the cooperating teachers hoped to transfer her insights from supervising Holly to her sister's school-aged twins who had the same visual limitation.

Blaine became Holly's college supervisor. He was chosen because in his seven years of supervision with Aboriginal and other special students he had shown flexibility, open-mindedness, and the ability to accommodate their needs.

Providing for diverse students and teachers is an important priority supported by federal, provincial, and university policy. For example, the university has a responsibility "to develop and support initiatives that promote the acceptance, retention and success of students with disabilities" (University of Saskatchewan, 1998, p. 3). It is especially important for colleges of education to prepare teachers who have impairments as role models. We have a steadily increasing incidence of students in schools with physical and other challenges.

Nevertheless, we had to weigh our desire to help make the internship experience a success for her against responsibility for the safety, management, and learning of the students in her class. In exploring Holly's experience, I wished to find out if our internship program satisfied her needs and if she could satisfy the professional demands of an internship.

Research Methods

After securing ethical clearance for my case study of Holly's internship experience, I collected data from various sources: her Year 2 and Year 3 student teaching evaluations, four college supervisor's reports, a classroom observation, two one-hour interviews with Holly and her two cooperating teachers, her internship final evaluation, and two post-internship hour-long interviews with her. These data would create a verbal portrait of Holly (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). They would be gathered from varied sources before, during, and after her internship process (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

In addition to providing his four observation-of-intern-teaching reports, Blaine also agreed to keep a journal tracking his seminar experience with Holly. He reported these findings to me orally in four monthly debriefings and in two telephone conversations.

After reviewing Holly's teaching evaluations, I interviewed her on campus about her concerns and expectations as she anticipated beginning the internship.

Next, Lynn and I spent half a day at Holly's school during her full-time teaching in the 12th week of her internship. We listened to the pre-observation conference among the college supervisor, Blaine, and Holly. We observed her teaching in the classroom and witnessed the post-observation supervisor-intern conference. Then we interviewed Holly, her two cooperating teachers, and Blaine using a semistructured set of interview questions such as "What qualities and adaptations should cooperating teachers demonstrate to support your intern growth?"

I shared the interview transcript data with Lynn, who confirmed or corrected parts of the draft. Then I faxed the revised manuscript to the two cooperating teachers, Holly, and Blaine with an invitation to edit.

Next, I examined the four end-of-month internship college supervisor's reports, and her internship final evaluation. Finally, I interviewed Holly for two hours following her final evaluation to confirm and augment previous data.

Analysis of Satisfaction

I looked for evidence in the interviews and related documents that represented answers of No and Yes to the satisfactoriness and satisfaction questions. The data content from all sources entered on computer disk was also analyzed using a constant comparative method to identify and collate evidence for common themes.

Findings

The data reported below reveal Holly's concerns and expectations as she anticipated her internship. They also show how the internship program satisfied her needs. Finally, they demonstrate how the visually impaired intern satisfied the requirements of teaching.

Anticipating the Internship

During her campus office interview Holly shared her pre-internship concerns and expectations. Like interns discussed in the literature (Gerber, 1992), she was concerned about her own performance and whether the internship staff would respond to her needs. She said,

I was scared, uncertain—not knowing if I would be able to teach. I'd taught figure skating and dance, but didn't know if that teaching will work in a classroom.

It would take time to get used to it — to adapt.

Will the university understand, will they be able to work with me, or will I be just another number?

She expected that she would "get to know the internship program expectations ... and make early contact with the staff to talk things out ... have a visually impaired mentor to talk to." Although the mentor suggested in other research (Merchant et al., 1980) was not available, most of her concerns and expectations had been satisfied. Her overall evaluation of her internship was: "It seemed

really fair to me" (office interview 5). The relationships that contributed to her satisfaction with her internship are listed below.

Intern Satisfaction

Intern satisfaction asks, Will the internship program and staff supply the support, resources, adaptations and accommodation needed by the intern with a disability? As used in this research, *support* means aiding someone faced with a challenge, *resources* means things that can be turned to for support, *adaptations* means change to a new use, and *accommodations* means reconciling opposing views.

I first examine below the actions of the internship office staff and college supervisor according to the satisfaction qualities. Then I consider the behaviors of the cooperating teachers and others.

Internship staff. Holly stated that the support and adaptations provided by the internship staff were effective:

The staff made early phone contact with me so that I could talk things out. I became aware of their caring supportive nature. (office interview 2)

In June, they provided support by selecting a school placement site that was known to me. (office interview 3a)

This four-month lead time enabled her to make early contact with the cooperating teachers, share information about her needs, begin building a relationship with them, and plan units of work before the fall internship. She also appreciated the support, provision of resources, and adaptations provided by Blaine. She noted,

He was always helpful. He provided excellent support and his openness developed a high level of trust between us.

He looked for available resources such as big books and books on tape at the Canadian National Institute for the Blind and the Teachers' Federation libraries.

He was very flexible in everything he did with me. (office interview 3b)

To accommodate future interns with disabilities, Holly suggested during a school site interview that the internship office should

Interview any intern with special needs prior to making the school placement. During that time they could discuss the special needs of the individual.

Encourage early contact prior to the internship between intern and the college supervisor to hasten the development of trust and support between them. (school interview 2)

The staff also realized that they had not adapted the internship registration form to accommodate Holly's visual limitations. It was printed in 12-point type with small spaces for answers. Future adaptations could allow the intern to use a computer to enlarge the questions and key in answers, or use audiotaped questions and answers.

Cooperating teachers. Holly felt welcomed by her cooperating teachers and other school staff members. Despite initial worries about providing support, both cooperating teachers agreed that

Maintaining open communication with Holly allowed us to determine her needs and supply suitable support. (school interview, 7)

Holly explained how

They provided daily activity sheets for my use and shared their materials so I didn't have to seek out many extra resources. (office interview 3c)

The cooperating teachers became more adaptable to Holly's needs over time. Holly noted how by saying,

At first each had different ways of teaching. I had to adapt both their differences to my teaching style. They would say, "Do this." I would tell them, "I can't." (office interview 3d)

For example, in the first week of the internship one of the cooperating teachers said she was chagrined after asking Holly to read a story aloud printed in standard 12-point type. The teacher thought this would be a simple task that many other interns had done without difficulty, but it was a physically daunting task for Holly. The two consulted and asked for Holly's suggestions. Holly explained that she was most comfortable reading from big books, text that she had enlarged to 18-point type on her home computer, or stories that she had memorized at home before reading to the class.

By the end of the internship they provided time and opportunity for Holly to create her own materials and methods. In addition, Holly noted that some adjustments could only be made on the spot and not be anticipated before the classroom event.

Adaptations made by the cooperating teachers included oral rather than written post-observation feedback, tape-recorded comments, enlarged-print written feedback, and high-contrast color-coded charts to show the intern classroom movement patterns. They encouraged Holly to arrange student seating to suit her and provided a whiteboard and black felt markers to facilitate her preferred board writing medium. They knew that she had some difficulty in visually sweeping the room to determine student conduct. They helped her develop a pattern of walking along desk rows to monitor the actions of all students. To give her students their preferred eye orientation, Holly faced her students full front, even though she saw peripherally. Also, after internship seminars the cooperating teachers orally reviewed the main points contained in overheads

The two cooperating teachers, Blaine, and Holly became a team of equal partners who, like others (Gerber, 1992; Hurst, 1997), accommodated learning and teaching difficulties. They encouraged Holly to take risks and allowed her to explore teaching in a nonjudgmental atmosphere (cooperating teacher, school interview, 7).

The triad found that having Holly teach in one classroom for a two-week block of time provided the best opportunity for her growth. Holly found that she was most successful in learning to teach in a fixed rather than constantly changing environment (school interview 6).

Other support. Holly explained that she and a peer teaching in another school supported each other, observed in each other's classrooms, team taught an after-school movement-dance class, and Holly rode with her peer to intern-

ship and classroom management seminars. She also received emotional support from her husband and adapted her instruction according to student response.

Satisfactoriness

The measure of satisfactoriness asks, Can the preservice teacher with disabilities accept the responsibilities required of the profession? In general, evaluations from student teaching (described in the background), internship experiences, and classroom observations demonstrated that Holly possessed the required teaching attributes and skills. She performed the tasks required of the profession, but her physical limitations were repeatedly questioned.

At the end of her 16-week internship, the internship evaluation form signed by two cooperating teachers, the school principal, and the college supervisor summarizes her success in performing the tasks required of a teaching professional. Comments from the form about her professional attributes, planning, and teaching demonstrate her ability to meet expected teaching outcomes:

Holly assumed a dependable role in fulfilling school commitments (musical, sports teams, movement program) and planned her lesson and units carefully and in detail.

Her assessors report her monitoring student work, responding to students, and providing for safety in the classroom. The cooperating teacher notes:

Holly improved her ability to monitor independent practice.

She was able to provide feedback to students on a consistent and equitable basis and has become more sensitive to obvious student non-verbal cues.

She was able to maintain a safe physical environment for her students.

These comments underscored Miller's (1982) query wondering if visually impaired interns can educate and provide for the safety of students. Children in her classes did not suffer, they were engaged in learning in a secure environment. Moreover, five months after Holly left the classroom students were still singing the songs she taught them and taking out books that they had made under her guidance. Nevertheless, the cooperating teachers stated that to make the best use of Holly's talents, they would recommend that she have a teacher aide to be her "reading tool" (Bell, 1998) that would give students immediate feedback in handwritten work, record brainstorming words, and identify any misbehavior in an unstructured setting such as reading groups.

With Holly's approval, the internship evaluation also named and described her vision loss and listed her instructional adaptations to accommodate her disability in the classroom. These included printing on unlined chart paper, using a whiteboard in place of a chalkboard, and taking more time to mark assignments. She adapted story and learning materials (big books, taped stories, puppetry), used computer-assisted materials, and enlarged attendance and evaluation forms. The document also acknowledged that Holly found reading normal-sized manuscript printing difficult.

Classroom observations of her teaching performance by cooperating teachers, the college supervisor, and two coordinators of school-based experience also corroborated her ability to meet the internship requirements.

Summary, Discussion, and Implications

In congruence with Dawis and Lofquist's (1984) framework, Holly successfully met two satisfaction measures. Her abilities corresponded with the job requirements, and her needs corresponded with how the job requirements were adjusted to meet her needs. Using her words, her perseverance allowed her to meet the internship requirements to pass the internship, and the encouragement she received from her mentors made her feel satisfied and excited about the internship experience.

The suggestions that emerge from this study are limited to the intern with the visual impairment. They are not generalized to all interns.

As college staff built the relationship with Holly, we tried to remain open and flexible in our attitude. We tried, in agreement with others (Gilmore, Merchant, & Moore, 1980; Goodwin, 1997; Howard, 1998), to become aware of her unique needs and not treat her according to some preconceived notions about all blind students. Her personal explanation of her limitations led to my approximation of what visual impairment might mean.

As well, we had to strive to not administer, instruct, or supervise her as an intern with normal vision. Blaine's experience as a college supervisor and from other research (Cole, 1997, Gerber, 1992) reminded us that before passing out a form, using an instructional overhead slide, or making a suggestion based on our visually oriented approach to teaching, we had to consider if our methods would accommodate her differences.

In all cases we discovered that asking Holly was our most accurate source of knowledge. She was most able to inform us why our standard method would not work for her. We followed previous authors' (Howard, 1998; Keller et al., 1992; Lichtenstein, 1997) suggestions to support the self determination of the intern with an impairment. Moreover, Holly was usually able to adapt her methods to make them accessible to her and useful in the instruction of students. Her need for large print, oral answers, and control of lighting also increased our awareness of how we could learn to adapt our instruction to serve differently able people.

After we became aware of the time needed to adapt resources from standard print, we were more aware of the importance of early contact between physically disadvantaged interns and educators involved with the internship. In interviews Holly stressed the importance of being given lead time so that she would have the time to prepare in her own way.

Because Holly was forthright, open, and flexible in communicating with us, we were able to ask her many direct questions about her limitations and capabilities. Her answers enabled us to understand her particular strengths and needs, build trust, provide a suitable school placement, and maintain a creative dialogue among all the participants in her internship.

For example, she functioned best when she was able to prepare in advance. Her main limitation was the slower pace of her instruction when she had to write on the board, read student work, or detect unusual pupil behavior. Without a reader she would require more time than usual to complete these

tasks. Her special teaching gifts would be most enhanced if she had a teacher associate to deal with these matters.

Possible implications for educators working with special-needs interns include the following.

- Educators need to make early contact with challenged interns because discovering new ways of teaching is time-consuming.
- Educators need to examine their views and see the capabilities rather than the limitation of these special teachers. Despite seeing actual teaching success, it is difficult to change from our visually oriented world view of effective instruction to an appreciation of other modes.
- We need to encourage interns with impairments to determine how to satisfy their needs. In this case Holly was successful when we trusted her enough to get out of her way.
- Finally, we need to employ forthright communication to expose all hidden assumptions. Doing this develops the intern's capacities and reveals her actual, rather than imagined, limitations.

Our experience in learning with a visually impaired intern showed us that people with disabilities can be highly effective educators. Teacher educators should not fear interactions with physically diverse interns, but rather see these encounters as opportunities to learn how a different set of capabilities can be used to educate. We can achieve educational equity for all only by embracing opportunities that reach beyond limitations.

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