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## Pedagogy, Practice, and Mentorship: Core Elements of Connecting Theory to Practice in Teacher Educator Preparation Programs

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# **Pedagogy, Practice, and Mentorship: Core Elements of Connecting Theory to Practice in Teacher Educator Preparation Programs**

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## **Abstract**

As the teacher education preparation climate shifts to emphasize extended clinical field experiences as the heart of preservice teacher preparation, the research community has attempted to understand more about the pedagogies and personnel that will support learning in these areas. Supervisors are a staple in the clinical field experience, yet the research community has a limited viewpoint of the practices and decision-making that lay underneath their work. Using a multiple case study methodology and a select but diverse group of participants, this study investigated the resources that supervisors draw on to resolve challenges in their practice. The results of this study highlight the significance of coursework for the preparation of teacher educators. Specifically, the results note that exposure to and practical application of philosophies and pedagogies learned during coursework can be used to utilized to resolve challenges in supervisors' work with preservice teachers. Additionally, this research demonstrates the role of mentoring communities on clinical instructors' development.

## **Keywords**

teacher education; teacher educator professional development; supervision

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## **Introduction**

In 2014, the *Journal of Teacher Education* published a special issue devoted to the professional development and practices of teacher educators. The editors vigorously confronted both the lack of understanding regarding the work and preparation of teacher educators. Generally speaking, the current model of teacher educator preparation in the U.S. presumes that the classroom experiences of former classroom teachers and school administrators serve as preparation sites for future teacher educators. Upon further review, the field of teacher preparation has accepted that the theories of teaching and learning used in classrooms have great variance when compared to theories of teaching about the science and art of teaching. Given these gaps between theory and practice, the field of teacher preparation should engage in research and dialogue to gather a better understanding of the “knowledge and skills that teacher educators will need to prepare teachers for the challenges of standards-based instruction” (Knight et al., 2014, p. 268). However, this call has been met by a number of challengers, including Goodwin et al. (2014) and Loughran (2014), who highlight the lack of preparatory experiences that support teacher educators professional development during their doctoral experiences, as well as underscore the need to provide a conceptual trajectory for on the job professional development that focuses research on context specific practices of acting teacher educators.

Still, the research on the practices and professional development of teacher educators remains nearly unearthed in comparison to other areas of interest in teacher education. Most of the research on the practices of teacher educators heavily focuses on the work of content area specialists and their struggles about teaching and learning in the college classroom. Research is lacking in the area of clinical instructor preparation and professional development. This is particularly true for the work of clinical field instructors, who are responsible for mentoring student teachers throughout their practicum experiences.

In the interest of addressing these gaps, this study seeks to understand how the past experiences of clinical instructors in graduate school impacted their work as supervisors of practicum experiences. The research question that guided this inquiry was:

What strategies and resources do clinical field instructors use to resolve challenges in practice as a field instructor?

The findings of this paper shed a light on the areas of clinical instructors’ experiences with graduate coursework and mentorship that helped them to conduct their work in the field.

## **Literature Review**

Supporting the development of teacher educators demands specialized knowledge and skills to advance preservice teachers as competent professionals. Swennen, Shagrir, and Cooper (2009) assert that one of the most important knowledge bases is derived from the ability of teacher educators to differentiate between the knowledge needed to teach PK-12 students from the knowledge needed to be an effective teacher educator in a teacher education program. This differentiation between knowledge needed to teach students and knowledge needed to teach teachers is frequently discussed in the teacher educator literature and is known as first-order and

second-order teaching (Swennen et al., 2009). In first-order teaching, teachers of children attempt to convey subject matter to a group of students. It is differentiated from teaching about teaching, known as second-order teaching, and requires a completely separate set of pedagogical and knowledge bases. Second-order teaching is best described by Loughran (2006) as the ability “to articulate the what, how and why of teaching and to do so through the very experiences of teaching and learning about teaching” (p. 14). This involves the knowledge of teaching as a subject and discipline, content of a particular subject area, and most importantly, knowledge and skills about the education of teachers. While the knowledge of how to teach in a content area might come naturally to most teacher educators, knowledge of how to teach teachers is initially foreign.

Research in the field of teacher education is moving towards identifying the skills required for teacher educators to engage in second-order teaching (Lunenberg, 2002). Burns, Jacobs, and Yendol-Hoppey (2016) have specifically identified second-order teaching tasks and functions that clinical instructors use in their practice. While most research in the field of supervision or about clinical instructors narrowly focuses on the supervisor’s responsibility of giving feedback and support as the dominant role and responsibility, or targeted assistance and individual support (Zeichner and Liston, 1989; Steadman & Brown, 2011; Solousu, 2015), Burns, Jacobs, and Yendol-Hoppey’s (2016) meta-analysis note the expanding role of the supervisor in clinically rich settings. This meta-analysis of research on clinical practitioners in the recent era of clinically rich field experiences reflects the most recent knowledge that has been generated regarding the tasks and functions of clinical instructors. These tasks and functions include (1) targeted assistance, (2) individual support, (3) collaboration and community, (4) curriculum support, and (5) research for innovation.

With a thorough and clear understanding of the tasks and functions, clinical instructors must embody to thoroughly engage in effective supervision of preservice teachers. Our field must also question the processes by which clinical instructors develop the philosophies and skills to engage in this unique type of teaching, in order to better bridge the gap between theory and practice in teacher education. Research shows that clinical instructors who are asked to engage in second-order teaching throughout field experiences have very little introduction or prior training to engage in these tasks and functions (Loughran, 2014). Thus, when teacher educators encounter activities in their work that they must complete, or issues they must resolve and are without the pedagogical skills that were discussed in the previous section, they have been found to draw on their experiences from a wide variety of sources to meet their job requirements. The following section details the varying experiences that teacher educators are known to draw on to supplement the knowledge and skills needed to work with preservice teachers.

### **Preservice Teaching**

Scholars have demonstrated that teacher educators draw on their past experiences in a number of areas in their lives to support their work as teacher educators (Boyd & Harris, 2010; Dinkleman, Margolis, & Sikkenga, 2006; Murray & Male, 2005). Teacher educators have been found to draw on past experiences as pre-service teachers, in-service teachers, and general life experiences. As such, there is a need to understand how previous experiences impact, and perhaps inhibit, the evolution of teacher educator preparation.

Novice teacher educators report drawing from their experiences as preservice teachers to support their work as field instructors. Bullock (2009) highlights the idea that teacher educators may reference their apprenticeship of observation as teacher candidates to frame their practices and pedagogies as teacher educators. With this in mind, there is a notion of apprenticeship based on observations from preservice teaching experiences that create a paradigm of what an effective teacher educator 'looks' like. By using experiences as a teacher candidate to frame the experience to provide for other preservice teachers, teacher educators often make assumptions about the needs of teacher candidates based on needs experienced during her/his own work as a teacher candidate. Bullock summarizes his theory of teacher development by saying, "just as teacher candidates might be able to imitate their former teachers, so too are new teacher educators able to imitate their former teacher educators" (2009, p. 299). The apprenticeship of observation as a teacher candidate serves as a vantage point where teacher educators attempt to conceptualize the work and skills of teacher educator without access to his/her intentions or goals, and formulate teaching approaches from these experiences which may be limited.

### **In-service Teaching**

Teacher educators also draw from their experiences as in-service teachers to support their work with preservice teachers. Goodwin et al. (2014) confirmed that teacher educators rely upon their experiences as PK-12 teachers to complete their work when they had not yet developed pedagogies as teacher educators. This study upholds a widely held notion in the field that previous in-service teaching informs the work of teacher educators.

One particular way that teacher educators use knowledge from their in-service teacher experiences is by using a 'pedagogy of presentation.' This notion is best described by the works of Berry (2007) and Ritter (2007) as an antiquated method of teaching preservice teachers where tips and tricks used former teachers' work as in-service teachers are used as examples to support the learning experiences of preservice teachers. Each author recognized the shortcomings of telling preservice teachers about successful strategies used in their former classrooms as a primary teaching strategy. More specifically, Ritter (2007) enacted a pedagogy of presentation by providing student teachers with advice that he had used in his work as an in-service social studies teacher.

On the other hand, Berry (2007) learned about the struggles associated with enacting a pedagogy of presentation in her self-study of the tensions she experienced in her work as a science teacher educator. Berry's analysis of myriad data sources including videotapes of her methods classes, an autobiographical account of her work leading up to the teaching of her class, and student interviews, revealed Berry's desire to provide tips and tricks that the preservice teachers could immediately enact in their practice. She felt conflicted about this type of engagement with the preservice teachers because she held conflicting assumptions about her responsibilities as a teacher educator. She recognized the importance of encouraging teachers to inquire into their practice through a constructivist approach, but also simultaneously recognized that her students were struggling and needed resolutions to their problems immediately.

Another example of research that demonstrates teacher educators' enactment of a pedagogy of presentation occurred in a large qualitative research study of new teacher educators. Murray and Male (2005) interviewed nearly 30 teacher educators in England within their first three years of transitioning from being a classroom teacher to a teacher educator. After their first year of working as a teacher educator, the first cohort of interviewees expressed their desire to “graft all their years of experience on to them (the students)” or saying ‘this is what worked for me, I’m the expert’ (p.131).” This study is one of many during the initial boom of self-study in teacher-education research (John, 2002; Ritter, 2007, Berry, 2007; Bullock, 2009) who attempted to learn more about the struggles teacher educators have while transitioning from classroom teacher to teacher educator.

Lastly, teacher educators also used their experiences as in-service teachers to formulate their beliefs and initial practices as teacher educators. Cuenca (2010) posits his experiences as a former classroom teacher shaped the pedagogical decisions he made in his practice as a novice supervisor. An analysis of field notes from conferences revealed that he relied heavily on the beliefs and practices that he used as a classroom teacher to direct and inform his pedagogy as a teacher educator. His ideas about effective teaching were based on the strategies and practices that he himself had employed as a teacher. Thus, he praised student teachers who shared beliefs and practices that he used in his teaching and directed students to reform if their teaching did not align with the practices in his previous teaching experiences.

The featured authors agreed that passing down tips and tricks helped to remedy the lack of confidence each of them had in their new roles but also recognized the constraints in using the strategy as a primary teaching strategy. These studies highlight the difficulty new teacher educators experience in transitioning into their new roles and provide a foundation that paves the way for research on how teacher educators attempt to overcome these problems.

### **Formal Preparation**

Researchers have attempted to address the development in teacher education through the study of graduate coursework. However, these studies narrowly focus on developing teacher educators' identity during the courses (Butler et al., 2014; Conklin, 2015). One particular study, Kosnik et al. (2011), studied a group of graduate students looking to understand how their participation in a Beginning Teacher Educator (BTE) community would influence their work in the field, their identities as transitioning teacher educators, and their research initiatives. While graduate students in the BTE community articulated that the group helped them to refine their practices in the field, they also reported that being exposed to the reading of scholarly articles, interviews of other teacher educators, and observations of other teacher educators in action also helped greatly to improve their practices.

Goodwin et al. (2014) highlights the lack of preparatory experience most teacher educators experience before entering their practice. While results did find supervisors and methods instructor's working together to integrate coursework, supervisors' coursework did not highlight important teacher educator skills. Participants reported learning practices through trial and error, and adapting effective strategies they saw modeled by other teacher educators.

The findings of Goodwin et al. (2014), Conklin (2015), and Butler et al. (2014) support the work of other scholars that have researched the lack of attention paid to graduate students as students of teacher preparation (Dangel & Tanguay, 2014; Zeichner, 2005). In light of the lack of attention paid towards the preparation of clinical instructors, and specifically, graduate students seeking to be prepared as teacher educators, this study seeks to fill that gap by focusing on developing clinical instructors and the role their graduate studies played in the development of philosophies and skills for supervision.

## **Methodology**

In response to the research on the role of prior knowledge and experiences as spaces for understanding the work of clinical instructors, the research question that guided this study was:

What strategies and resources do clinical field instructors use to resolve challenges in practice as a field instructor?

This study was conducted as a phenomenological multiple-case study. This method was chosen as it best fits both the research question and novel exploration of the topic. Given the lack of empirical research that describes or explores the way in which new teacher educators develop as clinical instructors, an exploratory methodology was used that placed the participants' experiences in the forefront of the study (Saldaña, 2016). This methodology was used to extract in-depth information about the supervisors' experiences, and in turn, provide opportunities to compare and contrast the supervisors' experiences for patterns that best illustrate the nuances of this particular phenomenon.

The primary context for this research was a Professional Development School (PDS) partnership between a local school district and a large mid-Atlantic university. At the time of this study, interns were placed in all of the elementary schools throughout the district. This partnership was selected as the primary setting for this research because of the wide variety of supervisors available to study.

The strong commitment to community-wide professional development also includes a focus on teacher educators engaged in the act of supervision. Reassigned teachers from the local school district, graduate students learning about teacher education and preparation, and college faculty (both tenure track and adjunct faculty) were all impacted by this job-embedded professional development. This PDS site also supported the notion that supervision is a complex activity requiring strong relationships between the members of the triad (supervisor, cooperating teacher, and intern), school community, and teacher-educator community. While supervision is a small slice of the teacher-preparation experience, supervisors in this context have extensive contact with their interns with whom they engage a minimum of two hours each week.

Participants were selected in accordance with a multiple-case study research design in order to create a representative sample of supervisors within the context. In this case, participants (supervisors) were selected who represented multiple roles within the PDS. Participants were selected from both reassigned teachers and graduate students. Five field instructors participated in the study. Two of the participants were graduate students who worked as field instructors in

the PDS program. Two of the participants were reassigned teachers from schools within the PDS program working as field supervisors. One of the participants was a field instructor at a PDS program at another university. During the time of this interview, this participant was a faculty member within the PDS program.

Qualitative interviewing was used as the primary data collection method in this study. Table 1 summarizes the interview process indicating the participant and goal of each interview as well as the amount of time spent with each subject. Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed. An amended version of Seidman's (1991) three-step interviewing process helped reveal the past experiences, current tensions in the supervisors' practice, and the experiences that have led to their decision-making. To help facilitate this process photo elicitation was also used to connect each participant to the relevant experiences for this interview. Each participant was presented with a picture grid, a tool linking student teachers' pictures and names, which helped participants recall a challenge with a preservice teacher in their past. Using this elicitation strategy, the participant was asked to find his or her most challenging intern. The supervisors were then asked to write three challenges they experienced with the intern that they could describe in detail. One supervisor used a picture of her own to identify the main subject for her interview. Each interview was transcribed.

Table 1: Interview Schedule

Supervisor	Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3
Makenzie	Elicitation with Picture Grid	Clarifying	Elicitation with writing samples
Maggie	Elicitation with Picture Grid	Clarifying	Elicitation with assessment documents
Reeva	Elicitation with group picture	Clarifying	Elicitation with Inquiry Paper
Stacey	Elicitation with Picture Grid	Clarifying and Elicitation with Systematic Observation Documents	
Brandy	Elicitation with Picture Grid	Clarifying and Elicitation	

As suggested by Merriam (2009), the data analysis of this multiple-case study was conducted in two phases: within case and cross-case analysis. During within case analysis, the case was treated as its own entity and the researcher analyzed the data singularly. Following this analysis of each single case, connections were made between cases in order to develop an understanding of the challenges supervisors experience within their work by creating problem spaces.



Table 2: Stacey's Problem Space During Analysis

Stacey			
Challenge #1	Past Experience #1	Challenge #2	Past Experience #2
Improve instruction	Improve instruction	Improve writing	Improve writing
Strategy	Strategy	Strategy	Strategy
Build relationships	Build relationships	Build relationships	Conferring
Systematic observation	Systematic observation	Guided practice	
Analyze data	Analyze data		
Conferring	Conferring		

A problem space is an abstract description of all of the possible states that can occur in a problem situation (Eysenck & Keane, 2010). In this study, a problem space is defined as encompassing the field instructors' challenges, resolutions, and related past experiences. Table 2 and Table 3 are examples of problem spaces that were constructed to compare supervisors' challenges and past experiences. For example, Table 2 describes all of the problem spaces constructed from Stacey's interviews. In this instance, Stacey's challenges and resolutions are being compared.

Table 3: Sample of Graduate Students' Problem Spaces for Cross Analysis

Stacey		Brandy	Reeva
Challenge #1: Improve instruction	Challenge #2: Improve writing	Challenge: Improve Intern/Mentor Relationship	Challenge #1: Improve Deficit Mindset
Resolution #1: Build relationships	Resolution #2: Build relationships	Resolution 1: Systematic Observation	Resolution 1: Positive self-talk
Resolution #2: Systematic observation	Resolution #2: Guided practice	Resolution 2: Data Analysis	Resolution 2: Co-teaching configurations
Resolution #3: Analyze data		Resolution 2: Collaborate	Resolution 3: Inquiry
Resolution #4: Conferring			Resolution 4: Collaborate

In Table 3, this configuration displays problem spaces of three supervisors, which provided a space to compare challenges and resolutions across three supervisors.

Reading the data from this viewpoint exposed the similarities between strategies and tools supervisors used to resolve challenges in their practice and allowed for generalizations about how these supervisors' past experiences led them to use these strategies. A wide variety of problem spaces were compared to find similarities and differences between the resolution strategies used in supervisors' challenges in working with interns and from their past experiences. The most telling problem spaces became the main source of data for the claims presented in the findings section.

## **Findings**

The results of this study suggest that future clinical instructors should be provided opportunities to practice developing philosophies and skills while taking coursework in their graduate programs. Clinical instructors who are being prepared as teacher educators were specifically using elements of graduate preparation in their everyday work. Four out of the five supervisors in this study took coursework in teacher educator preparation. During this coursework, the supervisors learned philosophies and pedagogies that can be used to support preservice teacher learning and also were provided with opportunities to practice newly learned information in conjunction with the coursework. The following section describes the coursework that each of the supervisors experienced as graduate students as well as the critical philosophies and skills these supervisors gained from their experiences.

### **Coursework as a Vehicle for Philosophy Development**

Clinical instructors reported taking coursework that exposed them to philosophies and practices that directly impacted their practice. Stacey, a clinical instructor and graduate student, described taking a course on supervision where she learned how to collect and analyze systematic data for teachers. Stacey describes this experience by saying,

I can't remember everything about the class, but I do remember learning different ways that you can take systematic observation[s] and what the purpose of them was. And how it could help you. Instead of being evaluative. It's a way that you can give feedback without you saying, 'Hey, that didn't go very well....' I don't do the trip sheet kind of thing. Where I say these are the things that I really liked. These are the things you need to work on. I've never done that. And you know what if I hadn't taken that class? I probably would have used those trip sheets. And had that style. (Stacey Interview 1).

In this quote, Stacey describes the learning philosophies of collegiality through taking a course on supervision. Her account highlights her previous manner of supervising, conducted through the use of "trip sheets" or triplicate sheets where supervisors provide written notes, leave a copy for the intern and cooperating teacher, and take one for the intern's record. Her engagement with the supervision course provided her with the opportunity to learn about the concept of collegiality, the principle of dual responsibility and effort in growing as a teacher, and reframe the ideals of supervision as collaborative instead of evaluative.

Brandy, another clinical instructor from this study, also discussed how her coursework helped her to develop a particular set of philosophies that she enacted in her practice. Brandy described two different courses that impacted her philosophies toward supervision. First she recalled a supervision course that she described as having helped her to “refine [her] practices” (Brandy Interview 2). The supervision course also provided Brandy with a space where she could explore the ideals behind effective supervision. She demonstrated this by saying, “I always have been fascinated with supervisor metacognition, the pre observation and post observation conferences. I struggled with how to study that before this course” (Brandy Interview 2). Here, Brandy described learning about the pre and post observation, foundational tenets of clinical supervision. She remarked that she was interested in learning about these aspects to support her work as a clinical instructor and sought to understand the tacit thinking that sits behind the visible work of coaching interns through the cycle of supervision.

Like Stacey and Brandy, Reeve’s learning experiences as a graduate student contributed to the philosophies she enacted as a supervisor. Reeve’s engaged with her coursework during a job-embedded professional development experience where she learned how to enact inquiry as a stance in her own practice. She also supported other teachers by facilitating inquiry projects throughout her district. Reeve detailed the philosophies she derived from her coursework:

The systematic analysis of data, it taught me how to read my classroom in a way that I didn’t know how to do before and that I don’t think the teachers I was working with knew how to do. I could read my classroom but really being systematic about it paying attention to something specific and how those things connected to other parts of the classroom was new (Reeva Interview 3).

From this experience, Reeve described how inquiry altered her beliefs on the value of studying instruction.

Inquiry became a tool for me to push against the scripted mandated curriculum I was given that did not match my kids. So yeah, inquiry became a way for me to stand up for myself as a beginning teacher and say, ‘Here are some things that I know need to happen for my kids and here is the proof that I have for that.’ So even from the very first time I tried inquiry it was a tool for advocacy... Always at the center it was standing up for yourself and your kids and really figuring out what it is that the people you are working with need and doing that by looking at yourself. Because you can’t change other people. We won’t get anywhere if we keep trying to change other people (Reeva Interview 2).

This illustration provides a snapshot of the philosophies Reeve was introduced to by using inquiry as a method to improve her own practice as a teacher. While Reeve experienced coursework in teacher inquiry and not clinical supervision, her experiences are on par with the types of philosophies, skills, and tools that are used in clinical supervision. These philosophies include the use of inquiry as a tool for advocacy and the collection of systematic observations over time to learn about trends in the classroom. Reeve also described her learning of an important philosophical tenet of inquiry, which includes the notion that teacher inquiry is aimed at making changes in the teacher’s practice, not in student behavior.

A fourth supervisor, Makenzie, also reported changing philosophies in her approach to supervision as a result of the graduate coursework she was taking. Unlike the other three supervisors who were full time graduate students, Makenzie was a reassigned teacher who was taking graduate coursework part time while completing her work as a field instructor. Makenzie directly referenced her graduate school experience as a source of knowledge that she drew on in collecting data as an instructional strategy to support her intern's growth and development. She referenced her experiences by saying, "At this point (in the year), I am six weeks into a supervision class with Dr. Henry where I am reading Glickman who, of course, says that it (supporting change in teacher's practice) needs to be done through observation" (Makenzie Interview 1). This reference points to Makenzie's budding understanding of Glickman's (2010) developmental supervision text, which encourages supervisors to use systematic observation and data-collection tools to help teachers learn about their teaching. While her past experiences as a preservice teacher, in-service teacher, and past mentor teacher had been filled with providing suggestions and providing student teachers with directions on how to improve their teaching, her graduate coursework in supervision altered her philosophy and geared her toward a more inquiry-based approach to supervision.

### **Bridging Theory in Coursework to Application in Practice**

The coursework attached to the supervisors' graduate school experiences provided them with the opportunity to practice the philosophies and skills associated with the work. More specifically, the coursework and assignments provided future clinical instructors with low-risk opportunities to practice the philosophies and skills that were embedded in each course. In Stacey's case, she learned the practice of collecting systematic observations to create tools for conversation with teacher partners. Stacey was able to test these philosophies and practices in the real world through a project associated with her class. She recalled the project that she completed in her supervision course which helped her to practice collecting and analyzing data with a teacher. "I spent lots of time in the teacher's room at least once a week. I went into her room during that semester and I took observations for her. I would ask her what do you want me to look for and then the two of us would have an evening conversation on the google doc (Stacey Interview 2)." She continued to describe her experiences by saying, "I had a really great person to work with initially and that helped me understand how useful things could be...She was really interested in how she was teaching and what her kids were doing and so we would try things then she would ask me, 'What do you think about this? Do you think we should change the learning spaces on the rug? Do you think we should take the teacher chair and move it somewhere else?' We would try something. I was really trying to learn how to use these" (Stacey Interview 2).

Stacey had opportunities for practical application of the new philosophies and skills she had learned in her graduate coursework. She and her partner practiced using various data collection tools and analyzing the data to make changes in the classroom that would improve the teacher's instruction. Stacey described this process by saying,

I tally who they call on early on. I try to do basic data collection that anybody can analyze, so that I'm not the one telling her what she needs to do and not do, and she's figuring that out on her own. And so I would do where she stood in the room and whether

she called on girls or boys or any of that sort of thing and that gave me an entry point for conversation with her. In the beginning there was just basic stuff it wasn't even really pointed at a particular issue that I thought she had. It was just getting her used to looking at what she was doing and seeing that we could have productive conversations about that.

Stacey used strategies gained from her coursework on supervision in her work as a supervisor as she encountered the challenge of supporting her intern's ability to implement effective teaching. This practice mirrors the assignments she had as a graduate student where she was provided opportunities to practice the skills of data collection and analysis.

Brandy recalled similar experiences of practically applying the philosophies and skills she learned from her professional development course taken during her graduate work to her work as a supervisor. Brandy described learning the importance of giving adult learners choice in directing their own learning through a process called differentiated supervision. The assignment provided the opportunity for Brandy to practice what she had learned in her coursework. Brandy and another graduate student wrote a grant to create differentiated professional development opportunities for a local school near the university. During the course of this grant, Brandy was able to gain experience applying theories of choice and clinical supervision strategies that she had learned in her previous course work. Brandy described her experiences by saying,

We (my classmate and I) designed this professional development together. We (asked the course instructor) if we could try to see if we can differentiate professional development for our staff...I was able to enact the things I was learning and really wrestle with meaningful problems and putting it into practice and changing the culture of that school and professional learning (Brandy Interview 1).

Brandy's philosophies about teacher choice and empowerment emerged from her work on this course assignment. These philosophies are reflected in her work as a supervisor when she sought to guide her work with a struggling intern by creating a space of empowerment. When attempting to resolve challenges in the intern's teaching practice, Brandy described her philosophical approaches to working with the intern by saying,

I was just trying to give her an alternative approach. I was trying to find ways to empower her. I was struggling to find ways for her to find her voice and look at her own practice instead of letting someone else make judgments about her practice because I really think she felt like she was being judged all of the time.

These examples provide a snapshot of the congruence between Brandy's graduate coursework and assignments with her adapted desire to conduct her work as a supervisor from a sense grounded in a philosophy of collegiality and empowerment.

A third supervisor reported using practices and philosophies from their graduate coursework in order to resolve challenges in their work as a supervisor. During her graduate coursework, Reeva completed an inquiry course that helped her to develop a vast understanding of the inquiry process and its benefits for her classroom. She described the practical benefits as a tool that she could use to systematically learn about her practices and make decisions to improve her teaching.

In Reeva's words, "Inquiry became a tool for me to push against the scripted mandated curriculum I was given that did not match my kids." She was able to put these philosophies and skills to the test while completing her own inquiry project and helping other teachers do inquiry in their classrooms. As a part of a course assignment, Reeva conducted an inquiry project on the impact of using a course management system to improve student engagement and attendance. She collected data on student attendance, discipline referrals, and standardized test scores. Reeva was shocked to see how the data demonstrated that the implementation of the course management system in her classroom had improved attendance, lowered referrals, and improved standardized scores. In response to the inquiry class assignment, Reeva described the growth in her practice by saying,

It taught me how to read my classroom in a way that I didn't know how to do before and that I don't think the teachers I was working with knew how to do. I could read my classroom but really being systematic about it paying attention to something specific and how those things connected to other parts of the classroom. I kind of knew (improvements) were happening. But when I analyzed my data and recognized how much it had actually changed the school experience for my kids. That was huge.

From this example, we can see how Reeva's coursework provided the space for her to try out practices and philosophies used throughout the inquiry process. She then took these practices and philosophies and applied them to her work as a supervisor. When attempting to support an intern that projected a deficit mindset towards her students and practice, Reeva had the opportunity to utilize the skills and philosophies of inquiry in her practice. She recalled her efforts to resolve the challenge by saying,

I would go in with her and I would take observational data of how she was interacting with the student and she did definitely progress... Through inquiry I was able to have a lot of really good conversations about, "yeah, this happened and I see that you're frustrated and that makes you upset. What are you going to do about it?"

Reeva's coursework on inquiry in the classroom provided her with the opportunity to try on philosophes and implement practices that would then inform her work as a supervisor. A fourth supervisor, Mackenzie, was taking her first graduate course in supervision when she simultaneously began her role as a supervisor with the program. While she did not describe a specific assignment that influenced her supervision, she did describe having meaningful interactions with a course text that impacted her philosophies towards working with preservice teachers. She recalled the conflict between her previous philosophy of supervision with new philosophies that were introduced in the course text by saying,

I think I would say that I was uncomfortable with going in and telling (the intern) what to do (how to make improvements on their practice). It's not necessarily the idea that I'm the most comfortable with. But like Glickman would say, depending on what level (the intern) is at with their supervision, they might need more direct instruction. That makes sense to me in the sense of like there are some kids I would rather teach through an inquiry stance and more that idea of "what do you think what do you think?"

Mackenzie's desire to supervise using an inquiry-based approach became more nuanced given the developmental level of the intern. This philosophical revision was spearheaded by her interpretation of the Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon (2010) text on instructional supervision. Mackenzie implemented these philosophical changes in her practice while attempting to help her struggling intern alter her classroom practices. She described this experience this way,

Again, I would go in and audio tape her. One day I stayed in one spot and as Mary (the intern) walked around the classroom talking to different students you could hear the conversation from the corner of the room and so I through Evernote I audiotaped the conversation and wrote notes like how do you hear your voice trying to make her aware. And as we sat and talked I would get quieter and her voice did not get quiet. She was not aware of it. So then I eventually was very direct: "Your voice is very loud. This classroom is very quiet. This might be bothering your mentor teacher. Just be aware of it."

Mackenzie's experience of locating her intern's developmental level was impacted by the philosophes of differentiated supervision introduced by the Glickman and Gordon text. Her realization that the intern would benefit from more direct supervision as opposed to an inquiry-based approach affirms the opportunity she had to apply her coursework to her practice. In each of these scenarios, the clinical instructors were given low risk assignments through their coursework to practice the philosophies and skills that were fundamental to the course. Supervisors then applied these philosophies and practices during their work as field instructors when attempting to support the development of preservice teachers.

### **Community Mentorship as a Space for Professional Development**

While graduate students in this study drew from their experiences in graduate school to support their practice as clinical instructors, they also received support from mentors and community members. The third major finding of this study concerns the type of community supports that clinical instructors used to resolve challenges in their practice which included consultation for gaps in philosophical and pedagogical understanding of preservice teacher education as well as specific programmatic structures to support development and mentorship.

As expected of novice field instructors, the field instructors in this study had gaps in their philosophical and pedagogical understanding of preservice teacher education. Two of the four supervisors candidly identified when they were unable to come up with strategies that they could use to resolve their challenges. Within the first minute of describing the challenge that stood out the most in her practice as a supervisor, Reeva honestly admitted her initial reaction to resolving the challenge by saying, "I wasn't sure what to do! (Interview 1)." Similarly, Brandy reached a point in attempting to resolve her challenge in a relationship between a mentor and intern pair. After attempting to meet with each member and attempting systematic observations with the pair, Brandy honestly admitted that, "I constantly felt like strategy after strategy was failing; that I needed more support (Interview 1)." These two examples highlight supervisors who openly admitted when they did not have the knowledge necessary to create a plan and resolve the

challenges. These gaps lead the clinical instructors in this study to turn to mentor supervisors in their community for help to support the work of their practice.

Maggie provides an example of how supervisors sought the support of community mentors to work with interns. When describing her challenge of helping an intern not interrupt his mentor while talking, Maggie expressed that she was not seeing any improvement in the intern's behavior after it was addressed. Maggie's community supporters gave her information that explained the nature of working with interns as adult learners. She described the experience this way:

Early on in my experience as a [Professional Development Associate] PDA we were talking at one of the meetings or something. So someone said just 'like we do with our own students. We have to scaffold the learning for these big students'. I said, 'Oh yeah right.' So thinking about whenever you are expecting someone to do something brand new they needed support. Whether it's lessons in math or handwriting. I was being reminded by other PDAs that these are still students, students of teaching and students of learning how to teach. They are still students (Maggie Interview 1).

In this example, Maggie's community supporters were helping her understand her intern's needs as an adult learner as she attempted to resolve the challenge of helping an intern learn etiquette within professional spaces. Maggie's community supporters provided her with the advice to scaffold her work with the intern to help him understand what the problem was and how he could work to change it over time, instead of expecting the intern to make amendments in his behavior after one conversation.

In another example of the role community mentors fill for supervisors who are attempting to resolve challenges in their practice, Reeva, a supervisor who worked outside of the PDS, worked closely during her supervision with her officemates, other graduate students who also worked as supervisors. When trying to resolve the challenge she had with an intern who had a deficit mindset, Reeva went to her colleagues to get ideas on how to handle the experience. Reeva explained the encounters by saying,

Every time I had a conversation with this intern or had something turned in, I ended up going to them like, 'Oh my gosh, I don't know how to deal with this.' They would read emails that I was crafting to her. They would help me prepare with one-on-one conferences I would have with her and just really think through strategies for helping her push past this, but still maintain a lot of professionalism (Reeva Interview 1).

Each of these venues provided supervisors in this study with the space to access knowledgeable mentors who could problem solve and pass along knowledge and support for the struggling supervisors.

This mentorship could be generated by any member in the community. In the PDS community, the clinical instructors had a wide, varying range of roles and experiences. These individuals included in-service teachers, university faculty, retired teachers, and graduate students. Each of the five clinical instructors in this study described receiving help from each of the four different



groups of community participants. Having a wide diversity of community mentors opens up the range of knowledge and support that can be provided to developing clinical instructors. This idea supports our understanding of the need for diverse voices within our communities and partnerships.

In addition to relying on the knowledge and skills of other community mentors to help resolve challenges, supervisors in this study benefited from myriad of structural components within the PDS program that supported their professional development. The PDS where this study was situated held weekly meetings to work on the logistics of the PDS site, but also to serve as a space for questioning practice and professional development. One structure in particular, *Issues and Concerns*, is a question and answer session where supervisors could bring their issues to the group with respect to their work as supervisors as well as general concerns they had about the community, and receive feedback from the other supervisors at the table. The clinical instructors in this study reported that these meetings were spaces where they went to receive help. Even Stacey, who did not admit to using *Issues and Concerns* as a space for help with her work as a supervisor, did mention one particular Professional Development Associate meeting at the beginning of her first year where she picked up tips and tricks about how to use an evaluation document.

Another programmatic structure that facilitated the support from community mentors was strategic grouping of supervisors across buildings. Program facilitators made sure to match novice supervisors with more seasoned supervisors, in-service teachers with graduate students, and graduate students with faculty members. These structures, grouping supervisors in building, mixing types of supervisors and experience level of supervisors, and using Professional Development Associates meetings as a space for professional development provided spaces for supervisors to ask for help when needed. It also created spaces where community supporters who might be well versed in the act of supervision are available to people who need their help.

Research on how teacher educators transition into the profession reveals that novice teacher educators look to mentors, especially mentors that work in the same field as them, to model best practices and help them think about the practices they can use to improve their work. Field's (2012) study of teacher educators transitioning into their role as supervisors found that when supervisors were placed with experienced tutors who the supervisor wanted to emulate, they felt more at ease in resolving problems in their practice. This recognizes that individual supporters within a community can make a difference.

## Discussion

The results of this research highlight areas not addressed in the previously described research efforts. Specifically, this study demonstrates that coursework in teacher education does help supervisors employ pedagogical knowledge and skills to support preservice teachers as they are learning how to teach and better bridge the theory-practice gap. This study also highlights that supervisors used the low-risk opportunities provided in graduate school classes to practice the pedagogies and skills that would then be useful to them as supervisors of preservice teachers. This is an outcome that scholars in the field of teacher educator education hope to make better connections between the theoretical to the practical to improve teaching outcomes. Van Velzen

(2013) remarks that “a lot of work needs to be done to empirically ground the many beautiful and apparently useful pedagogies we have and to develop an empirically based knowledge base for teacher educators (p. 26).” These sentiments are echoed by the theoretical conceptions of teacher educator knowledge composed by Loughran (2014), Korthagen, Loughran, & Russell, (2006) as well as research studies by Goodwin et al. (2014) and Davey (2013), who all describe the lack of teacher educator knowledge as a theory-practice gap for the profession.

The findings of this research also connect back to the Lunenburg’s (2002) framework defining the pedagogical needs of teacher educator education. The graduate students took classes in supervision and teacher inquiry, which exposed them to strategies of collecting non-judgmental data for their teachers and working closely with the teacher to learn from their own practice. These particular strategies also reflect the work of researchers in the field of supervision including Sergiovanni and Starratt (2007), as well as Nolan and Hoover (2011), who promote philosophies of collegiality and the use of data collection in both in-service and preservice teaching as critical tools that supervisors can use to help their partners improve instruction. The third finding of this study highlights the role of community support on the professional development of novice clinical instructors. This finding provides evidence that clinical instructors may draw from resources that are available to them in their moment of need, especially experienced mentors. While this seems like a common sense occurrence, most studies discussed this approach to supervisor problem solving in isolation from one another and without detail. This research helps us understand that the community members serve as an extension of knowledge from experienced members to the supervisor in need. The mentorship that supervisors seek from well-established members in the community as learned by Goodwin et al. (2014), van Velzen (2013), and Davey (2013), communicate the general guidance and security provided by an experienced mentor. In this study, the supervisor and mentor are acting in concert with one another to resolve the challenge.

Additionally, this study contributes to the teacher educator preparation community by identifying the structures and practices that support the work of supervisors while they are out in the field. A number of other scholars describe professional learning communities in teacher education as a resourceful way to support professionals throughout their careers (Cochran-Smith, 2003; Levine, 2010) without the micro level analysis of how to maintain them. Dangel & Tanguay (2014) provide the best example of what a supportive supervisor community would look like on a macro level, including the structures and resources used in the process. This research identifies three structures that support novice clinical instructors as they develop their supervisory philosophies and pedagogies. The first structure includes dismantling supervisory silos and connecting novice clinical instructors with seasoned mentors. These connections can include placing novices and seasoned mentors at the same building or creating spaces for regular and structured reflective opportunities. Additionally, these mentorship groups should contain clinical instructors with a wide variety of past experiences. The novice supervisors in this study were informed by a wide variety of professionals including current and retired in-service teachers, former administrators, as well as university faculty. Each type of supervisor brings with them a particular view point and expertise of supervision that can inform varying aspects of the clinical instructors responsibilities and practice. Lastly, colleges of education must prioritize the professional development of supervisors through regular and explicit opportunities for discussion and

reflection. This structure creates a safe space for novice supervisors to ask for and receive help while also normalizing the need for reflection, problem solving, and professional development.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, this study highlights the types of experiences novice clinical instructors have encountered that can better support the development of the philosophies and pedagogical tools needed by teacher educators who work as field instructors. These experiences include graduate coursework in teacher education that exposes supervisors to philosophies and pedagogies that can be used to support preservice teacher learning. Specifically, these courses provide opportunities for novice clinical instructors to try on new philosophical approaches and tinker with new skills that they then use when resolving challenges in their practice in the field. Additionally, the support of a strong group of mentors throughout the clinical instructors' community of learning contributes to the professional development of this group of teacher educators.

As the field seeks to invest in a pipeline in order to recruit and retain more teachers into our profession, we must meet the professional development of crucial gatekeepers and educators with the same innovation and fervor. Dismantling silos in the supervisor community, providing multiple perspectives when problem solving, and normalizing structures for professional development are all opportunities for innovation that can provide professional development for supervisors who conduct clinical field experiences. The research conducted in this study should encourage our community to further expand our understanding of the sites of preparation for future clinical instructors.

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