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Tensions in the Preparation of University Supervisors: Dual Perspectives from Supervisors and Administrators

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Abstract

Prior research shows that supervisors of teacher candidates are typically underprepared for their work and receive little oversight of it. However, there has been less research into these causes and the effects of minimal preparation on supervisors. This case study of a teacher education department uses survey, interviews, and document analysis to examine the tensions that occur when supervisors are underprepared for their roles. The results indicate three tensions that undermine supervisors' practice: unclear expectations, perfunctory evaluations, and the failure to develop teacher educator identities. In the absence of organizational supports for supervisor preparation and development, supervisors relied on peer networks and their PK-12 experience to inform their practice. Program administrators lamented the lack of training for supervisors but did not have the time or resources to support it. Intentional preparation could help supervisors navigate these tensions and should aim to align supervisors' training to the roles they embody.

Keywords

university-based teacher supervision; supervisor preparation; supervisor roles; teacher education

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Introduction

University supervisors are an essential component of teacher education (Bailey, 2006; Tang, 2003; Youngs & Bird, 2010) and perform a variety of roles and functions as they support teacher candidate growth. The clinical supervision model is nearly ubiquitous in US teacher education programs today and has been in place for the past half-century (Acheson & Gall, 2003). The preference for and longevity of this model reinforces the belief that supervisors are valued members of teacher education programs. However, the supervisor's role is shifting as teacher preparation through clinical experiences (e.g., practica, internships, student teaching, or other field-based experiences) gains ground due to increased calls for school-university partnerships (Burns, Jacobs, & Yendol-Hoppey, 2016; National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education [NCATE], 2010). These calls, in addition to teacher education reforms, have attempted to bring teacher education closer to the schools and mend the disconnect between the university and the school site, which has placed supervisors into closer contact with schools (Williams, 2014; Zeichner, 2010). This expanded supervisor role has implications for supervisor knowledge and skills as well as how supervisors acquire such knowledge and develop such skills. Unfortunately, supervisors receive very little training (Danielowich & McCarthy, 2013) and feedback on their performance (Conderman, Katsiyannis, & Franks, 2001). Furthermore, as largely graduate students and adjunct faculty (Baecher, McCormack, & Kung, 2014; Conderman, Morin, & Stephens, 2005; Zeichner, 2010), supervisors can be seen as or feel like they are outsiders to the university (Slick, 1998).

The present study seeks to advance the body of scholarship on clinical supervision by describing how supervisors are developing their knowledge, skills, and practice in light of limited university-provided training and oversight and the tensions that arise in supervisor preparation. In addition, this study includes program administrators' perspectives on the subject of supervisor preparation, which have largely been absent from the literature.

Literature Review

University supervisors are "critical actors" (Baecher et al., 2014, p. 3) in teacher education and are an important component of the clinical experience (Bailey, 2006; Tang, 2003; Youngs & Bird, 2010). However, despite a broad consensus on the importance of supervisors to the development of teacher candidates, the complexity of their work is not acknowledged by teacher education programs, and supervisors are often overlooked and ignored (Baecher et al., 2014; Cuenca, 2012; Gelfuso, Dennis, & Parker, 2015; Slick, 1998; Zeichner, 2005). Supervisors receive little intentional preparation and ongoing development for their work and often retain classroom teacher identities rather than adopt field-based teacher educator identities. Although the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) offers national standards for supervisors (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education [AACTE], 2018), the interpretation of these standards and the transformation of the standards into supervisor preparation practices varies. Furthermore, there is scant evidence of which supervisor traits, behaviors, or methods impact teacher candidate growth and should be emphasized in supervisor preparation.

The Difficult Work of Supervising

The supervisor role is complex (Cuenca, 2012) yet undergirded by assumptions that it is not difficult (Stones, 2003), that teaching experience prepares supervisors for their work (Zeichner, 2005), that supervisors have the observational skills necessary to observe teacher candidates, and that they are able to convert their observations to useful feedback (Cuenca, 2012). Recent scholarship has begun to position supervisors' work in the third space (Bhabha, 1994) where they take on many complex and challenging tasks. Supervisors are liaisons who navigate multiple spaces (Martin, Snow, & Franklin Torrez, 2011), and they bridge the needs and balance the beliefs of teacher candidates and cooperating teachers (Williams, 2014). Thus, supervisors must manage complicated relationships among multiple actors (Martin et al., 2011; Williams, 2014). Williams (2014) concluded: "the work of teacher educators in the third space involves crossing and re-crossing, and negotiating and re-negotiating, professional and personal boundaries between different but closely connected sites of professional practice" (p. 317). Unfortunately, the field of "[s]upervision continues to travel incognito" (Glanz & Hazi, 2019, p. 2). Many teacher education programs either ignore the complexity of the role or are unaware of it and treat supervisors as lower-status members in the higher education hierarchy (Cuenca, 2012; Slick, 1998). Thus, the supervision of teacher candidates has become "second-rate work" (Cuenca, Schmeichel, Butler, Dinkelman, & Nichols, 2011, p. 1068) and has been outsourced to graduate students and adjunct faculty (Cuenca, 2012; Slick, 1997; Zeichner, 2005, 2010).

A final challenge for most supervisors is the transition from a practitioner identity to a teacher educator identity. Supervisors who were classroom teachers tend to default back to their teacher identities and classroom practices when supervising, which can impede teacher candidate development and impair supervisors' development of teacher educator identities (Cuenca, 2010; Williams, 2014; Williams, Ritter, & Bullock, 2012). Williams, Ritter, and Bullock's (2012) literature review of nearly 60 empirical studies on supervisors' transitions from classroom teacher to teacher educator revealed that years of teaching experience may affect supervisors' openness to developing a supervisor identity. Supervisors with more teaching experience came to supervising with preconceived beliefs and did not feel that they needed to re-examine those beliefs, whereas supervisors with less teaching experience were more open to accepting the university's position on teacher education.

Lack of Supervisor Preparation

Preparing supervisors for their work has not been a top priority for teacher education departments or institutional leaders (McCormack, Baecher, & Cuenca, 2019; Steadman & Brown, 2011). Mudavanhu (2015) noted the absence of induction for supervisors. Gelfuso et al. (2015) reported that supervisors do not receive adequate training in the complexities of the field experience. Zeichner (2005) remarked that doctoral students at research universities bear the brunt of supervision but do not receive training or ongoing support, and then those doctoral students go on to teach at teacher preparation institutions where they continue to lack professional development on teacher education. Unfortunately, not only do many teacher preparation programs not provide training to supervisors, they also fail to evaluate supervisors' work (Conderman et al., 2001). Although teacher education organizations have recently attempted to fill this gap by drafting standards for supervisors' work (e.g. AACTE, 2018),

supervisor preparation remains difficult due to the lack of a universal definition of the supervisor, a common understanding of the essential tasks they perform, and frameworks and rubrics to evaluate these tasks.

However, some attempts at supervisor training have proven beneficial. Baecher et al. (2014) reported that supervisors in their program received training both on campus and online regularly. The professional development sessions focused on giving feedback in pre- and post-lesson conferences. Stemming from these meetings, the supervisors formed a community of practice online to ask and answer questions about supervising. In a small liberal arts college, Fayne (2007) led supervisor meetings once per quarter in which the supervisors developed an action research project, a rubric, and grading system that they then implemented in practice. This work gave the supervisors agency, brought supervisors out of isolation, and allowed them to share ideas and experiences stemming from their work. These findings demonstrate that forming supervisor professional learning communities to workshop problems and giving the group responsibilities within the program can lead to more inclusive and less isolating work environments for supervisors.

Although there are no widely-accepted frameworks guiding supervisors' work (Dinkelman, 2011), Zeichner (2005) offered a few suggestions: (a) help teacher candidates learn to discern when to use particular praxis and how to adapt to changing contexts, (b) guide teacher candidates to more advanced teaching practices in constantly-changing contexts, and (c) develop reflective habits and abilities, especially in terms of the assumptions teacher candidates bring with them to the classroom. Scholarship on supervising in the third space also posits that supervisors should be able to navigate those spaces, develop and manage relationships, and care for the needs of others in those spaces (Martin et al., 2011; Williams, 2014).

The research clearly demonstrates a tension between the importance and complexity of supervisors' work and a reluctance or inability on the part of institutional leaders to invest in training and development for contingent, yet experienced, supervisors. However, supervisors themselves may resist training that challenges their practitioner identity and beliefs. The present study seeks to understand the tensions surrounding supervisor preparation given the role complexity and overlooked status revealed in the literature.

Conceptual Framework

Two conceptual frameworks situate this research. The first is the supervisor role typology drawn from the literature and utilized as a starting point for understanding supervisors' roles. Secondly, I include the research on organizational supports and teacher professionalization as an empirical lens for framing supervisors' work and needed support within organizations. Although supervisors are not teachers, they are organizational actors and former teachers themselves who have largely retained a teacher-based professional identity (Cuenca, 2010; Ritter, 2007); as such, they likely face some of the same organizational functions and challenges as teachers. For example, like supervisors, teachers also struggle to balance objective assessment of student work with encouragement and positive support for students.

Supervisor Role Typology

To clarify the concept of supervisor roles, this study used a typology of university supervisors' roles stemming from the literature that includes five major roles: instructional coach, counselor / mentor, manager of the clinical experience, evaluator, and socializer into the teaching profession. It is important to note that these roles are not mutually exclusive. For example, a supervisor who views herself as a manager of the clinical experience may also see herself as a counselor / mentor. Table 1 below provides a typology of supervisor roles and the primary responsibilities of each role.

Table 1. Typology of Supervisor Roles

Role	Literature Base	Primary Responsibilities
<i>Instructional coach</i>	Akcan & Tatar, 2010; Baecher et al., 2014; Bailey, 2006; Fayne, 2007; Lutovac, Kaasila & Juuso, 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-plan lessons and provide feedback • Observe instruction • Debrief and reflect on instruction • Improve quality of instruction
<i>Counselor / mentor</i>	Bailey, 2006; Caires & Almeida, 2007; Fayne, 2007; Gelfuso et al., 2015; Mudavanhu, 2015; Nonis & Jernice, 2011; Smith & Lev-Ari, 2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide emotional support • Help teacher candidate manage stress • Encourage teacher candidate
<i>Manager of the clinical experience</i>	Enz, Freeman, & Wallin, 1996, Fayne, 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete paperwork and other program requirements • Collaborate and communicate with cooperating teacher and university faculty
<i>Evaluator</i>	Bailey, 2006; Conderman et al., 2005; Hamel, 2012; Mudavanhu, 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate classroom instruction, management, and environment • Monitor student progress • Determine aptitude for teaching
<i>Socializer into the teaching profession</i>	Bailey, 2006; Enz et al., 1996; McNamara, 1995	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acquaint teacher candidate with the social and political contexts of teaching • Provide a professional recommendation

Organizational Perspective

To improve supervisor effectiveness, scholars and program administrators must consider the contexts in which supervisors work. Again, supervisors are not teachers, but they are organizational actors who position themselves as former PK-12 practitioners rather than teacher

educators (Cuenca, 2010; Ritter, 2007). As such, they likely face similar organizational functions and challenges as teachers, thus, it is plausible that they would benefit from similar organizational supports. Recent scholarship has revealed that the most salient organizational supports for teachers are: a positive organizational climate (Kraft, Marinell, & Yee, 2016; Simon & Johnson, 2015), support from school administrators (Boyd et al., 2011; Grissom, 2011; Ingersoll, 2003; Kraft et al., 2016), positive relationships with colleagues (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Kraft et al., 2016; Simon & Johnson, 2015), and a perception on the part of teachers that they are successful in their work (Johnson, 2004; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Lortie, 1975; Santoro, 2018).

Methodology

As noted in the literature review, current research has established that supervisors receive very little training for the work they will undertake and, thus, are poorly prepared for it. Given this finding, the first purpose of this study was to examine supervisor training in one teacher education program and the effects of that training on supervisors' practice. It is clear that supervisor training does not always occur, but less research has examined *why* there is a dearth of training and what the effects of insufficient training are. As noted earlier, I was specifically interested in tensions in supervisor preparation from both an administrator and supervisor standpoint. I use the term, tension, to encompass challenges, struggles, frustrations, and general discomfort or confusion both in providing training and that arose due to a lack of training. Thus, the research questions guiding this study were: How are clinical supervisors prepared for their work? What are the effects of that preparation on their practice?

Research Design

This was a case study of current practices in and perspectives on supervisor training in one teacher education department (Yin, 2009). In this research, I sought the experiences and perspectives of both supervisors and program administrators, which have largely been absent from the literature on supervisor training. Case study facilitates the collection and analysis of multiple data sources, which I believed would result in rich, descriptive data around the tensions in supervisor training. To achieve a "concentrated inquiry" (Stake, 2000, p. 436) of both supervisors' and administrators' perspectives, I employed a three-pronged data collection approach that included a survey, interviews, and document analysis over two research stages.

Setting

The site for this study was a teacher education department within a school of education at a Research I institution located in an urban center in the Northeast. The teacher education department at Hillside University² offered single and dual certification programs as well as certification in English, social studies, science, and mathematics education, and other special topics. These programs differed in degree earned, time-to-degree, clinical experiences, and coursework. The teacher education program used a triad model that consisted of a teacher candidate, cooperating teacher, and university supervisor. While the supervisor and cooperating

² All people and place names are pseudonyms.

teacher provided individual evaluations throughout the clinical experience, they did collaborate on midterm and final evaluations of the teacher candidate. Each program had a program coordinator, and two co-directors of teacher education oversaw the program coordinators. In many instances, the co-directors of teacher education also acted as program coordinators.

Participant Description

The sample consisted of 23 females and five males of whom 27 were White and one was Asian. Nearly all participants had at least a few years of PK-12 teaching experience, and 22 were retired teachers and administrators. The supervisors worked in three program categories: secondary education (n=15), elementary education (n=14), and early childhood education (n=8); some supervisors worked across programs. The participants varied in years of experience supervising; the majority had less than five years of experience (n=13) with the remainder split between 5-9 years (n=8) and over 10 years (n=7).

In addition, Hillside University employed two co-directors of teacher education who participated in the study. Both were White females who were full-time faculty, taught courses in the department, and served as program coordinators for various programs but did not supervise teacher candidates. At the time, Katherine had over 20 years' experience working with supervisors while Erin had six.

Data Collection

The first stage of the data collection was an online survey distributed to all supervisors at Hillside University. This survey solicited supervisors' demographic information, experiences with university-led training and self-directed learning, and training preferences. The final item on the supervisor survey asked respondents if they would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview. Of the 39 current supervisors, 28 took the survey, which resulted in a 72% response rate.

The second stage of the data collection consisted of both supervisor and program administrator interviews. The supervisor interviews were designed to give space for supervisors to elaborate on the beliefs and experiences they reported in the survey. Of those who volunteered for an interview, I selected 10 supervisors for a semi-structured, responsive interview (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I used quota sampling to select a purposive sample (Maxwell, 2013) based on supervisors' role at the university, program, years of experience supervising, and PK-12 experience. There were only two co-directors of teacher education at the time of the study, and I recruited both for interviews. I hypothesized the administrators could help clarify supervisors' roles, document trainings offered and elaborate on the difficulties of supervisor preparation, and shed light on tensions the supervisors reported. In the course of the data collection, I realized one of the supervisors I interviewed, Maria, was also a program coordinator. Her responses were grouped with the supervisors when she was speaking as a supervisor and with the program administrators when she was speaking as an administrator.

Lastly, I collected departmental documents including program-specific handbooks and policy documents that had the potential to contain information regarding supervisor training. I also

suspected the program documents could illuminate how Hillside University conceptualized the supervisor role, and, thus, might provide insight into training the supervisors would need to enact that role. All departmental documents were publicly available on Hillside University's website.

Data Analysis

The data collection resulted in mixed quantitative and qualitative data; therefore, I used both quantitative and qualitative data analysis procedures. For the majority of the survey items, frequencies and means provided evidence of central tendency and variability on essential components of supervisors' work and training. I treated the open-ended survey responses as qualitative data, which I coded following the same procedures as the interview data described below.

The open-ended survey responses, interview, and document analysis data were coded following Saldaña's (2016) coding cycles. In the first cycle coding, I used Structural and Initial Coding (Saldaña, 2016) to generate a broad index of codes aligned to the tensions, instances of formal and informal training, role typology, and organizational supports. In the second cycle, I used Pattern Coding to synthesize and organize the codes as well as to generate understandings of tensions in supervisor preparation and beliefs about how preparation could improve supervisor efficacy. Throughout the coding cycles, I wrote brief analytic memos (Saldaña, 2016) to capture emerging themes, record new questions, and document preliminary findings.

Findings

This study found that, while Hillside University did provide some initial training and professional development for supervisors, this support was insufficient to prepare them for their work or move them forward in their practice. In lieu of adequate organizational supports, the supervisors relied on each other and their career experience to carry out their roles. Program administrators were aware of and regretted the limited attention they gave to the supervisors but were themselves hindered by a lack of time and resources. These realities led to tensions as supervisors carried out their work including unclear expectations, significant problems when evaluating teacher candidates, and the retention of PK-12 educator identities.

Supervisor Preparation and Training

Supervisors at Hillside University were prepared for their roles in three ways: formal training provided by program administrators and university faculty, informal learning, which consisted of engagement in communities of practice with other supervisors, and reliance on PK-12 practitioner experience.

Formal training. The primary training for Hillside University supervisors was a one-hour annual orientation at which the program administrators reviewed logistical aspects of supervising (e.g., which forms to complete) and facilitated a discussion of an actual, complex case to, according to co-director Katherine, help the supervisors "think about how to approach problems when they arose." Following the orientation, the supervisors met their teacher candidates for the first time. The supervisors reported that the orientation offered several benefits: being apprised

of new policies or procedures, learning about supervising generally, networking with administrators and other supervisors, and meeting their teacher candidates. Supplemental supervisor training occurred in individual program meetings where program-specific faculty and supervisors met to discuss teacher candidates' progress and share updates from the clinical setting. These meetings were supposed to occur at least once per semester; however, at the time of the study, some programs met more frequently than that while others had not met at all. Despite these efforts, the interviewees unanimously agreed that they were unprepared for their work. Gracie, a graduate student and first-year supervisor, was exasperated with how little she knew of what she was supposed to be doing:

I knew in general that students would be in school and I would go observe them and give them feedback on their work. And that's probably everything I knew. Not all those details like what kind of evaluation, or how many times, or what kind of students, or what kind of schools, not at that point...I wondered who my boss was. I seriously [had] no idea.

Paul remarked, "People don't get very well-prepared for the day-to-day efforts of supervising."

Informal learning. In the absence of sufficient university-led supervisor preparation, nearly 80% of Hillside University supervisors resorted to informal learning. This informal learning included: relying on other supervisors for guidance and advice, consulting with a program coordinator, and individual inquiry into supervision. Sixty percent of supervisors indicated that they learned about their practice from another supervisor, and the interview data were rich with descriptions and instances of supervisors sharing advice and guidance. One program in particular, English education, had a supervisor mentoring network that had been in place for over ten years and had benefitted at least five English education supervisors. The effects of this supervisor network on one supervisor, Shannon, were improved practice, increased knowledge of supervision and teacher education, and the feeling that she was a part of a team. The program administrators were aware of and supported supervisor peer networks, because they developed collegiality, promoted problem solving among supervisors, and made the administrators' work more time-efficient. On occasion, the program administrators asked strong, experienced supervisors to mentor new supervisors.

Practitioner experience. A second result of insufficient preparation was that supervisors resorted to their professional experiences³ to develop, understand, and carry out their roles. Nine out of the 10 interviewees identified their own teaching career as preparation for supervising teacher candidates. Caroline reported that supervision was a "natural extension" of her teaching career: "Most of it had to do with teaching methods, and delivery, and obviously lesson planning...I felt totally natural observing their voice, their demeanor, their delivery style, their presentation skills..." Diane claimed she, "did what [she] always did" when she was an administrator observing teachers: "They sort of overlap. Supervision of [teacher candidates] is like supervision of my own teachers." When faced with both common and unexpected problems, the interviewees reported relying on what they had done as teachers and administrators and what they had seen others in their schools do. Furthermore, several supervisors strongly believed that

³ Specifically acting as cooperating teachers to teacher candidates, mentoring new teachers, and observing and evaluating in-service teachers.

they had been hired to be supervisors because of their successful careers as PK-12 educators (indeed, many of them were very accomplished and well-respected in their schools and communities) and that PK-12 experience was foundational to high-quality supervision.

A Lack of Supervisor Oversight

Approximately 60% of survey respondents indicated that they had never had a performance evaluation, and many of them had been supervising for over 10 years. The other 40% reported that their performance evaluation consisted of impromptu, positive comments from a program coordinator; therefore, it is questionable if this could be considered a performance evaluation. The lack of feedback or evaluation of supervisors' work led to an overall sense of unease among the interviewees as to how well they were doing as supervisors. First-year supervisor, Caroline, lamented: "The best way to sum up my experience as a supervisor was I had no idea how I was doing... Without any feedback on how critical to be, I was kind of winging it." She finally concluded, "If nobody's telling me I'm doing it wrong, I guess I'm just going to keep doing what I'm doing." Unfortunately, because she had not received feedback on her lesson observations, Caroline questioned whether she mattered or if the university simply needed a "warm body" to fill her spot. Shannon claimed that in 12 years of supervising at Hillside University, "Nobody ever quite came and said to me, 'Good job.' 'Not good job.' 'You need to focus more on this and that.'" Most interviewees wrestled with the lack of feedback on their evaluations and observations and felt that administrators' feedback was important in giving them a sense of how well they were doing, validating their approach and methods, and making them feel that they were important to the program.

Supervisor Tensions Stemming From a Lack of Training and Oversight

The supervisors reported three strong tensions due to the lack of initial preparation for their roles and an absence of continuing professional development and oversight: unclear expectations, enacting the evaluator role, and resorting to practitioner identities and beliefs.

Unclear expectations. Supervisors lacked clear expectations for their work at both the logistical and conceptual levels. As discussed previously, first-year supervisors like Gracie and Caroline did not know basic logistics and expectations of supervising at Hillside University. This problem was exacerbated when the supervisors attempted to communicate university expectations to teacher candidates and cooperating teachers and often led to different understandings between the cooperating teacher and supervisor regarding teacher candidate progress and evaluation. Lauren relayed a situation where she disagreed with a cooperating teacher about final score for one of her teacher candidates: "[It] was contentious, and I had a lot of conversations with [her program coordinator] about... 'Am I right?'... 'Is my judgement accurate?'... It was just uncomfortable."

Caroline, Paul, and Shannon claimed that, when they first began, they thought they knew what good teaching was from their career experience, but they were unaware of what was important to the university. While most of the supervisors adopted roles that were (unknowingly) consistent with university expectations, some supervisors adopted roles that were not. Other supervisors were consciously selective of the roles they embodied irrespective of the university's

expectations. The primary negative outcome of unclear expectations for supervisors was a strong tension surrounding the evaluator role, which is discussed below.

Evaluator vs. preferred roles. Although the survey indicated that the majority of supervisors viewed themselves as evaluators, the interview data complicated this finding. The interviewees reported that having to evaluate teacher candidates caused major tensions, especially for those who embodied the instructional coach and counselor / mentor roles. Courtney bluntly stated that evaluating teacher candidates was in direct conflict with instructional coaching: “You’re never meant to be an evaluator when you’re a coach.” Even co-director Katherine attempted to steer supervisors away from evaluation:

I really try to avoid, especially in the beginning of the relationship, the whole notion of evaluation. “I am not here to evaluate you, to tell you, ‘You were good or bad. It’s about growth, and this is where you are and how can we make steady progress to grow.’”

Each year, Paul told his teacher candidates that he would give them A-equivalent grades in hopes that the teacher candidates would disregard the evaluations, which he perceived to be “a hoop to jump through,” and focus on improving their teaching. Gracie admitted to gerrymandering her teacher candidates’ scores so they would not get too many low scores at the beginning of the term; she was concerned “it would crush them.” Gracie progressively gave her teacher candidates higher scores over time so that they would feel that they were improving and gain confidence. Because program administrators were not reviewing supervisors’ evaluations, the supervisors could disengage from their mandated evaluator role and enact their preferred roles, especially the instructional coach and counselor / mentor roles, with impunity.

Practitioner identity. Of the interviewees, all but one of the second career supervisors⁴ emphatically positioned themselves as former PK-12 practitioners rather than teacher educators. Shannon declared: “I see my role as consummate: ‘This is what it’s like in the real world’...My job was to be the real-world exemplar. Hillside University can take care of the research and the theory.” She was adamant that her job had “nothing to do with what goes on on campus.” Paul, Diane, and Jeanne felt their teacher candidates’ lesson plans and sometimes the lessons were not particularly relevant to the practice of current teachers. In these cases, the supervisors were in an awkward position between supporting the work prescribed by the university, with which they disagreed, and preparing the teacher candidates for typical classroom activities and practices that they felt were more appropriate.

Preparation to Support Supervisors

Approximately 70% of the supervisors in this study reported wanting initial preparation and continuing professional development. This group identified five types of support they believed would improve their practice (a) university-led, large group professional development sessions, (b) program-specific meetings, (c) opportunities to confer and network with other supervisors, (d) a review and discussion of supervisor’s evaluation forms, and (e) a specific orientation for first-year supervisors. The supervisors believed the large group meetings could be sites for content learning on: the theory and practice of clinical supervision, current research on teacher

⁴ Those who had retired from PK-12 careers and were supervising for Hillside University in their retirement.

education, and skill development around observing, conferencing, and evaluating teacher candidates. Additionally, the program-specific meetings could be spaces to: clarify expectations, discuss teacher candidate progress, and improve program policy, practice, and documents.

Program Administrators' Perspectives

The program administrators affirmed the importance of their supervisors' work, "[It's] a crucial, crucial role," and they were keenly aware of the lack of supervisor trainings. Program coordinator Maria acknowledged, "There should be more training. It's not really their fault as a supervisor if [they're] not as aware of things." However, the administrators struggled with having time to develop and lead large group and program-specific supervisor meetings and to review supervisor evaluation forms. In fact, Katherine purposefully hired and attempted to retain supervisors whom she knew to be skillful practitioners so that she would have to provide less oversight. In addition, Maria, Katherine, and Erin all admitted that they were reluctant to ask too much of the supervisors due to the supervisors' low pay and part-time status. Katherine also acknowledged supervisor turnover as an inhibitor to providing training: "I can't ask them to come here for a week-long training, and they might not even be here next year."

The teacher education program documents, which included a teacher candidate handbook, positioned supervisors as instructional coaches, evaluators, and managers of the clinical experience. However, the co-directors argued that the manager role belonged to the placement coordinator and not the supervisors. Instead, they ascribed the counselor / mentor and the socializer into the profession roles to the supervisors. The co-directors' prescription of these roles is interesting. Since these are interpersonal roles that are somewhat removed from the functional aspects of teaching a teacher candidate how to teach, it may be difficult to mandate the counselor / mentor and socializer roles in the program documents but easier for the co-directors to informally encourage supervisors to adopt these roles.

Discussion

This study reports similar findings to prior research that has found supervisors receive little preparation for and ongoing development of their practice (Danielowich & McCarthy, 2013; McCormack et al., 2019). While Hillside University did provide some supervisor training, it was insufficient to prepare supervisors for their work and led them to rely on peer networks and career experience to develop roles and praxis. Inadequate training combined with minimal oversight resulted in supervisor uncertainty, perfunctory and inflated evaluations, and the retention of practitioner identities. Despite this, the supervisors met university expectations for their work with the exception of the evaluator role; they completed the evaluator functions without embodying the role. Unfortunately, the administrators' reluctance to impose upon the poorly-paid and part-time supervisors resulted in less organizational supports for the supervisors, who, for the most part, wanted more preparation, ongoing training, and oversight.

While this study's finding of a lack of organizational supports to prepare and support supervisor growth is not new, this work advances the research on supervisor training by illuminating *why* supervisor training is so difficult, the effects of minimal preparation on supervisors, and the types of training supervisors believe would support their work. This research also extends a vision for

improved clinical supervision that includes (a) explicit expectations for supervisors including which roles supervisors are to embody, (b) purposeful and adequate preparation for new supervisors based on those expectations, (c) ongoing professional development including administrative feedback to support supervisor growth, (d) a predication that clinical supervision is fundamentally different than PK-12 teaching or administrative work, and (e) decision-making about supervision and clinical experiences based on local contexts and program structures.

How then do administrators in teacher education programs operationalize this vision to drive change? Certainly administrators' limited time and resources must be taken into account as well as the reality that not every supervisor wants to attend more trainings and meetings. However, this study suggests that minimal investment in supervisors via meaningful induction and professional development opportunities could result in maximum return. The Hillside University supervisors cared deeply about their work and wanted to be successful. Moreover, many of the second career supervisors wanted to be more involved in their programs. Administrators could leverage this enthusiasm and appoint exceptional supervisors to lead large group professional development sessions and new supervisor inductions as well as mentor new supervisors. An online repository of exemplar teacher candidate lesson plans, supervisor observation and evaluation forms, and video-recordings of teacher candidates in various clinical experiences including supervisor-teacher candidate conferences could also help supervisors (a) understand program expectations for themselves and their teacher candidates, (b) learn to use evaluations to drive growth, and (c) visualize the work of supervising, which is often done in isolation.

This study also cautions that failure to invest in supervisors can be disastrous. While an absence of organizational supports may not exist at all institutions, this study reminds administrators to examine their own programs, reflect on the roles supervisors are asked to perform, learn about the tensions they face performing those roles, and act strategically to provide appropriate supports. Some tensions supervisors faced, such as unclear expectations, could be easily resolved through policy documents or a new supervisor orientation. Others are more engrained in the nature of supervision and the realities of limited time and resources. While it is not feasible to eliminate all tensions, it is crucial to provide support to supervisors through these challenges. Supervisors are allies to teacher education departments who can and should be leveraged to drive teacher candidate growth.

Limitations and Next Steps

This study had several limitations stemming from the design and participants. First, it was a single case study of one teacher education program that offered multiple degrees and certificates across a variety of programs. While similar programs exist that may face similar circumstances and challenges, it is important to acknowledge that teacher education programs have multiple structures and clinical experiences (Pasternak, Caughlan, Hallman, Renzi, & Rush, 2017) that could lead to different circumstances and challenges for supervisors than the ones reported here. Furthermore, the participants in this study were primarily White, female, retired teachers who supervised in the early childhood and elementary education programs; thus, the data are inherently skewed toward those perspectives. Finally, I interviewed the co-directors of teacher education but not all the program coordinators, so this study does not include all Hillside University administrators' voices.

Further study of differently-structured teacher education programs and their supervisors could shed light on supervisor preparation, the roles that supervisors embody, and the tensions they face across different types of programs, especially as teacher education programs are being challenged to foreground clinical experiences (NCATE, 2010). In addition, it is critical to understand the effects supervisors have on teacher candidate growth and which roles and behaviors are associated with that growth. Future researchers could utilize the role typology presented here and the findings on which roles are embodied most frequently to study these effects. For example, Hillside University supervisors viewed themselves as instructional coaches and counselor / mentors. Are those supervisors more effective in fostering teacher candidate growth than supervisors who embody other roles? Is one role more central than another in affecting growth? Finally, perspectives from non-White, male, and graduate student supervisors as well as cooperating teachers and teacher candidates could be included in future research to add nuanced understandings of supervisors' work.

Conclusion

Because of the near ubiquitous reliance on university supervisors in teacher education programs, supervisor preparation and ongoing development is imperative. Each teacher candidate deserves a well-qualified and skillful supervisor to facilitate her learning. However, supervisors exist in the untenable position of high expectations in a complex role with an incognito status (Glanz & Hazi, 2019). As supervisors are drawn nearer to the field site via teacher education reforms and calls for increased clinical experience in teacher preparation, it is ever more crucial that supervisors have clear expectations of their roles, explicit preparation for these roles, and effective oversight and evaluation of their performance. It may be through explicit supervisor preparation and ongoing professional development that supervision is recognized as a distinct and legitimate endeavor in teacher education.

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