

2020

An Ecological Framework for Supervision in Teacher Education

Rebecca Buchanan

University of Maine, rebecca.buchanan@maine.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/jes>



Part of the [Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Buchanan, R. (2020). An Ecological Framework for Supervision in Teacher Education. *Journal of Educational Supervision*, 3 (1). <https://doi.org/10.31045/jes.3.1.6>

This Conceptual is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UMaine. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Educational Supervision by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UMaine. For more information, please contact um.library.technical.services@maine.edu.

An Ecological Framework for Supervision in Teacher Education

Journal of Educational Supervision

76 – 94

Volume 3, Issue 1, 2020

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31045/jes.3.1.6>
<https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/jes/>

Rebecca Buchanan¹

Abstract

Pre-service teachers are typically supervised by two differently situated mentors: university-based clinical supervisors and cooperating teachers. These two types of supervisors are positioned differently within the institution of teacher education. Using ecological systems theory combined with institution theory, this paper offers an analytical framework for ecologically investigating how teacher supervisors and cooperating teachers are positioned and the effects on their labor, identities, and practices and how ecological forces operating at multiple levels shape new teacher learning. Drawing from empirical research to provide examples of this framework in action, the paper examines challenges to the field and offers potential responses that teacher education programs and teacher supervisors can take to mitigate these challenges.

Keywords

teacher supervision; cooperating teachers; ecological systems

¹ Univeristy of Maine, Maine, USA

Corresponding Author:

Rebecca Buchanan (School of Learning and Teaching, College of Education and Human Development, University of Maine, 5766 Shibles Hall Room 329, Orono, Maine, 04469, USA)

Email: rebecca.buchanan@maine.edu

Introduction

The pre-service teaching triad is a common structure for teacher mentoring in field components of teacher education programs in the United States. Typically, the triad is made up of the pre-service teacher (PST), a university-based supervisor, and a school-based cooperating teacher (CT) (Cuenca, 2012; Glickman & Bey, 1990). PST's receive mentoring from both their university supervisor and their CT as they engage in practice teaching. While the term triad connotes interconnectedness among all three members of the group, in most cases, the majority of interactions are dyadic – between the PST and each of their mentors individually (Byrd & Fogleman, 2012).

Research on teacher education broadly and instructional supervision specifically has demonstrated the fraught nature of this triad. University-based supervisors, PSTs, and CTs are often working towards different goals, which complicates the partnership (Bullough, Draper, Smith, & Birrell, 2004; Burns & Badiali, 2015). PSTs frequently receive conflicting feedback from their different mentors (Byrd & Fogleman, 2012). This combination creates challenges for effective communication among members of the triad (McCormack, Baecher, & Cuenca, 2019; Slick, 1998).

The challenge and complexity of the triad is due, in part, to the ways that the different members are institutionally situated (Buchanan, 2017; Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1985). Supervisors are employed by the university, CTs by PK-12 schools, and these two worlds are physically separated. University-based supervisors spend most of their time in the field, observing and debriefing with students, and CTs (who are rarely integrated into the formal teacher education process) spend all of their time in the PK-12 classrooms where PSTs are apprenticing. Further complicating this fragmentation is a lack of cooperation and partnership between the two worlds (Feiman-Nemser, 2012; Goodlad, 1990; Grossman, Hammerness, McDonald, & Rondfeldt, 2008; Zeichner & Liston, 1987). Teacher preparation structured in this way is not a shared endeavor that both universities and PK-12 schools engage in. Rather, serving as a CT is a favor that PK-12 educators do for the profession or a recruitment strategy that PK-12 principals use to evaluate new teacher candidates for their schools. Unfortunately, there can be very little communication between teacher education programs and PK-12 CTs about the kinds of pedagogies the programs are attempting to foster (Fives, Mills, & Dacey, 2016; Goodlad, 1990).

These two institutions are organized differently, have different goals, different accountability demands, and (in many cases), operate from different philosophical perspectives regarding what counts as *good* teaching and learning (Cuban, 2007, 2013; Smagorinsky, 2010). The different forces that structure these institutions overlap, intersect, and reinforce each other. A combination of institutional theory and ecological systems theory can illuminate how this situatedness operates within the lives and work of university-based supervisors and CTs, and how it complicates the work of teacher education, especially for teacher preparation that seeks to transform PK-12 schooling.

Institutional Theory and Ecological Systems as a Theoretical Framework

Institutions are structures in society that shape human reality. They "provide stability and meaning to social life" (Scott, 2008, p. 48). Through their regulative, normative, and cultural cognitive elements, institutions structure the possibilities of social life. The regulative pillar involves policies, laws, sanctions, and codified rules. The normative pillar is associated with professions. Professional norms, codes of conduct, and standards for entry and practice shape both the types of participants that organizations recruit as well as their behavior and participation within an organization. The cultural cognitive pillar reveals the unconscious, taken for granted ways of thinking about the world on which individuals and organizations rarely reflect. Cultural cognitive aspects of institutions are *common sense* and are reproduced through mimetic means (Scott, 2005; Scribner & Donaldson, 2001). Institutions are reproduced in organizations through carriers: symbolic systems, relational systems, routines, and artifacts (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). These carriers permeate organizations and reproduce institutions through an organization's formal structures, by defining who can participate and what roles they assume, by outlining what activities take place, and by determining what materials are appropriate (Scott, 2008).

Ecological systems theory was originally developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) to understand how an individual interacts with factors that operate at multiple levels within his/her environment. Bronfenbrenner believed that in order to understand human development, one must take into account the ecological context surrounding an individual. He outlined five ecological levels: micro, meso, exo, macro, and chrono;¹ factors operate at multiple levels to influence human development. These factors are bi-directional, meaning they also affect factors at other ecological levels. Ecological systems theory encourages examination of how contextual factors are related to one another as well as how those factors shape individual development.

Institutional forces operate at multiple ecological levels through institutional carriers. The macro-level includes histories, discourses, regulations, reform movements, and professional norms in the fields of higher education and PK-12 schooling. A regulative example is the federal regulation *No Child Left Behind* and the accountability requirements that emanated from it. Those accountability demands were not merely regulations that must be fulfilled; they also gave rise to a discourse defining school, teacher, and student success in terms of measurable, objectively determined (by means of a standardized assessment) academic achievement. Macro forces, even within teacher education, operate quite differently on the university and PK-12 schools. For example, while university programs may dedicate a significant amount of time and resources to the completion of a credentialing assessment (like edTPA), this typically has little impact on PK-12 schools (other than the fact that PSTs have to complete a portion of the assessment in their placement). Similarly, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and aligned assessments (like Smarter Balance Assessment Consortium or SBAC) shape curricular decisions in PK-12 schools but are not a guiding feature for university programs. The exo-level involves the particular university and school district settings that intersect around the work of teacher education. Exo-level forces include organizational goals, which are communicated

¹ The chronosystem, which is not used in my framework, encompasses how time relates to the ecological context.

through artifacts (e.g. teacher education program mission statements and PK-12 instructional program models), and requirements placed on teacher educators at each organization (e.g. mandated PK-12 curricula or publishing expectations). The meso-level is the actual teacher preparation program. Within the teacher preparation program, analyzing program features illuminates particular routines (e.g. roles of different teacher educators) or relational systems (e.g. a cohort model for teacher candidates) that either carry or attempt to intentionally subvert institutional forces. The micro-level involves the communication (and simultaneous reconstruction) of various institutions through the interactions that occur between PSTs and their teacher educators, within both the university and PK-12 school settings.

Institutionalization occurs through multiple processes, but several of these processes take place at the micro-level through person-to-person interactions. Shared values, norms, and expectations are communicated through these interactions. This process of objectification renders these values, norms, and expectations as fact, not as contextually produced (Scott, 2008). Simultaneously, as the profession of teaching secures the commitment of new members (through the structures and relationships within a teacher education program), it communicates professionally aligned actions and behaviors.

These four levels of analysis are not disconnected from one another. They are interrelated and dialectical, continually influencing and informing one another. For example, teacher education program structures (meso-level) are shaped by federal and state requirements (which are macro-level regulations) as well as accreditation requirements (which are an instantiation of professional norms and values). An ecological framework allows us to trace how institutional carriers shape the experiences, expectations, and lived realities of supervisors and CTs, which reveals how structure becomes manifest in practice.

Tracing Institutional Carriers within Ecological Levels

Table 1 outlines a sampling of institutional forces and their carriers that operate at different ecological levels and shape the work of teacher supervision across the two worlds where teacher education occurs. These differential forces interact, often compounding the effects. For example, the work of university-based supervisors is shaped by the university structure of coursework, which is organized into Carnegie units. Teacher education programs often negotiate this demand by requiring PSTs who are student teaching to register for multiple courses. University-based supervisors may be graduate students or hired as adjunct instructors or lecturers in order to supervise student teachers, listing them as instructors for these courses. The result of these interconnecting forces is university-based supervisors who are often fragmented from the rest of the teacher education program and may have little connection to or knowledge of what occurs in other parts of the program. In this way the institutional carriers operate across pillars and ecological levels to situate university-based supervisors and impact the supervision they provide. The work of CTs, on the other hand, is shaped by different accountability demands, typically standards and annual standardized testing. Linked to the increased focus on accountability through standardized means that has occurred over last the 15 years, CTs also navigate local policies that articulate standardization through pacing guides and fidelity to adopted programs (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006). And while CTs spend a great deal of time working as teacher educators, they usually have little to no preparation for educating teachers and are even more

disconnected from the content of the teacher education program that PSTs are completing than university-based supervisors do (Byrd & Fogelman, 2012).

Table 1: Ecological Factors

Macro Level	Regulative: National and State Policies		Common Core Standards
	Normative: Historical Structures		Factory Model of Schooling
	Cultural Cognitive: Common Discourses		Teachers as Technicians
Exo Level	University Structures	Regulative: Policies	Carnegie Units
		Normative: Professional Roles	Increase in Adjuncts
		Cultural Cognitive: Common Discourses	Low Status of Teacher Education
	PK-12 District Structures	Regulative	Scripted Curricula
		Normative	Lack of Release Time for Supervising Student Teachers
		Cultural Cognitive	Teachers as policy implementers
Meso Level	Teacher Education Program	Regulative	Credentialing Requirements
		Normative	Fragmentation between supervisors and course instructors
		Cultural Cognitive	Lack of Conceptual Coherence
Micro Level	Interactions between PST and Mentors	Regulative	Program Expectations
		Normative	Observation-Debrief Cycle
		Cultural Cognitive	Forms of Feedback

This fragmentation is exacerbated by the mismatch between the kinds of theories and pedagogies taught in teacher education programs (which are frequently constructivist and student-centered) and the practices that take place in PK-12 classrooms (which are frequently didactic and teacher-centered) (Buchanan, 2017; Britzman, 1991; Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1987). This mismatch makes it challenging to establish the linkages necessary to understand teaching at both concrete and abstract levels. PSTs need both conceptual and practical tools in order to build a knowledge base that is firmly grounded in aligned theory and practice (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2005; Grossman, Hammerness, McDonald, & Rondfeldt, 2008). Otherwise, even with particular philosophical commitments, understandings, or dispositions, if teachers lack the ability to put those theories into practice, they are likely to revert to the patterns of schooling that they experienced or that take place in their schools (Britzman, 1991). The lack of coherence renders both the experience of learning to teach and the practice of trying to educate new teachers particularly challenging and complex. An ecological framework can illuminate how these factors operate to shape the kinds of learning experiences new teachers experience.

In order to demonstrate what this framework means for the practice of supervision, the next section explores analysis from a broader study of teacher education (Buchanan, 2017). This study examined how two social justice focused teacher education programs that were differently structured (one traditional and one residency) organized the learning to teach experiences for PSTs. Using ethnographic approaches, the structures of the program and experiences of both teacher educators and PSTs were explored. As part of this study, conversational data between PSTs and their mentors (both CTs and university-based supervisors) were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using sociolinguistic analysis techniques. The next section provides two analytical examples: one organizational and one interpersonal. The organizational example ecologically examines how programs organize the work of both university-based supervisors and CTs, which serves, inadvertently, to reinforce structural and conceptual fragmentation. The interpersonal example illustrates how this fragmentation manifests in the conversational patterns between the different mentors as they engage in the practice of teacher education through debrief and collaborative conversations with PSTs.

Organizational Example: Structural Fragmentation of Teacher Educators

Examining how teacher educators are situated at the meso-level reveals how normative and cultural cognitive institutions are carried through organizational structures, professional norms, and assumptions of what constitutes standard practice. Like most teacher education programs, the two examined in this study employed teacher educators in three formal roles (course instructors, university-based supervisors, and CTs), teacher educators across roles (and sometimes within them) were quite disconnected from each other, which contributed to a fragmented learning experience for PSTs.

University-based supervisors oversaw student teachers in their placement, observing them regularly and providing feedback. They also led weekly supervisory sessions with a small group of student teachers. In both programs, university-based supervisors were a mixture of retired teachers and teachers who had left the classroom after a decade or so. Some supervisors worked full-time, but most worked part-time, using this work to supplement their retirement. They had no formal preparation for the work of supervising PSTs, and the training for new university-based supervisors was mostly ad-hoc support from their colleagues. One of the new university-based supervisors described it this way:

I haven't known the big picture. I have basically come in knowing that there's going to be a lot of work, but I don't know what that work is, and just assuming that I really can't ever rest because if I'm resting it's because I don't know what I should be doing.

Institutional forces operating at the macro and exo-levels shaped the experiences of this new supervisor. The cultural-cognitive discourse that frames teacher education as low-status work within the university combined with the decrease in resources caused by the broader neoliberal trend in reduced funding for higher education shaped the organizational structures such that new supervisors are provided with little to no preparation for their role. They are just expected to know how to shift into the role of teacher educator, despite abundant scholarly evidence concerning the challenges of this transition (Loughran, 2006; Olsen & Buchanan, 2017; Swennen, Jones, & Volman, 2010).

While CTs are not always included in discussions of teacher educators (and in fact may not even consider themselves teacher educators), they serve an incredibly important function in the development of PSTs (Clarke, Triggs, & Nielsen, 2013; Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1987; Izadinia, 2015). The CTs in this study were all very experienced (had at least 10 years of teaching experience); most had served as CTs in the past, but they had little preparation for their work supporting PSTs.

The structural locations of these teacher educators influenced how connected they were to the rest of the program, how they interacted with PSTs, and how they understood their purpose and role. Teacher educators ought to serve as a bridge between theory and practice, explicating the implicit understandings about inequity, power, learning, and teaching within the institutions of school and examining how they are either sustained or thwarted through instructional practices. However, because of the disconnected nature of their work across institutions, these mentors were not able to effectively bridge this divide. This fragmentation demonstrates what institutional theorists call loose coupling (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Weick, 1976). The different program components were not tightly coupled, or linked together and, therefore, PSTs did not experience a cohesive preparation.

Teacher educators were separated from each other in both formal and informal ways by the role they occupied. The connection between course instructors and supervisors depended on individual connections. One course instructor described her experience this way:

I tried to email supervisors and talk to supervisors, but more about problems, or problematic students that were having issues ... There were a few times that I was noticing things in their work that I think was coming from those classes that was either helpful or not helpful for my class and so trying to check in about things. My sense is that people just don't have the time.

Course instructors had no formal, direct contact with CTs. In a few cases long-term work with the program and living in the local community meant they had friendly relationships with local teachers who also served as CTs, but there were no formal partnerships that linked coursework experiences with PSTs' practicum.

CTs also had very little knowledge about coursework experiences. In some cases CTs were actually graduates of the program, but because of the time that had elapsed since they graduated, they were still relatively unaware of what the PSTs were learning about in their classes. The only teacher educators that they had direct contact with were the university-based supervisors, and the supervisors varied in how much they knew about the coursework experiences and requirements. One supervisor put it this way:

I haven't really known the scope of the program and how it is all integrated. It would've been nice to have some kind of preparation in that way, where I could understand how people are networked together and how the overall program is designed in a cohesive way.

Since supervisors were the only teacher educators who bridged the divide between the universities and the PK-12 schools, their experience with and knowledge about program coursework was incredibly important. However, they did not make explicit connections between course material and the student teaching they observed since they were not well integrated.

Interviewer: Did you have a sense of what they were doing in their coursework?

Supervisor: Somewhat, yeah. Not formally asking them, but we'd talk sometimes in private. They'd ask me about something or ask for help with the little things.

These meso-level organizational structures hampered supervisors' ability to serve as the bridge between the two worlds and support teacher learning as they navigated the contested perspectives on learning, the purpose of schooling, and teacher capacity. This outcome furthered the divide between the teacher education program and the experiences in the student teaching practicum, which encouraged PSTs to treat their student teaching experience as an apprenticeship, where they mimicked the practices in place without critique.

Role of the CT. One of persistent unspoken factors that shaped the mentoring that PSTs received was how CTs understood their role, another institutional carrier. CTs were encouraged (both implicitly and explicitly) to see themselves primarily as models of good teaching, rather than coaches or even mentors. As one of the CTs put it: “[PSTs] get a chance to see teaching being modeled and practice their skills.” This CT understood his role as someone who serves as an exemplar for PSTs to imitate. CTs could potentially conceive of their role as a coach who supports PSTs as they explore their own pedagogical interests or as an intellectual sounding board helping them unpack thorny issues of pedagogy (Smith & Avetisian, 2011). Instead these CTs understood themselves as models who demonstrate what good teaching looks like and attempts to pass those skills onto new teachers, which was quite likely similar to their own student teaching experiences. This was a form of how normative institutions operate, through the roles available to be occupied and how the expectations of those roles are communicated to participants who they engage.

Learning how to enact theories learned in university courses is non-linear, thorny, and complicated. PSTs need support in exploring the relationship between theory and practice from practicing teachers, particularly if the kinds of pedagogies they want to engage don't fit a traditional teacher-centered model of instruction. One PST participant demonstrated this complexity as she tried to negotiate what it meant to link Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) with her practice teaching in a fifth grade classroom.

The concept of ZPD on paper sounds perfect, but then when you're actually in the classroom and there's a bunch of people raising their hand, like who do I go to first? Who needs my help the most? Who can probably figure it out by talking to their partner? Or who is actually completely lost?

This PST was interested in the conceptual ideas about teaching and learning, but she wasn't always sure how they applied, because the linkages were not direct. The questions she raised above are the kinds of questions she could have been exploring with her CT as she developed

conceptual and practical links between abstract ideas and classroom teaching. But these were not the kinds of conversations PSTs had with their CTs. Exo level carriers of normative PK-12 school practices quickly socialized PSTs into eschewing these complex theoretical ideas in order to attend to the immediate and daily demands of their classrooms. This disconnect demonstrates the conceptual fragmentation (Zeichner & Gore, 1990) that often accompanies the divide between university and school and between theory and practice and can result in under-theorized classroom practice. Teachers engaging in activities for reasons they may not be entirely clear about: because it worked once before, because that's what they were told to do, or because that's how the curriculum does it (Ertsas & Irgens, 2017). These kinds of tacit, unexamined explanations for instructional choices are encouraged by the traditional roles through which PSTs and CTs understand themselves, which typically do not demand that PSTs inquire and question the evidence that supports particular approaches (or the learning theory that undergirds them), but rather that they enact the practices like their CTs do it. One of the major challenges of tacit teacher knowledge that isn't explicated, is that PSTs may not have access to the ways that practicing teachers negotiate, internalize, adapt, and merge various perspectives on learning and purposes of schooling. Without the explication available, they often make assumptions based on what is immediately visible, or draw from their own experiences as a student. Instead of opening up their understanding to the situated nature of education and the complexity of teaching and learning, this causes them to look for simplistic solutions to complex problems.

Need to maintain relationships with CTs. One of the final organizational factors that shaped the work of both types of mentors was the relatively tenuous relationship between CTs and the teacher education programs. The director at one program put it this way,

We're not sure that we have enough CTs and really great school settings. Just the sheer number of matches that we need to make with excellent CTs might be a constraint.

CTs were essentially doing the program (and/or the profession) a favor when they opted to take on a student teacher. This oriented the program (and the university-based supervisors, whose job it was to locate placements and/or maintain these relationships) as grateful recipients of the CTs' sacrifice of time. If simply the act of serving as a CT is going above and beyond professional duty, it is particularly difficult for programs to try and reorient their practice in a way that prioritizes PST development and more explicitly supports the vision of the teacher education program. It also makes it challenging for the university-based supervisors to influence the practices in place in local schools. As the only formal bridge between the two worlds university-based supervisors were tasked with maintaining relationships with CTs so that the programs would have enough placements in the future. The CTs were not oriented to the program with the expectation of receiving instructional coaching. Instead they expected to serve as models to their PSTs. There was not an agreed upon expectation that this would be a mutual, collaborative, co-learning activity. As such, university-based supervisors felt uncomfortable asserting this position in their work with CTs.

The structural fragmentation of teacher educators within the programs interact with other institutional carriers to recreate traditional patterns of practice and maintain the status quo in teacher education. The low status of teacher education within the university, and the low status of teacher supervision within teacher education, locate the work of supervision in positions and

persons which operated peripherally to the rest of the program. This is rooted in the historical divide between universities and PK-12 schools (Clifford & Guthrie, 1988; Labaree, 2004), and the fragmentation and of both university-based supervisors and CTs contributed to a lack of conceptual coherence for PSTs. This undermined the transformative goals of these social-justice oriented teacher education programs.

Interpersonal Example: 1:1 Feedback. This second example examines how the interactions between PSTs and their mentors during feedback sessions served as an important carrier for objectifying institutions. The process of objectification recreates the institution in daily practice, rendering it as real for both participants. This process occurred slightly differently for university-based supervisors and CTs. Conversational data revealed that while both CTs and university-based supervisors had regular one-on-one meetings (which ranged in level of formality) with teacher candidates, their interactional patterns were quite different. These different approaches demonstrate how the supervisors and CTs had different conceptual models of learning to teach, which had significant implications for the experiences of PSTs.

Feedback conversations with university-based supervisors typically began with a question, such as “What worked for you? What felt good during the lesson?” University-based supervisors then allowed PSTs to direct the conversation, focusing on areas that they had concerns about or wanted support on. If the supervisor disagreed with the PST’s self-assessment, he/she articulated it. But the conversation was driven by the PST’s reflection, not necessarily by the supervisor’s priority. While there was some variance to this pattern (depending on the program, experience-level, or content focus of the lesson), the conversational patterns of supervisor/PST feedback sessions (usually called observation-debrief sessions) encouraged self-reflection and personal inquiry on the part of the student teacher. Conversely, conversations between PSTs and CTs were characterized by less questioning (on the part of the CT) and more critique, description, and explanation. In one-on-one conversations, CTs typically assumed a traditional master practitioner role, offering their specific perspectives on a lesson to the PST, focusing primarily on what could be improved. Two conversational excerpts are included below for comparison. Table 2 is an excerpt between a PST and a supervisor, Table 3 between a CT and a PST. Linguistic form codes are included in the right hand column.

In Table 2, the university-based supervisor opens with a question and talks far less than the pre-service teacher. While the supervisor does provide a bit more advice later in the conversation, the direction has been determined by the PST already. The supervisor’s work here is to restate the PSTs’ ideas as she records them on a collaborative log that serves as record for each observation-debrief session. In Table 3, the CT speaks more than the PST. Instead of using questions to direct his reflection, she provides advice about how she would do it, which situates student teaching as training. The different interactional patterns of university-based supervisors and CTs illustrate how macro-level discourses of teachers as technician are instantiated in 1:1 conversations between CTs and PSTs. The collaborative log is an institutional carrier operating at the meso-level, because it is a program expectation that supervisors complete these during observation-debrief sessions. The nature of a collaborative log may predispose university-based supervisors to engage differently than CTs, framing their interactions around collaborative sense-making. CTs focused on skills, what PSTs needed to do, in that moment, while university-based

Table 2: Observation Debrief between University-Based Supervisor and PST

Role	Dialogue	Interaction Description
Supervisor:	What worked for you? What felt good during the lesson?	Question
PST:	Using the blocks are always fun. I think that definitely helped.	
Supervisor:	You demonstrated with manipulatives.	Restatement
PST:	We don't always do the book and the lessons that I have done for math haven't always been with the book, so I'm practicing that now.	
Supervisor:	You're using lessons straight out of the book ... We'll put that on your challenges side.	Restatement
PST:	I'm trying to follow the book. It's something that at this point I'm practicing things that I want to practice. That's something that I try to find the balance of how to use the book as a resource but not rely on the book and how to follow the book enough.	
Supervisor:	What did you feel good about? What was working for you? You said using the manipulatives. What else?	Question
PST:	Following the opening structure. Their procedures. That went okay. Clearly the 2nd group was more ready, so it took them a little while to get settled from lunch, plus we had a little bit more time, so I could check in with them one on one. I knew we wouldn't get through all the problems, so I went through which ones I thought would be ...	
Supervisor:	You selected certain ones. Ones that you thought would be best.	Restatement
PST:	I had gone through it a little bit before. It's hard to tell when it's something they'll pick up right away or when it's something that they're going to get caught up on. I wanted them to focus on the ones with the geometric shapes, since it's geometry and some of those questions were ... I shouldn't have picked the handshake one because that one took a little bit more. It's one of those things that immediately shows it's face afterwards.	
Supervisor:	When you go from geometric shapes to handshakes that's like ...	Restatement
PST:	Did you take a look at the. Some of the other ones were talking about money and talking about some of these different things, like okay we're not going to go there. We can do the pizza one	
Supervisor:	You're picking and choosing the parts that hang together for them then.	Restatement
PST:	Mm-hmm (affirmative).	
Supervisor:	On top of that I started working on the collaborative assessment log because I had time between. The students read the intro and then the problem chorally, so you're all reading it together. You demonstrate with manipulatives. You demo how to form the shapes. You demonstrate with different shapes. They have blocks themselves for you to make the shapes within the shapes. You repeated the demonstration a second time, then more as you needed it, as you were working with individuals.	Summary

Table 3: Feedback Conversation between CT and PST

Role	Dialogue	Interaction Description
PST:	I have to say, I could really use some positives right now. It was a really rough day. Because actually do think there were some things I did that were pretty good.	
CT:	Oh my God, that's so good.	Evaluation
PST:	Condensing the reader's work ... I mean it wasn't ideal I had against the reader's mini-lesson, but on the fly adjustments, I think that worked fairly well.	
CT:	I think everything up until morning recess was really good.	Evaluation
PST:	Yeah?	
CT:	Mm-hmm (affirmative). Morning meeting you were super smiley and positive. In the phonics you were doing a lot of follow through with the behavior stick. You decided to review the rules as soon as you noticed that they were getting off, which, I made a note. I do the rules every day because they need it every single day. At one point Marcel was kind of tuned out so you turned your body and included him in the circle, which helped him. So then I asked for a peace out and you were like, yeah, that's a really good idea. The actual lesson, once you had the beginning and middle and end sounds up on the board, I like that once they tried it, and then you showed them the right one and then you had them refer to each other, and that gave them a chance to revise right in the moment so it wasn't like being right or wrong. It was like, oh, I see why you thought that and then let's change it so that we can internalize the actually language pattern. Spelling pattern.	Summary and Evaluation
	Had you picked a book for read-a-loud?	Question (factual)
PST:	No that was one of those things I was going to do this morning and ... Yeah.	
CT:	Okay.	
PST:	No, obviously the lack of preparation this week is ...	
CT:	Makes a difference.	
PST:	Yeah.	
CT:	I know that for myself also, that's why I'm so obsessive about getting everything done Friday and I don't like things to go into the weekend because once you ... You have to hit the ground running when you get here Monday morning, and otherwise it's just way too much. If something isn't copied, it's just, like ... I mean it seems like a little deal bit it, yeah. It doesn't feel like a big deal when you're the lead teacher. I mean a little deal. And the anger chart had ...	Advice
PST:	Not been made.	
CT:	Not been made. Okay.	

supervisors emphasized reflection, encouraging PSTs to develop particular habits of mind and forcing them to explicate some of their instructional decision making.

Despite the difference in interactional patterns described above, there was a similarity across both approaches (dispensing advice or eliciting reflection). They both focused on micro aspects of teaching (a particular lesson) instead of taking a more holistic approach to examining pedagogy and instruction. In Table 2 the PST and his supervisor were discussing a lesson he had taught on building geometric shapes using smaller geometric shapes. The lesson was intended to develop students' conceptual understanding of determining area using multiplication. During this excerpt the supervisor hones in on detailed specific choices that the PST made during the lesson. She does not branch out into how his decisions (about whether or not to use the text book, about how to structure the activity) connect to his understandings of PK-12 student learning or connect with particular content from his math methods course. This level of focus, called targeted assistance (Burns, Jacobs, & Yendol-Hoppey, 2016) helped PSTs develop adaptive expertise, or the ability to make in-the-moment instructional decisions (Darling-Hammond, 2006; McDiarmid & Clevenger-Bright, 2008; Zeichner, 2014), but at the expense of developing a more cohesive philosophy. After noticing this pattern arising, the issue was raised with one of the university-based supervisors, whose personal philosophy differed significantly from many of the current practices in the schools where she was supporting teachers, about the emphasis on targeted assistance over more holistic support, and her response was that she hoped they were getting it in their coursework, but she did not really know what was happening in coursework.

[Our observation debrief conversations] didn't focus. Maybe technically they should have, but I'm not sure. I guess partly, in terms of philosophy, I would be thinking that they would be getting some of that at school. Although it's very different, getting it at school and putting it into practice. There seems to be this big hole in the program, and maybe in the world, between theory and practice. Not hole, chasm.

The observation-debrief sessions were the primary form of support and assessment for teaching that PSTs received from the program - and it came through their university-based supervisors. As part of the observation debrief cycle, supervisors came in and observed a lesson, took notes on the lesson, and then met with the teacher candidate afterwards, typically directly following the lesson (unless it was during one of their solo days). During the observation debrief the supervisor let the PST guide the conversation about how the lesson went. Typically this discussion focused on the performance aspects of teaching - what worked well or did not work during the lesson, and rarely circled back to the lesson plan that the teacher candidate developed in preparation for the lesson. When university-based supervisors provided support, it was usually narrowly connected to that particular lesson and what kinds of decisions the PST could have made differently in the moment (redirecting behavior, a different kind of material or resource), and did not provide much support for thinking about their pedagogical approaches broadly or developing a cohesive philosophy.

The different interaction patterns illustrate how the institutional forces operated differently on the two-worlds, both demonstrating how CTs and university-based supervisors understand the normative definitions of their roles differently, as well as reinforcing the two-worlds divide. This combination of normative patterns of discourse combined with the meso-level program

requirements (of observations of individual lessons, frequently disconnected from coursework experiences) reinforced the cultural cognitive discourse of teacher as technician. By focusing on individual lessons and targeting assistance to specific behaviors the feedback that PSTs received privileged the “correct” behaviors that teachers should engage in and served to reinforce these traditional structures and maintain the status quo in teacher education.

These analytical excerpts demonstrate how institutional forces operating through carriers at multiple ecological levels shape the work of university-based supervisors in ways that make providing transformative teacher education particularly challenging. The net effect is to restrain the transformative possibilities of teacher education by recreating a fragmented experience for PSTs. While many of these factors have been examined in research on teacher education, this ecological framework allows researchers and teacher educators to explore the multi-faceted, and frequently mutually constitutive ways these factors overlap.

Implications and Recommendations

The goal of this ecological framework for supervision is two-fold. The first is to offer new conceptual tools for conceiving of the work of teacher supervision. Examining how the work of university-based supervisors (both university and school based) is shaped by the factors that operate at multiple levels can serve the field in identifying both challenges and affordances that university-based supervisors face and examine the ways that these shape learning experiences for teachers. The second is to use this analysis to offer a set of solutions that could serve to mitigate the challenges to transformational supervision.

Given the challenges identified, de Certeau’s (2005) notion of strategies and tactics offer several paths forward for addressing the challenges supervisors face from both organizational and individual perspectives. For de Certeau, strategies are the tools of the powerful. They are ways that institutions and organizations shape the everyday lived experiences of people who operate within them. Tactics, he characterizes as the resistant methods that individuals engage in to assert some agency within the already colonized spaces. However, when situated within an ecological framework, the dichotomy of weak and powerful (institution and individual) becomes muddled. As teacher educators, we have the capacity (at times) to wield both strategies and tactics. To the extent that we can revise program structures and requirements, strategies can be used to create conditions that better support transformational supervision. As those systems are beyond direct control, tactics can be used to navigate and negotiate those demands.

Strategies

The three suggested strategies are approaches that can be taken by institutions of higher education. These operate at the meso-level and might take the form of creating new programmatic policies or working to develop a new professional norm.

1. Integrating both university-based supervisors and CTs into the program, so they become less peripheral and are more aware of program goals and content. This may take a variety of forms and should respond to specific contextual needs, but more formal on-boarding of supervisors, creating spaces where all types of teacher educators (faculty, course

instructors, supervisors, and CTs) come together and discuss the work of teacher development, and providing structures to support the development of mentors are all ways that supervisors located structurally within the university and PK-12 school could be better integrated into the program.

2. This integration requires greater material commitment to supervisors in order to demonstrate their value. This is particularly true for CTs, who are rarely compensated for their work (Fives, Mills, & Dacey, 2016). Providing meaningful compensation for CTs (which may include pay as well as release time) not only sends the message from the institution that the labor they provide is valuable, but also that it is seen as a linchpin in the teacher education process. This also creates new avenues for requiring particular kinds of participation as well as providing support for their own development.
3. Despite the joint attention provided to supervision from the fields of teacher education and educational leadership, rarely is there institutional partnerships created amongst programs. Developing these kinds of partnerships could serve several purposes: providing needed opportunities for students who are training to be educational leaders to develop their skills at supervision, providing meaningful support to PSTs by aspiring school leaders, creating connections between programs within an institution, creating stronger alignment between the kinds of support that PSTs and CT receive within their teacher education program and within the schools where they work. These kinds of partnerships might create more conversations and potential alignment across the two worlds and at multiple ecological levels.

Mercado (2019) argues that teacher educators must make connections across the communities of practice that they draw from in order to support transformation teacher education. These three strategies are efforts at just that – creating connections across institutional, organizations, and individuals in purposeful ways in order to launch a collaborative, concerted to navigate the factors that inhibit transformational supervision.

Tactics

Tactics are the ways that practitioners (in this case supervisors) navigate, negotiate, resist, and disrupt the institutional carriers that limit their efforts. These are typically the factors that operate at macro and exo levels that cannot always effectively and efficiently be shifted by individuals working on their own. However, tactics can serve as meaningful ways to shift the experiences of PSTs in more restrictive environments while working towards broader change collectively. These tactical moves, therefore, are often carried out on the interpersonal level as supervisors engage with their PSTs and collaborate with other mentors.

1. Supervisors should centralize the tensions they face between the two worlds with their PSTs. Providing them with the tools to analyze the ecological landscape and identify the forces that may be shaping their workplaces as well as the profession are key tools for new teachers to develop, and they are rarely explicitly addressed in teacher education (Author, 2019). This will model for PSTs how educators navigate external demands, particularly those that conflict with our own educative goals. Centralizing this tension should also provide PSTs with problem solving opportunities, where they practice identifying institutional carriers and tactically negotiating them.

2. Since PSTs occupy roles with less power, university-based supervisors should also advocate for the kinds of experiences that their PSTs need with their CTs. The practices that PSTs engage in frequently mimic what is already occurring in the CT's classrooms, which may not align with programmatic, supervisory, or even the PST's developmental goals. As the main representative of the institution and the figure who most frequently bridges the divide between the two worlds, university-based supervisors should use their positionality as leverage to require particular kinds of practice with field placements (Buchanan, Byard, Dana, Ferguson, & Billings, 2019).

As many teacher educators operate across multiple positionalities (course instructor, tenure track faculty member, university-based supervisor, program policy maker), they may find themselves switching back and forth between working to enact new strategies that will reshape the ecology of teacher supervision and operating in the marginal spaces tactically to support transformative teacher education.

References

- Achinstein, B., & Ogawa, R. (2006). (In) fidelity: What the resistance of new teachers reveals about professional principles and prescriptive educational policies. *Harvard educational review*, 76(1), 30-63. <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.76.1.e14543458r811864>
- Berger, P., & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The social construction of knowledge: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. Open Road Media: Soho, NY, USA.
- Britzman, D. P. (1991). *Practice makes practice: A critical study of learning to teach*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Buchanan, R. (2017). "It's not about that anymore": *An ecological examination of the theory-practice divide in contemporary teacher education*. Doctoral Dissertation. Retrieved from <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/91g7w6x2>.
- Buchanan, R., Byard, T., Dana, M., Ferguson, G. & Billings, K. (2019). Navigating standardized spaces in student teaching. *The Education Forum*, 83(3), 237-250. doi.org/10.1080/00131725.2019.1599647
- Bullough, R. V. Jr., Draper, R. J., Smith, L., & Birrell, J. R. (2004). Moving beyond collusion: Clinical faculty and university/public school partnership. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 20, 505–521. doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2004.04.007
- Burns, R. W., & Badiali, B. J. (2015). When supervision is conflated with evaluation: Teacher candidates' perceptions of their novice supervisor. *Action in Teacher Education*, 37(4), 418-437. doi.org/10.1080/01626620.2015.1078757
- Burns, R. W., Jacobs, J., & Yendol-Hoppey, D. (2016). The Changing Nature of the Role of the University Supervisor and Function of Preservice Teacher Supervision in an Era of Clinically-Rich Practice. *Action in Teacher Education*, 38(4), 410-425. doi.org/10.1080/01626620.2016.1226203
- Byrd, D. & Fogleman, J. (2012). The role of supervision in teacher education. In A. Cuenca (Ed.) *Supervising student teachers: Issues, perspectives and future directions* (pp. 191-210). Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense. [doi:10.1007/978-94-6209-095-8](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6209-095-8)
- Clarke, A., Triggs, V., & Nielsen, W. (2014). Cooperating teacher participation in teacher education: A review of the literature. *Review of Educational Research*, 84(2), 163-202. doi.org/10.3102/0034654313499618
- Clifford, G. J. & Guthrie, J. W. (1988). *Ed schools: A brief for professional education*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Cuban, L. (2007). Hugging the middle: Teaching in an era of testing and accountability. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 15(1). doi.org/10.14507/epaa.v15n1.2007
- Cuban, L. (2013). *Inside the black box of classroom practice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Cuenca, A. (Ed.). (2012). *Supervising student teachers: Issues, perspectives and future directions*. Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense. [doi:10.1007/978-94-6209-095-8](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6209-095-8)
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2006). *Powerful teacher education*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Darling-Hammond, L. & Baratz-Snowden, J. (Eds.). (2005). *A good teacher in every classroom: Preparing the highly qualified teachers our children deserve*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

- de Certeau, M. (2005). "Making do": uses and tactics. In G. M. Speigal (Ed.), *Practicing History: New Directions in Historical Writing After the Linguistic Turn* (pp. 217-227). New York, NY: Routledge. doi.org/10.4324/9780203335697
- Ertas, T. I., & Irgens, E. J. (2017). Professional theorizing. *Teachers and Teaching*, 23(3), 332-351. doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2016.1205013
- Feiman-Nemser, S. (2012). *Teachers as Learners*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Feiman-Nemser, S., & Buchman, M. (1985). Pitfalls of Experience in Teacher Education. *Teachers College Record*, 87, 49-65.
- Feiman-Nemser, S., & Buchmann, M. (1987). When is student teaching teacher education?. *Teaching and teacher education*, 3(4), 255-273. [doi.org/10.1016/0742-051X\(87\)90019-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/0742-051X(87)90019-9)
- Fives, H., Mills, T. M., & Dacey, C. M. (2016). Cooperating teacher compensation and benefits: comparing 1957-1958 and 2012-2013. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 67(2), 105-119. doi.org/10.1177/0022487115626428
- Glickman, C. D., & Bey, T. M. (1990). Supervision. In W.R. Houston (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teacher education* (pp. 549-566). New York, NY: Macmillan.
- Goodlad, J. I. (1990). Connecting the past to the present. In J. I. Goodlad, R. Soder, and K. Sirotnik (Eds.) *Places where teachers are taught* (pp. 3-39). San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.
- Grossman, P., Hammerness, K. M., McDonald, M., & Ronfeldt, M. (2008). Constructing Coherence Structural Predictors of Perceptions of Coherence in NYC Teacher Education Programs. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 59(4), 273-287. doi.org/10.12691/education-2-8-18
- Izadinia, M. (2015). A closer look at the role of mentor teachers in shaping preservice teachers' professional identity. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 52, 1-10. doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2015.08.003
- Labaree, D. (2004). *The trouble with ed schools*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Loughran, J. (2006). *Developing a pedagogy of teacher education: Understanding teaching and learning about teaching*. New York, NY: Routledge. doi.org/10.4324/9780203019672
- McCormack, B., Baecher, L. H., & Cuenca, A. (2019). University-based university-based supervisors: Their voices, their dilemmas. *Journal of Educational Supervision* 2(1), 22-37. doi.org/10.31045/jes.2.1.2
- McDiarmid, G. W. & Clevenger-Bright, M. (2008). Rethinking teacher capacity. In M. Cochran-Smith, S. Feiman-Nemser, D. J. McIntyre, & K. E. Demers (Eds.), *Handbook of research on teacher education; Enduring question in changing contexts* (3rd ed., pp. 134-156). New York, NY: Routledge. doi.org/10.4324/9780203938690
- Mercado, C. I. (2019). *Navigating Teacher education in complex and uncertain times: Connecting communities of practice in a borderless world*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Meyer, J. W., & Rowan, B. (1977). Institutionalized organizations: Formal structure as myth and ceremony. *American journal of sociology*, 83(2), 340-363. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2778293>
- Olsen, B., & Buchanan, R. (2017). "Everyone Wants You to Do Everything": Investigating the Professional Identity Development of Teacher Educators. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 44(1), 9-34. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/90003616>

- Scott, W. R. (2005). Institutional theory: Contributing to a theoretical research program. In K.G. Smith & M. A. Hitt (Eds.), *Great minds in management: The process of theory development* (pp. 460-485). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
doi.org/10.1108/17465680610706346
- Scott, W. R. (2008). *Institutions and organizations: Ideas and interests*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Scribner, J. P., & Donaldson, J. F. (2001). The dynamics of group learning in a cohort: From nonlearning to transformative learning. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 37(5), 605-636. doi.org/10.1177/00131610121969442
- Slick, S. K. (1998). The university supervisor: a disenfranchised outsider. *Teaching and Teacher Education* 14(8), 821-834. [doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X\(98\)00028-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X(98)00028-6)
- Smagorinsky, P. (2010). The culture of learning to teach: The self-perpetuating cycle of conservative schooling. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 37(2), 19-32. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23479587?seq=1>
- Smith, E. R., & Avetisian, V. (2011). Learning to teach with two mentors: Revisiting the “two-worlds pitfall” in student teaching. *The Teacher Educator*, 46(4), 335-354.
doi.org/10.1080/08878730.2011.604400
- Swennen, A., Jones, K., & Volman, M. (2010). Teacher educators: Their identities, subidentities and implications for professional development. *Professional Development in Education*, 36(1-2), 131-148. doi.org/10.1080/19415250903457893
- Weick, K. (1976). Educational organizations as loosely coupled systems. *Administrative science quarterly*, 21, 1-19. doi.org/10.2307/2391875
- Zeichner, K. & Liston, D.P. (1987). Teaching student teachers to reflect. *Harvard Educational Review*, 57, 23-47. doi.org/10.17763/haer.57.1.j18v7162275t1w3w
- Zeichner, K. & Gore, J. (1990). Teacher socialization. In W.R. Houston (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teacher education* (pp. 329-348). New York, NY: Macmillan
- Zeichner, K. (2014). The politics of learning to teach from experience. In V. Ellis & J. Orchard (Eds.), *Learning teaching from experience: Multiple perspectives and international contexts* (pp. 257-268). New York: Bloomsbury. doi.org/10.5040/9781472593313.ch-001

Author Biography

Rebecca Buchanan is an assistant professor of curriculum, assessment and instruction, part of the School and Learning and Teaching at the University of Maine College of Education and Human Development. Dr. Buchanan studies teacher learning, broadly defined. She is interested in the intersection of personal identity, professional development, school reform, literacy and language. She employs qualitative methods and discourse analysis to investigate how teachers learn in and across multiple contexts by connecting their own personal and professional pasts with the present.