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## The State of Supervision Discourse Communities: A Call for the Future of Supervision to Shed Its Mask

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# The State of Supervision Discourse Communities: A Call for the Future of Supervision to Shed Its Mask

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## Abstract

This article reviews the various discourse communities that can be found throughout the field of supervision. Over the last several decades, the field has largely struggled with its identity. The struggle to define supervision, as well as supervision scholarship being forced to travel incognito to survive (Glanz & Hazi, 2019), has largely been due to a lack of an academic journal to serve as a publishing venue dedicated solely to issues of educational supervision. As the *Journal of Educational Supervision* continues to evolve from inception to fruition (Mette & Zepeda, 2019), it is important to keep supervision discourse communities vibrant and growing, as well as to help the field move *forward*. Additionally, supervision scholars must acknowledge the realities of policies facing practitioners in order to better bridge the research-practice-policy gap. The continual development of these five discourse communities – as well as any cross-pollination among them and preparation for emergent discourse communities – is paramount to the future of supervision.

## Keywords

supervision; discourse communities; research-practice-policy gap; critical supervision

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## **Introduction**

For many years, it was said that supervision has had to travel incognito (Glanz & Hazi, 2019). Over the last several decades, the field has largely struggled with its identity. The struggle to define supervision, as well as supervision scholarship being forced to travel incognito to survive, has largely been due to a lack of an academic journal. Prior to the creation and launch of the *Journal of Educational Supervision* in the spring of 2018, supervision scholars last had an academic outlet in 2005 when the *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision* published its final issue.

To be clear, there have been many successful supervision scholars during the last several decades, including but not limited to Sally Zepeda, Carl Glickman, Steve Gordon, Ed Pajak, Helen Hazi, Jeffrey Glanz, Tom Sergiovanni, Pat Holland, Jim Nolan, and many others. However, with a lack of a publishing venue dedicated solely to issues of educational supervision, there have been shrinking supervision discourse communities that have been able to support original supervision literature. These communities often exist in annual meetings of the Council of Professors of Instructional Supervision (COPIS), the University Council of Educational Administration (UCEA), and the American Educational Research Association (AERA). While these supervision discourse communities have helped push new thinking and new ideas about how to expand the influence of supervision, broadly speaking, supervision scholars and their graduate students can and should do much more to move the field forward. The field needs supervision researchers and scholarly-practitioners to take risks and to be bold to develop new ideas and concepts and with new methodologies (Haberlin, 2019a). To do this, the field must move forward an agenda for the future.

As Philip Lanoue, 2015 AASA Superintendent of the Year reminds us, “Checking a box won’t improve instructional practice – the only way to get people to change is to talk about instructional practice” (2019). Supervision scholars can help address these changes – changes that need to find a nexus between policy, practice, and research – which will help teachers improve their instruction, leading to better educational opportunities for students. However, supervision scholars must turn the attention of their supervision discourse community toward the future by acknowledging the current realities of practitioners who consume their scholarship and encouraging new possibilities.

## **Supervision Discourse Communities**

Further complicating the state of supervision is the lack of definition of supervision discourse communities that exist, which has made it hard to track areas of new supervision scholarship over the last 15 years (Zepeda & Ponticell, 2019). This paper provides an analysis of presentations on supervision given at recent conferences, specifically those given at COPIS, UCEA, and AERA, and provides insight into the work being addressed within these supervision discourse communities. Informing this piece is a broad definition of supervision that can be synthesized from these various discourse communities and is defined here as non-evaluative feedback that is intended to help educators build capacity to improve their own reflection about instructional practices. While not exhaustive, the following categories provide a broad overview of five distinct discourse communities that can be found in various spaces and within various

supervision literature, which in turn might help better connect new theories and ideas with other scholars, practitioners in the field, and policymakers who wish to make their state policies more conducive to supporting quality teaching.

### **Instructional Supervision**

Within the field of supervision this continues to be the most established and well-acknowledged supervision discourse community. Traditional literature within this area focuses on the clear bright line separating supervision (formative feedback) from evaluation (summative feedback) and the use of theory to argue how supervision should occur in practice as opposed to evaluation (Badiali, 1997; Goldsberry, 1984; Glanz, 1997; Kelehear, 2008; Knoll, 1987). Many of these scholars tend to descend from the lineage of Goldhammer (1969) and Cogan (1973), often building on the clinical supervision model to expand their work. The work of many of these scholars has resulted in various textbooks over the years (Beach & Reinhartz, 1989; Wiles & Bondi, 2004), several of which are considered foundational texts for master's level supervision courses (Sullivan & Glanz, 2009; Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2018; Nolan & Hoover, 2011; Zepeda, 2017).

### **Leadership for Learning**

Recently there has emerged a new discourse community that comes out of the field of instructional supervision but it is more closely aligned with the realities of teacher evaluation models used in practice. Hazi (1980, 1982, 1994) helped begin this important discourse about how supervision interacts with evaluation, particularly through policy decisions. Scholars in this field tend to focus more on the professional development that can occur as a result of feedback (Zepeda, 2006, 2017, 2018, 2019), which in turn leads to professional growth (Mette et al., 2017; Zepeda, 2017) and ongoing support typically provided by a principal or instructional coach (Derrington & Campbell, 2015; Stark, McGhee, & Jimerson, 2017; Range, Anderson, Hvidston, Mette, 2013; Zepeda, 2018). Additionally, while many of these scholars maintain a philosophical difference between the functions of supervision and evaluation, they often acknowledge the realities of evaluation models and instead offer practical suggestions of how to work within preexisting evaluation systems. These include the use of peer-observations (McGhee, 2019), delineating formative and summative principal feedback (Derrington & Campbell, 2018), developing opportunities for principals and aspiring principals to develop supervision skills *in situ* (Mette, Schwartz-Mette, & Lawrence, 2019; Mette & Starrett, 2018), and teacher evaluation outcomes that can be used to better inform support structures to improve instruction and promote growth over the course of a career (Brandon & Derrington, 2019; Campbell & Derrington, 2019; Oliveras-Ortiz, 2019; Zepeda, 2017, 2018, 2019a; Zepeda & Ponticell, 2019).

### **Teacher Preparation**

One of the most innovative discourse communities within the field of supervision is teacher preparation. Scholars in this area have provided much new literature on the importance of providing supervision in educator preparation programs (EPPs). Shunned by the instructional supervision community for decades, the recent acceptance and influx of relatively new scholarship on supervision of teacher candidates provides important theoretical frameworks for

EEPs (Burns & Badiali, 2016, 2018; Burns, Jacobs, & Yendol-Hoppey, 2015, 2016; Burns & Yendol-Hoppey, 2015; Snow et. al., 2019). As new accountability measures are imposed on EPPs, there is a growing body of research that suggests important alternatives that could be considered among policymakers and practitioners (Alexander, 2019; Diacopoulos & Butler, 2019). Moreover, teacher preparation supervision literature seems to push the boundaries more than other supervision discourse communities with alternative theories and concepts that could have a profound impact on clinical supervision (Buchanan, 2018; Haberlin, 2019b; Klock, 2019; Rutten, 2019).

### **Critical Supervision**

Historically, the most ignored supervision discourse community, critical supervision is seen as a crucial area if supervision is to remain relevant in the 21st century in a rapidly diversifying America, and if gross inequities and power differentials among racial, ethnic, and cultural groups are to be addressed. Prominent scholars have attempted to bring a critical perspective to supervision in the past (Guerra & Nelson, 2010; Guerra, Nelson, Jacobs, & Yamamura, 2013; Jacobs & Casciola, 2015); however, traditional and controversial perspectives (e.g. colorblindness, treating supervision as apolitical) held by some supervision scholars have impeded this important work from moving forward (Mette & Schwartz-Mette, 2017). More recently, however, supervision scholars have begun to address the importance of addressing Whiteness, power, and privilege in teacher candidates (Elfreich & Willey, 2019; Lynch, 2018; Willey & Magee, 2018) as well as educational leaders (Coward Moss, 2019; Hitzges, 2019). Perhaps of most importance, some supervision scholars have begun the important task to re-envisioning supervision that places culturally relevant practices at the center of supervision theoretical frameworks rather than considering them a secondary side-item (Arnold, 2019; Cormier, 2018; Witherspoon Arnold, 2015).

### **Policy Analysis**

Perhaps the least defined and yet maybe the one of the most important discourse communities to further develop in the accountability era and in response to No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), there are an increasing number of supervision scholars who analyze policy. Scholars in this community analyze the values and beliefs embedded in written policy that are intended to improve instruction (Hazi & Ruczinski, 2009; Hazi, 2019) and that are often used as levers to influence practices (Wieczorek, Aguilar, & Mette, 2019; Zepeda, 2019b). Additionally, this discourse community tends to question how states and providential government agencies might play a greater role if they were to consider organizational learning frameworks in their policy development that could be used to influence more informed supervision and professional growth practices (Adams et al., 2018; Brandon, Hollweck, Donlevy, & Whalen, 2018; Paufler & King, 2019, Sox, 2019).

### **Directions for the Future**

To keep these discourse communities vibrant and growing, supervision scholars need to help the field move *forward*. In many publications and presentations, supervision scholars are engaging in new and exciting research and conceptualization. However, in some cases, supervision scholars

have an over-reliance on literature that is 20 years and older and do not introduce much new peer-reviewed literature. Like any field, supervision should acknowledge seminal literature that influences epistemological underpinnings of scholars and practitioners. However, if the field is to stay relevant, supervision scholars must reengage in the development of new empirical research, the development of new conceptual literature, and the promotion and explanation of how their work influences and impacts practices of scholarly-practitioners *directly*. As such, the field needs to make sure to address the following:

1. Produce new research that is celebrated and built upon various supervision communities, including the use of methodologies that can be borrowed from other social sciences. These include but are not limited to laboratory experiments that gather physiological data and brainwave activity during supervision feedback sessions, field studies that gather qualitative and quantitative data, ethnographic research in schools and EPP settings, and action research that can show changes in practices over time through rigorous program evaluation.
2. Support more critical analysis of supervision, particularly the ongoing questioning of the impact race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and identities more broadly have on existing supervision frameworks. Much of the work written by supervision scholars continues to be dominated by White males, and as such inherently does not adequately question power, privilege, and the impact supervision could have on addressing issues of social justice.
3. Develop more connections among all five discourse communities to expand the current notions of what supervision can do to help improve organizational learning. This includes the development of more university-school partnerships to understand and re-conceptualize what is needed in the *current context of schools* to inform supervisory practices. Additionally, the internal alignment of EPPs with educational leadership programs and engaging in activism to influence policy development at the state and local level would help reintroduce the role of democracy into American public schools.
4. Support the development of new ideas about supervision by maintaining a naturally inquisitive stance of *what could be* rather than *what is* or *what was*. Like many other fields, supervision often engages in intellectual jockeying about who is right and with what reasoning. However, if supervision is to be a field that plays a critical role in teachers developing an inquiry stance and in helping schools function more like a learning organization, new ideas, not an over-reliance on old ones, is the path forward.

Perhaps it is because the field has been forced to travel incognito for so long – behind a mask that has continually been ignored by policymakers about the important contributions supervision can provide. However supervision must turn the attention of research and practical contributions to the future, not simply celebrate the glories of the past, and acknowledge the realities of policies facing practitioners in order to better bridge the research-practice-policy gap. The continual development of these five discourse communities is paramount to the future of supervision, as well as the promotion of the cross-pollination of ideas among these groups. In order for the field to propel itself forward, supervision must shed its mask and support new ideas and contributions to inform the ongoing development of these emergent discourse communities.

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