



Supporting and Making Evident the Practices of Teacher Education Supervisors

**By Lisa Sullivan, Kayce Mastrup, JerMara Davis-Welch,
Cheryl Forbes, Victoria Harvey, Soleste Hilberg,
Emma Hipolito, Jane Kim, Virginia Panish,
Elisa Salasin, & Johnnie Wilson**

Lisa Sullivan is a lecturer and Kayce Mastrup is a supervisor, doctoral candidate, and California Teacher Education Research Improvement Network fellow, both in the School of Education at the University of California, Davis. JerMara Davis-Welch is assistant dean and director of teacher education in the Graduate School of Education at the University of California, Riverside. Cheryl Forbes is director of teacher education at the University of California, San Diego. Victoria Harvey is a lecturer/supervisor in the Graduate School of Education at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Soleste Hilberg is director of teacher education at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Emma Hipolito is director of teacher education and Jane Kim is a lecturer/supervisor, both in the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles. Virginia Panish is director of teacher education in the School of Education at the University of California, Irvine. Elisa Salasin is director of teacher education in the Graduate School of Education at the University of California, Berkeley. Johnnie Wilson is a lecturer/supervisor at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Email addresses: lhsullivan@ucdavis.edu, klmastrup@ucdavis.edu, jermara.davis-welch@ucr.edu, cforbes@ucsd.edu, vharvey@ucsb.edu, soleste@ucsc.edu, hipolito@gseis.ucla.edu, jane.w.kim@gmail.com, vpanish@uci.edu, salasin@berkeley.edu, & jobwilso@ucsc.edu

Introduction

The study reported here resulted from a collaborative investigation across eight University of California teacher education programs (TEPs) to understand more fully the types of feedback and guidance supervisors provide to student teachers (STs) and interns (for the sake of simplicity both interns and student teachers will be referred to as STs in this paper). One of the essential components of teacher education is feedback. The amount, quality and content of feedback has been found critical for the development of STs (Berman, and Usery, 1966; Galea, 2012; Kent, 2001; Sa, 2008; Stimpson et al., 2000). However, little is known about the type, content, and nature of feedback that best supports beginning teacher development. Our work was loosely organized around the principles of continuous improvement and drew from the work of Bryk, Gomez, Grunow & LeMahieu (2017) to inform how we examined our programs and practices. This structure helped us look across our programs in a systematic way. While we did not establish a formal Networked Improvement Community (NIC), we saw our work as the first step in establishing a NIC.

The impetus for our work came from a new California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) requirement that supervisor observations of ST's provide data aligned to the California Teaching Performance Expectations (TPEs) that can be meaningfully aggregated in order to inform continuous improvement efforts, and to guide programmatic support for STs. This led TEPs to consider what types of data it would make sense to gather that could also measure student teacher progress and growth over time. Assuming a strong link between quality supervision and ST performance (Stricker, et al., 2016), we initiated a cross-campus study of supervision.

It is commonly accepted that the feedback and guidance that STs receive from their supervisors play a fundamental and significant role in the growth and progress candidates make (or not) while in a credential program. However, there is little research on the specific type and quality of 'moves' that supervisors make as they support STs in their clinical practice settings. Most supervisors in TEPs provide STs with verbal feedback and anecdotal notes following an observation. Many programs also use observation and evaluation tools that measure progress or mastery of the Teaching Performance Expectations (TPEs) at different points of the year. This study examined what STs and supervisors report is most meaningful to their work together and what types of training, professional development and support supervisors are receiving or would like to receive. The goal of this study was to uncover what, in many cases, are the hidden practices of supervisors and to identify common challenges and successes in supervision across the UC TEPs.

In general, research on clinical supervision has found that the supervision process can lead to positive changes in a teacher's instructional practice (Kagan, 1988). According to the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC, 2017), teacher candidates are required to have access to clinical practice hours where they are working with and learning from "experienced" educators and

Supporting and Making Evident the Practices of Supervisors

“have the support and guidance they need” to become effective educators (p. 2). Candidates also must receive proper supervision and guidance from program and district-employed supervisors during their clinical practice. But what does *proper supervision* mean? As a means towards understanding the supervision process, we wanted to explore the current landscape of supervision and definitions from the field of supervision and the role it plays in teacher preparation.

The California Commission on Teacher Credentialing does not provide an explicit definition of supervision, but does specify the qualifications a supervisor must hold. The CTC Common Standards (2015) specify that supervisors:

- ◆ are trained in supervision (p. 3)
- ◆ assess candidates during field experiences and clinical practice (p. 2, 4, 8)
- ◆ provide guidance as an experienced individual who has the knowledge and skills the candidate is working to attain (p. 6)
- ◆ are a qualified person that designs activities to assess a candidate in mastering the required knowledge, skills and abilities expected of the candidate (p. 5).

Acheson and Gall (1987) define supervision as, “the process of helping the teacher reduce the discrepancy between *actual* teaching behavior and ideal teaching behavior” (p. 27). Goodwin and Kosnik (2013) provide a knowledge taxonomy and suggest that teacher educators should understand these domains:

1. Personal knowledge/autobiography and philosophy of teaching;
2. Contextual knowledge/understanding learners, schools, and society;
3. Pedagogical knowledge/content, theories, teaching methods, and curriculum development;
4. Sociological knowledge/diversity, cultural relevance, and social justice; and
5. Social knowledge/cooperative, democratic group process, and conflict resolution.

It is often the case that supervisors are recruited and drawn from the ranks of retired teachers and administrators. In many university settings, methods instructors, experienced faculty and in some cases graduate students with teaching experience who are interested in teacher education also become part of the supervisor community. There is great variation in the experiences and knowledge about the supervision process amongst pools of supervisors. As noted by Koerner and Rust (2002), some supervisors come to the job having learned from a skilled mentor, whereas others may come with formal academic coursework related to supervision, and others may solely rely on their experiences as teachers and their own memories of student teaching.

Supervisors often serve as translators of the values and beliefs of the teacher education program, thus making it all the more important for programs to strategically identify and select supervisors that will provide mentorship that is aligned with their program’s core values. Supervisors are tasked with finding a balance between the

practical and theoretical aspects of teaching. To what extent are supervisors aware of or have a clear understanding of the preparation programs guiding curriculum, practice and values and how are they using this knowledge to inform the feedback and support they are giving to STs?

Let us now turn to the supervision process. In *Mentoring and Supervision for Teacher Development* (1998), Reiman and Thies-Sprinthall assert that “the cornerstone of effective supervision is caring and *progressively collaborative teaching* between educators as developing adults” (p. 2). They maintain that a variety of individuals may be involved and referred to as supervisors or coaches. That is, supervision is less about a designated person in a supervisory role than it is about the kinds of activity that occur within a supervisory relationship.

In the 1950s, Morris Cogan originated clinical supervision as a discipline and emphasized that, “Supervision must operate within the school and depends on direct observation. Its objective is to encourage genuine collaboration in which there is not a superior-subordinate relationship, no assumption of the supervisors, *teaching the teacher*” (1973). Similar to Reiman and Thies-Sprinthall (1998), Cogan’s definition supports the notion that teacher supervision is about a process that promotes collaboration, is rooted in building a relationship between two individuals as a means to obtain a common goal, and that this process must occur through direct experience that is real and relevant to the ST.

Upon examining various definitions of who supervisors are and what is meant when one engages in supervision, words commonly encountered include: advising, guiding, counseling, collaborating, modeling, coaching, evaluating and assessing. Ultimately, one can argue that teacher supervision is based on a relationship, typically one-to-one, and is systematic and purposeful.

In our TEPs we have informally adopted what is referred to as a “developmental instructional supervision” model. In this model, supervision is a formative process for refining and expanding the instructional repertoire that differentiates support and challenge according to an individual ST’s learning and developmental needs (Reiman & Thies-Sprinthall, 1988). In this model, supervision is part of a reflective practice, where the role of the supervisor is more collaborative and facilitative, guiding the teacher candidate to become self-directed in his or her own learning (Strieker et al., 2016). Furthermore, in this specific approach, the supervisor adjusts his or her communication and style of interaction based on the adult and professional needs of the ST (Glickman et al., 2014). Rather than taking a summative approach to supervision, which implies a gatekeeping function, most TEPs emphasize a formative lens for teacher supervision. This is potentially where some tensions arise when supervisors are asked to collect data on STs.

The manner in which teacher preparation programs design, structure, and integrate supervision into the curriculum varies greatly. Currently there are few published guidelines for supervision, and furthermore little agreement on what constitutes good practice in fulfilling the supervisor role (Stimpson et al., 2000, p. 5). It is often

Supporting and Making Evident the Practices of Supervisors

the case that supervisors base their practice largely on their own experiences gained through teaching, or observing lessons with other supervisors. Reiman and Thies-Sprinthall (1988) note that supervisors should commit themselves to adequate training and that this preparation should model effective theory, research, and practice. Furthermore, they suggest that supervisors should engage in formal coursework and guided practical experiences in the area of adult learning but provide little direction on what exactly training and coursework should address. Where training provided to university supervisors was examined, results proved to be successful and there were statistically significant differences in the manners in which trained supervisors facilitated and managed their roles (Gürsoy et al., 2013).

Kent (2001) argues that supervisors are too often provided with training that is inadequate, resulting in cooperating teachers and university supervisors alike gaining minimal support to supervise effectively. Common practice for preparatory programs is to offer a single orientation session, where some written materials may be distributed, but beyond that university supervisors ordinarily receive no specific preparation for their supervisory role. One cornerstone of optimal clinical supervision as discussed above is providing data and specific feedback to STs that will help drive and influence their practice, something that undoubtedly requires training, professional development and collaboration. Current training practices for clinical supervision are often rooted in assumptions about prior knowledge and experiences held by the supervisor (teaching experience, experience as an administrator).

There are however, some models and frameworks for supervision that have been developed and are being utilized by TEPs (Cogan, 1973; Reiman & Thies-Sprinthall, 1988; Pajak, 2000). In one model (Cogan, 1973) there is an emphasis on having supervisors engage in a learning process in which they learn in tandem with the ST. This learning process is often a catalyst for change in professional knowledge, attitudes and skills for both participants. Other models of supervision focus more closely on how preparation programs align clinical practice and fieldwork experiences. For example, programs may be designed to maintain a tightly woven connection between what occurs in methods courses and the supervision process (Stimpson et al., 2000). In this model one of the goals is to maintain continuity and consistency in the pre-teaching practice, the teaching practice and post-teaching practice phases. Ensuring an ST receives supervision that consistently reinforces content taught in coursework seems like an important factor to consider carefully.

One approach to enhance consistency that Stimpson et al., (2000) offers up is that lesson observations should be perceived as part of a continuum rather than a one-off evaluating event and that direct connections and links are being made between site visits. Ultimately, despite which frameworks or models are used to guide the cycle of supervision, giving STs focused feedback directly related to their practice and rooted in theory that is supported by coursework has shown to result in increased levels of performance, and motivation (Kilminster & Jolly, 2000).

Milne, Aylott, Fitzpatrick and Ellis (2008) reviewed 24 studies of clinical teacher

supervision and proposed a basic model of supervision, which includes different supervisor interventions demonstrated to have positively influenced STs' practices. The following "mechanisms of change" emerged from their review: experiencing, reflecting, planning, conceptualizing, and experimenting (p. 181). They concluded that experiential learning played a central role in promoting change in instructional practice. Milne et al. (2008) found that there is no one common approach to the supervision cycle (p. 183); rather, many supervisors took a systematic approach that included teaching, modeling, rehearsal, and corrective feedback. The frameworks, models and approaches to supervision found in the literature emphasize the importance of the relational aspect of supervision.

Scholars who have studied the cycle of supervision have suggested that effective feedback is individualized, specific and focused, objective and nonjudgmental, delivered in a sensitive manner that promotes relationships, regular and ongoing, consistent, timely, maintains a positive tone and provides an opportunity for the recipient to respond, reflect and contribute (Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano, 1987; Galea, 2012; Zeichner and Liston, 1987). Building trusting relationships is at the foundation of creating an opportunity for feedback that drives growth. A dialogue based on objective observational data, which is then analyzed collaboratively will promote the STs development and growth (Acheson and Gall, 1987). An important and necessary precursor to impactful feedback is 'acceptance' from the ST and a trusting relationship with the supervisor. Approaches to developing this trust are not clearly articulated in the work reviewed.

There is insufficient research on best practices in supervision or relevant skills and dispositions necessary for supervisors to provide quality feedback and support to STs. There is a need to explore in greater depth how preservice programs use evidence to examine the effectiveness of their program's supervision model and what is being done to address areas where current practices of supervision are ineffective and/or successful in instilling the underlying principles and driving ideologies of the preparatory program.

Method

Teacher Education program directors and supervisors examined current supervision practices and policies, reviewed student teaching observation and evaluation protocols, conducted focus groups with STs ($N=65$) and supervisors ($N=45$), and surveyed supervisors ($N=60$). Our team also met for two-day in-depth meetings over two summers. These meetings and the discussions we had were invaluable in helping us establish a common problem of practice and analyze data collaboratively. For example, in the first summer meeting, each campus identified quotes and themes from their ST focus groups which they shared and we then refined these themes as a group and generated themes that arched across campuses. Following this the network team conducted a fishbone brainstorm (Bryk et al., 2017) and generated

Supporting and Making Evident the Practices of Supervisors

a fishbone diagram which helped generate a problem statement. The problem of practice we identified was: *We are not able to consistently provide feedback and evaluation to STs that supports learning and development that also shows progress and growth over time and informs program improvement.* We also gathered information from across our TEPs about how we recruit supervisors, and the types of tools and resources we use to guide supervision.

The initial focus groups were conducted with STs in the spring quarter of 2017 to ask about the types of feedback they were receiving from their supervisors and the types of feedback they found most helpful. These focus groups were conducted by supervisors and faculty who were not currently working with the candidates. After reviewing and looking for themes from the ST focus groups we developed the protocol for the supervisor focus groups to build on what we had learned from STs. Focus groups with supervisors were conducted in the spring of 2018. Graduate students in our TEPs conducted the focus groups with our supervisors. All focus groups were recorded and transcribed. A survey was sent to all supervisors in our TEPs in the spring of 2018 to gather information related to how long they had been supervising, how many students they supervised, their prior experience, and the types of professional development they had received. All of the information from these sources was reviewed by our team. We used an inductive approach to identifying themes across the various data sources and created data tables and charts to capture the survey responses from supervisors.

Results

Five primary themes arose across our TEPs from reviewing the data from the ST focus groups. *Theme One: Relationships and trust are important.* Teacher candidates shared that the relationship between the teacher candidate and their supervisors became more personal and productive over time. Strong connections with supervisors resulted in strategic, open feedback. *Theme Two: Seeing growth and improvement over time is valuable.* Candidates valued the timely feedback they received, and appreciated that the process was formative and not summative in nature. *Theme Three: Building confidence while noticing areas for growth.* Candidates shared that their supervisors often provided tools and resources that were relevant to the challenges they were facing in their classrooms. They also described how the feedback helped them reflect on their own teaching practices and moves in the classroom. *Theme Four: Goal setting after observation helpful (specific target areas).* Candidates believed the feedback and resources they got from their supervisors contributed to their growth. Some candidates indicated a need for more emphasis on specific and critical feedback and sharing discipline specific resources. *Theme Five: The majority of students felt supported.* The feedback provided by supervisors is meaningful and related to students' university course assignments, credentialing evaluation and the development of instructional skills.

In reviewing the supervisor focus group data and the open-ended responses to the supervisor survey four broad themes emerged with multiple sub-themes in each. These themes were: identifying needs and challenges, describing specific tensions, describing successes, and identifying specific strategies used to support STs. Additional information for each of the themes is described below.

Needs and Challenges—Supervisors identified the following areas as priority needs: Continued and ongoing training for supervisors in many areas including: content training, purposes and goals of supervision, EdTPA, TPEs, UDL, best practices for supervisors and sharing resources and ideas across TEPs. *Specific Tensions*—Supervisors identified some common tensions that arose in their work including: little or no formal training; STs all need different levels and types of support; lack of common notions of what ‘good’ teaching looks like; lack of time to collaborate with other supervisors and mentor teachers; providing supportive vs. evaluative feedback; quantity vs. quality of observations; lack of coherence across the TEP; mismatch between university coursework and fieldwork; not being viewed as experts or feeling valued; and the responsibilities required of university supervisors above and beyond conducting observations and providing feedback. *Successes*—Supervisors described the primary successes of their work as developing positive relationships with their STs, fellow supervisors and mentor teachers; seeing STs make progress over time, and drawing upon program values or missions to inform work. *Strategies Used*—Supervisors described specific approaches they used that were effective including using video recordings to support observations and promote ST self-reflection, providing different types of feedback and support over time, and collaborating closely with mentor teachers.

Data from the supervisor survey (beyond the open-ended data reported above) revealed that supervisors in our TEPs have a range of experience levels, number of STs they are working with and varying levels of training. When asked how many candidates they were supervising 35% said 4-6; 30% said 7-10; 22% said 1-3 and 12% said 11 or more. When supervisors were asked what their role was in the TEP beyond supervision 40% said that they were also lecturers; 33% said they had no role beyond supervision; 10% were faculty and the remaining supervisors were made up of graduate students and administrators. When asked how many years of K-12 teaching experience they had 77% of the supervisors responded that they had 11 or more years of experience; 15% had 4-6 years of experience; and 8% had 2-3 years of experience. Supervisors were asked how many years they had been supervising and this question had the widest range of responses with 27% having 11 or more years; 20% having 1-3 years; 18% respectively having 1 year or less and 4-6 years; and 16% having 7-10 years. The data from the survey revealed how supervisors have widely different years of experience, different backgrounds and are working with from 2 STs to more than 11 STs. All of these variations impact the types of support and professional development that supervisors may need across our TEPs.

Supervisors were also asked to identify specific areas in which they would

Supporting and Making Evident the Practices of Supervisors

like to receive additional professional development and training. The areas that came up most frequently were having time to collaborate and share resources with other supervisors, hearing about the latest research on teaching and learning, using video as a tool, social justice approaches, universal design for learning, restorative justice and cognitive coaching. Supervisors were also asked in the survey what they enjoyed most about their work and the majority described the relationships they built with their STs and seeing the progress they made over time. Other highlights included collaborating with mentor teachers and feeling like they are contributing positively to the next generation of teachers.

Discussion

Our work revealed that collecting meaningful data on ST progress is complex and messy. Both STs and supervisors reported that the conversations and dialogue they have together and the relationships they build are the most important contributing factors to ST growth and progress. Some STs reported that receiving additional data on their progress would help them have a clearer understanding of how they can improve their practice. The implications of this study are that both STs and supervisors would benefit from more specific guidance and support in order to maximize the impact of the feedback and mentoring. Supervisors across our programs reported that they would like more professional development and more tools to guide their practice. Developing tools and resources that allow supervisors to communicate specific areas for improvement and areas of growth that also generate program wide data would be beneficial to the field.

Supervisors also identified a desire to collaborate with other supervisors regularly in order to share knowledge and learn. There are many common problems of practice that could be addressed more effectively through collaboration and sharing resources and ideas across TEPs. It is clear that supervision of STs is an area ripe for additional research and examination in order to ensure that our candidates are receiving the best possible mentorship and guidance. We learned that this is an overlooked area of focus for program improvement efforts. Currently, the majority of supervisors working in our programs expressed that they had little or no training before taking on their work as supervisors. Supervisors also identified specific target areas for professional development and learning. Although we learned that overall, supervision is providing crucial feedback to STs we believe that there is room for improvement in order to provide high quality mentorship to our candidates. This collaboration with supervisors from across our programs is a first step in this direction and we plan to advocate for statewide and national collaborations amongst supervisors to start a dialogue and encourage professional growth.

Implications of the work include a recognition that supervisors need dedicated time to collaborate and share resources both within and across TEPs. In addition, it seems that the field would benefit from more clearly delineated frameworks

and models of best practices for supervisors in order to provide STs meaningful feedback and resources that support them in becoming change agents and future teacher leaders.

Acknowledgment

The authors would like to acknowledge and thank the California Teacher Education Research Improvement Network for supporting our work. The authors would also like to thank Rebecca Ambrose of the School of Education at the University of California, Davis for initiating this collaborative study.

References

- Acheson, K. A., & Gall, M. D. (1987). *Techniques in the clinical supervision of teacher: White falin*. New York, NY: Long Man.
- Bryk, A. S., Gomez, L. M., Grunow, A., & LeMahieu, P. G. (2015). *Learning to improve: How America's schools can get better at getting better*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- Berman, L. M., & Usery, M. L. (1966). *Personalized supervision: Source and insights*. California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC). (2017). *Guidance on clinical practice and supervision of preliminary multiple subject and single subject teaching candidates*. Obtained from: https://www.ctc.ca.gov/docs/default-source/educator-prep/pdf/clinical-practice-guidance.pdf?sfvrsn=9cf257b1_8.
- California Commission on Teacher Credentialing. (2015). *Common standards*. Obtained from: <https://www.ctc.ca.gov/docs/default-source/educator-prep/standards/common-standards-2015-pdf>.
- Cogan, M.L. (1973). *Clinical supervision*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin.
- Drago-Severson, E., Blum-DeStefano, J., & Asghar, A. (2013). *Learning for leadership*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Galea, S. (2012). Reflecting reflective practice. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 44(3), 245-258.
- Glickman, C. D., Gordon, S. P., & Ross-Gordon, J. M. (2013). *Supervision and instructional leadership: A developmental approach*. New York, NY: Allyn & Bacon/Longman Publishing.
- Goodwin, A. L., & Kosnik, C. (2013). Quality teacher educators= quality teachers? Conceptualizing essential domains of knowledge for those who teach teachers. *Teacher Development*, 17(3), 334-346.
- Gürsoy, E., Bulunuz, N., Baltacı-Göktalay, S., Bulunuz, M., Kesner, J., & Salihoglu, U. (2013). Clinical supervision model to improve supervisory skills of cooperating teachers and university supervisors during teaching practice. *HU Journal of Education*, Özel sayı, 1, 191-203.
- Kent, S. I. (2001). Supervision of student teachers: Practices of cooperating teachers prepared in a clinical supervision course. *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision*, 16(3), 228-44.
- Kagan, D. M. (1992). Professional growth among preservice and beginning teachers. *Review of Educational Research*, 62(2), 129-169.

Supporting and Making Evident the Practices of Supervisors

- Kilminster, S. M., & Jolly, B. C. (2000). Effective supervision in clinical practice settings: a literature review. *Medical Education*, 34(10), 827-840.
- Koerner, M., & Rust, F. O. (2002). Exploring roles in student teaching placements *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 29(2), 35-58.
- Reiman, A. J., & Thies-Sprinthall, L. (1998). *Mentoring and supervision for teacher development*. New York, NY: Addison Wesley Longman.
- Milne, D., Aylott, H., Fitzpatrick, H., & Ellis, M. V. (2008). How does clinical supervision work? Using a “best evidence synthesis” approach to construct a basic model of supervision. *The Clinical Supervisor*, 27(2), 170-190.
- Pajak, E. (2001). Clinical supervision in a standards-based environment: Opportunities and challenges. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 52(3), 233-243.
- Reiman, A. J., & Thies-Sprinthall, L. (1998). *Mentoring and supervision for teacher development*. New York, NY: Addison Wesley Longman.
- Sag, R. (2008). The expectations of student teachers about cooperating teachers, supervisors and practice schools. *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research*, 32, 117-132.
- Stimpson, P., Lopez-Real, F., Bunton, D., Chan, D. W. K., Sivan, A., & Williams, M. (2000). *Better supervision better teaching: A handbook for teaching practice supervisors* (Vol. 1). Hong Kong, China: Hong Kong University Press.
- Stricker, T., Adams, M., Cone, N., Hubbard, D., & Lim, W. (2016). Supervision matters: Collegial, developmental and reflective approaches to supervision of teacher candidates. *Cogent Education*, 3(1).
- Zeichner, K., & Liston, D. (1987). Teaching student teachers to reflect. *Harvard Educational Review*, 57(1), 23-49.