Supervising Student Teachers

Issues, Perspectives and Future Directions

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The student teaching experience is often considered one of the most influential aspects of teacher preparation. Key in the success of student teaching is the university supervisor. During the student teaching experience, the university supervisor is mainly responsible for helping pre-service teachers relate university coursework with the situated experiences in schools. However, much like the various other spaces and places in teacher education, facilitating teacher learning is an incredibly complex endeavor. This edited volume addresses the complexities of supervising student teachers from three distinct vantage points. First, salient issues regarding the supervision of student teachers such as the preparation of novice supervisors, negotiating power in the student teaching triad, and the low status of clinical teacher education are examined. Second, different pedagogical frameworks for the work of supervision are provided such as care theory, teacher education for democracy, and social justice. Finally, future directions for field-based teacher education are discussed, such as a call to reconsider where supervision takes place, the necessity to develop a pedagogy of supervision, 21st century trends facing clinical teacher education, and the value added by university supervisors to teacher development. Each of these chapters engage the supervision of student teachers through a mix of research, theory, and personal stories from the field. As such, this edited volume is designed for new supervisors, veteran supervisors, and supervision scholars.
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INTRODUCTION

The Complex and Undervalued Work of University Supervisors

The university supervisor occupies a position within teacher education that is incredibly important for the professional preparation of teachers. Working alongside prospective teachers during formative field experiences, university supervisors are uniquely situated in spaces where they can help develop understandings of the intertwined nature of theory and practice in education. Unfortunately, education schools rarely acknowledge the importance of this work. Supervision is often considered a self-evident activity and thus poorly resourced by education schools. This book attempts to directly challenge the assumption that supervision should not be taken seriously by surfacing some of the vast complexities associated with this work. Through the various experiences with and frameworks for supervision, the authors in this book provide both novice and experienced supervisors with different ways to think about the nature of their work.

Although the supervision of prospective teachers takes place during early field experiences or the student teaching phase of teacher preparation, this book focuses primarily on the supervision of the student teaching experience. The reason for this focus is two-fold. First, despite the variety of conceptual goals that exist for the student teaching experience, its construction is somewhat standard. After content-area and education related coursework, and perhaps a few early field experiences, prospective teachers are paired with a cooperating teacher and a university supervisor during the capstone student teaching experience. The student teaching experience is considered the space where prospective teachers gain personal practical knowledge about the work of teaching. Although the premise and construction of the typical student teaching experience has been considered a “medieval apprenticeship” (Guyton & McIntyre, 1990, p. 514) or “fundamentally flawed” (Britzman, 2003, p. 221) for a variety of reasons, this model continues to be the prevalent way to prepare teachers for the profession. Given the entrenched nature of the student teaching experience in teacher education, understanding the ways in which university supervisors can play a role in furthering the professional preparation of teachers seems like a warranted conversation.

Another reason that the supervision of student teachers requires attention is that despite some inherent flaws, student teaching is still an important occasion for teacher learning. For the most part, the student teaching has a profound influence
on teacher candidates. Many teachers have suggested that the student teaching experience was one of the most important aspects of their professional preparation (Widden, Mayer-Smith & Moon, 1998; Wilson, Floden & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001). As several studies have indicated, the immersion into classroom life provides teacher candidates with multiple opportunities to develop new understandings of the dimensions of teaching such as pedagogy, content matter, students, and the social context of schools (e.g., Burn, Hagger & Mutton, 2003; Caires & Almeida, 2005; Shkedi & Laron, 2004; Smagorinsky, Jakubiak & Moore, 2008). The student teaching experience, however, is considered more powerful when the understandings developed in the field are consistent with the teacher education program’s vision of teaching (Grossman, Hammerness, McDonald & Ronfeldt, 2008; Hammerness, 2006). While several factors influence the degree of coherence between a teacher education program and a student teaching site, the university supervisor, as the representative of program commitments during the student teaching experience, is the individual with the greatest burden to help student teachers synthesize concepts learned during coursework. However, enacting a pedagogy that not only coheres with campus-based teacher learning experiences, but also accounts for the situated realities of student teaching is an incredibly complex undertaking.

The most common aspect of university supervisor’s work is to observe a student teacher’s practice and provide feedback through a post-observation conference. Generally, it is in the post-observation conference where supervisors facilitate the learning to teach process. However, the move from observation to feedback operates under two assumptions. First, that the university supervisor is a keen observer of classroom environments and interactions. Second, that the supervisor is able translate these observed realities and turn them into formative feedback that also accounts for aspects such as the expectations of the program, the particular academic, social, and emotional needs of a student teacher, and the known and unknown norms of the cooperating teacher’s classroom. Each move is difficult in its own right.

Upon entering a classroom, the university supervisor is attempting to observe, interpret, and ultimately judge the practice of a student teacher. However, the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of practice is predicated for these student teachers—like all teachers—on the array of factors that mediate teacher action and student response. As Labaree (2004) suggests, the effectiveness of a particular practice depends on, just to name a few:

…the subject, the grade level, the community; on the class, race, gender, and culture of the students; on the pedagogical skills, academic knowledge, personality, and mood of the teacher; on the time of day, day of week, season, and barometric pressure; on the content of the students’ last meal and the state of their parents’ marriage; on the culture and structure of the school; on the available curriculum materials; on the teacher they had last year; and their prospects of getting a job when they graduate; and so on (pp. 53–54).
Given the irreducible complexity of the effectiveness of practice, the supervisor walks into an observation visit with little to no understanding of most of these factors. This of course is not to say that supervisors are unable to discern effective and ineffective practices, but merely to suggest that the interpretations of effective or ineffective practice are always contingent on a great number of factors that are mostly unknown when a supervisor walks into a classroom at the beginning of fourth period. Moreover, the mere presence of an observer already disturbs some of the ordinary routine of a classroom as it dawns on all members—students and adults alike—that an observer is evaluating the performance of a student teacher.

Within this matrix of realities, the supervisor is asked to turn these observations, impressions, and interpretations into formative feedback for the student teacher. While some universities provide rubrics to conduct observations and subsequent conferences, to fully support teacher learning, the post-conference encounter must be more than the detailing of deficiencies and the prescription of solutions. Instead, for this formative feedback to support teacher learning in more lasting ways, the post-observation conference requires deliberate pedagogical efforts to advance the development of student teachers. However, the nature of the various pedagogical moves made by a supervisor are not only based on the particular and situational inferences made from an observations, but must also be combined with program aims, personal goals for and understandings of student teachers, and hopefully, some speculation about the incompleteness of the snapshot of practice she or he just witnessed. Although some of this processing happens during the observation, in most cases, the walk from the classroom to the post-observation conference room is about as much time as the university supervisor has to prepare.

During the conference, assuming the cooperating teacher is not part of the meeting (which creates a different set of dynamics for the pedagogy of supervision), the supervisor must enact this pedagogy and also attempt to be responsive to what the student teacher is saying or trying to say. This means that the work of supervision, like all pedagogy, is artful and improvisational (Cuenca, 2010). Moreover, this work happens within the boundaries of the very reason the university supervisor is in the room: to link situations in practice with understandings developed elsewhere in the program. Certainly, in order to accomplish this effectively, the university supervisor must have some prior understanding of program values and structures. Therefore, much like the complexities in many other teacher education spaces, the pedagogy of field-based teacher education for university supervisor is fraught with questions. What kinds of conceptual and pedagogical tools are most effective to engender understanding? How best to connect experiences with prior understandings? What responses are most appropriate? What personal biases are clouding these responses?

As mentioned earlier, the university supervisor is also typically asked to perform a series of other administrative tasks, such as playing a “public relations” role (Cole & Knowles, 1994) in placement sites. Therefore, supervisors are often also in charge of communicating the expectations and intentions of a teacher education program to a cooperating teacher. Although the relationships between education
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schools, placement sites, and cooperating teachers are typically cordial, at times, conflicts arise. Issues such as personality mismatches, perceived “teaching style” differences, or problematic student teachers require university supervisors to smooth over troubled relationships. These occasional situations confound pedagogical possibilities for supervisors. Moreover, as a result of the hierarchies that naturally form among and between the teacher, cooperating teacher, and university supervisor (Veal & Rikard, 1998), the university supervisor is constantly negotiating and jockeying for status. While the expectations for university supervisors vary across institutions, the pedagogically and politically charged spaces university supervisors inhabit—regardless of institutional context—require skill, adeptness, and expertise. Unfortunately, many teacher education institutions ignore the complexity of the work of supervising student teachers. The conditions within education schools often frame university supervisors as “disconnected service providers” (Clark, 2002). As such, those who conduct the work of supervision are often treated in both subtle and not so subtle ways, as second-class citizens (Jenkins & Fortman, 2010). Given the complexity of the work of supervision and the importance of student teaching experience in the development of pre-service teachers, the generally low status of university supervisors within education schools is quite problematic.

THE PROBLEMATIC STATUS OF UNIVERSITY SUPERVISORS

Although the challenging nature of facilitating learning to teach during field experiences has been well documented (Clift & Brady, 2005; McIntyre, Byrd & Foxx, 1996), the work of university supervisors is not often valued within teacher education. Much of this perception is due to the inverse relationship in higher education between status and proximity to the field (Lagemann, 2000; Lanier & Little, 1986). As several scholars have pointed out, the entire enterprise of teacher education is generally not taken very seriously in colleges and universities (Labaree, 2004; Zeichner, 2006). Constantly, professors of education have to fend off critiques levied both internally and externally about the seemingly “self-evident” nature of the work they do (e.g., Kanstroom & Finn, 1999; Farkas & Duffett, 2010). In many cases, colleges of education are just seen as “cash cows” offering little else to the prestige of institutions (Darling-Hammond, 2010). While many of these perceptions are due to the historical evolution of education schools within colleges and universities, they have real consequences. Professors of education are typically underpaid relative to other faculty and often have a limited voice within their institutions. Ironically however, similar status distinctions are established within education schools. Drawing on the same “proximity to practice” discourse that dismisses much of the complexity involved in teacher education, direct involvement with schools is generally not considered as valuable as research, publication, and teaching campus-based courses. These commitments are typically regarded as much higher priorities
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than supervision. As a result, those with the least status and authority within colleges of education—clinical faculty, graduate students, or retired educators—often assume the greatest responsibility for supervising student teachers. Even in those education schools where tenure-track faculty are asked to supervise student teachers, this responsibility is treated as _pro bono_ or overload work (Beck & Kosnik, 2002; Goodlad, 1990).

The low status distinction for university supervisors means that their work is usually not supported. For example, the literature generated by the self-study of teacher education practices community has begun to surface the innumerable intricacies involved in the act of teaching teachers (Berry, 2004; Korthagen, 2001). What this line of research has made visible is that in teacher education _how one teaches_ is as important as _what one teaches_ (Loughran & Russell, 1997). This maxim also holds true for university supervisors as field-based teacher educators. Campus and field based encounters require an understanding of the personal and interactive nature of pedagogy when teaching someone about teaching. Unfortunately, the low status of supervision within education schools leaves supervisors without any real resources to understand the degree to which supervision is pedagogical. In fact, researchers who write about their first experiences with supervision often detail the “sink or swim” attitude taken within their institutions (Cuenca, 2010; Hartzler-Miller, 1999; Ritter, 2007). Yet, as noted above, the very fact that supervisors are positioned in spaces where something pedagogical is expected from them (e.g., evaluation, feedback, opinions, support) means that these spaces are pedagogically charged. In essence then, whether education schools take the work of field-based teacher education seriously or not, the very nature of clinical supervision demands complex pedagogical work to be conducted.

Another problem supervisors face is the limited theoretical base that acknowledges the nuances associated with supervision and learning to teach during the student teaching experience. Although the clinical approach to supervision has been around for decades (Cogan, 1961; Goldhammer, Anderson & Krajewski, 1993; Mosher & Purpel, 1972), and several excellent models for supervision exist (Glickman, 1985; Waite, 1991), many of these models either focus on the in-service context of teacher learning or simply fail to acknowledge the personal, social, and cultural dynamics that influence teacher learning during student teaching. With the rise of interpretive research in teacher education, the sociocultural contexts of the student teaching experience has gained more visibility (Borko, Whitcomb & Byrnes, 2008). Interpretive studies have provided a more nuanced portrait of student teachers and the influence of the situated realities of student teaching on learning to teach. These studies provide a wealth of information that can help supervisors make sense of observed phenomenon. For example, being able to base field-based pedagogy on the ways in which value systems and social practices at a school site influence the understandings of student teachers might provide a more rich learning to teach experience. Unfortunately, relatively few models exist that connect sociocultural context with supervising student teachers.
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The low status of university supervisors also seems to minimize their voice in the conversation regarding assessment in teacher education. Although university supervisors are closest to the student teaching experience, they rarely have a voice in determining the goals for this experience. In many cases, supervisors are considered outsiders to the “real” work of teacher education (Slick, 1997), and are seldom used as resources to better understand, assess, and improve the field-based component of teacher education (Zeichner, 2002). This reality facing supervisors is also quite ironic, considering the constant pressure teacher education is under to create more coherent and powerful student teaching experiences. Recently, reports by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (2011) and the National Council on Teacher Quality (2011) were the latest blue-ribbon panels to make this point. Both reports critiqued the fragmented nature of teacher education and called for an increased emphasis on clinical teacher education. Scholars within the field have also made similar claims and questioned the inability of teacher education to help teacher candidates learn from field-based experiences (Ball & Cohen, 1999). For example, Darling-Hammond (2010) asserted that the central issue teacher education must confront should be, “how to foster learning about and from practice in practice” (emphasis in original, p. 42). Given university supervisor’s proximity to field experiences, it seems as if they can help prospective teachers do just that. Yet, the low status of university supervisors appears to cloud this reality.

THE CAUSALITY DILEMMA OF SUPERVISION IN TEACHER EDUCATION

While the problematic status of supervisors is in part symptomatic of the broader issues that face clinical education and teacher education, a possible reason that so little attention has been paid to the supervision of student teachers is that this work is mired in a causality dilemma. As some of the research literature suggests, in some encounters with supervision, not much happens. In fact, supervisory conferences are often characterized by their lack of in-depth feedback and their almost perfunctory nature (Borko & Mayfield, 1995; Bullough & Draper, 2004; Valencia, Martin, Place & Grossman, 2009). Ostensibly then, the status of supervisors within teacher education is vindicated. The seemingly perfunctory nature of supervision is probably a significant cause for the inattention given to supervisors. With what might only be a trivial influence on prospective teachers, there seems to be no real reason or evidence to reprioritize responsibilities for tenure-track faculty or provide supervisors with more support and input into program development.

However, the very nature of the supervisory relationship is also dictated by the structures that allow an educative teacher learning experience to occur. Without certain institutional commitments or professional support to gain a better understanding of the situated realities that abound during supervisory visits, the cursory role of the supervisor depicted in many studies becomes less convincing. Since part of the ambiguity involved in the work of supervision emanates from the fact that the curriculum of student teaching—the course of experiences necessary
for teacher learning—is ambiguous itself, the nature of supervision will always be difficult to codify. However, this reality should not detract from efforts to move beyond nominal efforts of facilitating student teacher learning. So, which problem precedes the other? Is the inattention to field-based teacher education because of perfunctory experiences? Or are these experiences perfunctory because of the inattention given to field-based teacher education? Although this causality dilemma might beget only circular arguments, it seems as if it is in the best interest of all involved in teacher education to take the supervision of student teachers more seriously.

OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

By problematizing, theorizing, and inquiring into the nature of supervising student teachers, the authors in this volume attempt to take the work of supervising student teachers more seriously by drawing out the complexities involved in this endeavor. More specifically, this book addresses three areas that require more exposure: (1) the issues facing university supervisors; (2) perspectives on the work of supervising student teachers; and (3) future directions for the supervision of student teachers. The first section, Issues, explores some of the ambiguity surrounding the work of university supervisors. In *Becoming a University Supervisor*, Charles Elfer details some of the troubles, travails, and opportunities he faced as a new supervisor. His narrative sheds light on the seemingly “sink or swim” nature of supervising student teachers for the first time. Yet, his contribution also unpacks ways in which collaborative inquiry and dialogue helped him through this initial experience with supervising student teachers. In *The Problematology of Supervising Student Teachers*, I explore the nature of the questions that I asked my student teachers during my work as a university supervisor. Through this exploration I question the limits of supervision in fostering dialogue. Mardi Schmeichel in *Check It Before You Wreck It*, draws on the work of Michel Foucault to explore how she mobilized power within the student teaching triad. Her narrative not only reminds us that the spaces of supervision are saturated with power dynamics, but also of the complexities involved in yielding and being responsible for this power toward teacher learning ends. Taking a look at university supervisors from a different perspective, Todd Dinkelman in *Observation Reports and the Mystery of Supervising Student Teachers* reflects on the hundreds of observation reports he has read over the years as a program coordinator. He shares three kinds of observation reports—encouraging, minimalist, and reformist—to argue for the challenges supervisors face in attempting to enact a pedagogy of field-based teacher education.

The authors in the next section, Perspectives, provide readers with different lenses to view and enact the work of supervising student teachers. Muffet Trout in *Care Theory* describes how this theory can serve as a useful framework for student teacher learning. Trout argues that by infusing supervisory practice with care theory, field-based teacher educators will demonstrate a conception of teaching that is dynamic
and responsive. Joseph Nichols in *Supervision and the Lives of Student Teachers* makes the case that powerful supervisory practice involves connecting pre-service teachers’ life histories with their development as student teachers. In his chapter, he shares a snapshot of the life history of Rebekah, a student teacher he supervised, and recounts how knowing about her history influenced his practice as a university supervisor.

Susan Waite and Duncan Waite in *Toward a More Democratic Student Teacher Supervisor* share their ideas on democratizing the spaces supervisors inhabit, such as the supervisory conference, universities, and schools. Meg Monaghan and Barbara Hartigan in *Gender Equity and the Classroom* explore the attitudinal and knowledge barriers student teachers face in teaching about gender. They argue that the supervisor is an important factor in fostering gender equity perspectives during student teaching. In *Working Through the Uncertainties in Equity-Oriented Supervision*, Hughes explores the role of the university supervisor in cultivating equity through pedagogical tact, openness to students’ experiences, attunement to subjectivity, and holding back. Hughes suggests that in order to achieve equity-oriented aims during field-based teacher education, supervisors must struggle with our social identities, prejudices, biases, and fears alongside our students.

The authors of the final section, *Future Directions* attempt to push our thinking about how to go about the work of supervising student teachers. In *Personal Examples of Self-Study*, Jason Ritter uses examples from his self-study research to explore the development of his pedagogy of teacher education. He argues that self-study is a powerful methodological tool to further understand, unpack, and complicate being a university supervisor. H. James Garrett in *Rethinking the Spaces of Supervision* draws on psychoanalysis to delve into the physical and psychical spaces of supervision. Garrett’s chapter provokes the reader to consider how rethinking the timing and spaces of supervision might create different possibilities for the practice of field-based teacher education. Adrian Rodgers in *Supervision 1.3* traces the evolution of supervision and explores some of the pressing trends facing teacher education and how the work of the university supervisor might be retooled to respond to these trends. Finally, David Byrd and Jay Fogleman conclude the book by contextualizing the chapters in this book within the broader research literature on teacher development during the student teaching experience.

Each author contributes in her or his own way to interrupting the causality dilemma university supervisors face. In taking the work of supervision seriously, each chapter speaks to the depth and complexity involved in supervising field experiences. Moreover, across these contributions, the reader will note that at times, authors will disagree about certain conceptualizations and characterizations of supervision. These disagreements reveal some of the nuances and complexities of supervision. Pointing to the complexity of supervision, however, does not mean that this work is impractical. Instead, the dialogue presented in this book should be taken up as a call to continue to identify the problems of supervision and address these problems through more dialogue, conceptualization, and investigation. It will be through
this kind of work that we not only further what becomes possible for prospective teachers to learn during field experiences, but also counter the marginalization many university supervisors endure.

REFERENCES


INTRODUCTION


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PART ONE: ISSUES
INTRODUCTION

What does it mean to do supervision? What exactly is my role as a supervisor of pre-service teachers? Am I even doing this right? In addition to the fairly significant reduction in pay, these several questions were just a sample of the constant sources of worry that surrounded me as I left the high school social studies classroom to assume the role of university supervisor. The recollections collected below represent my experience of the process of becoming a university supervisor and my efforts to make sense of that role.

This reflective chapter traces my development as a university supervisor over a two-year period. In the first section, I detail several of the obstacles that I encountered in negotiating the norms and expectations of a teacher education program, my transformation from classroom-based teacher to field-based teacher educator, and my awkward attempts to navigate the sometimes competing interests of stakeholders affected by work as a university supervisor. Section two builds on those and other initial themes and explores the manner in which I came to internalize and understand the challenges and opportunities associated with the ongoing process of becoming a university supervisor. The final section of this chapter unpacks new understandings surrounding the value of collaborative inquiry, dialogue, and program design in the context of developing and problematizing effective field-based supervisory practices.¹

TROUBLES

Trial by Fire

Given the critical importance of the field-based experiences in teacher education, it is somewhat surprising to find that so little in the way of university supervisor training is available. Beyond a casual introduction to the mechanics of field supervision, I do not recall any sort of formal induction to the work when I was asked to supervise student teachers as a graduate assistant. I was oriented to the pre- and post-assessment processes that our program adopted, as well as the Likert-type assessment tool that was to be completed twice per semester. I was also offered samples of introductory
letters that might serve to establish contact with student teachers and with our school partners (i.e., cooperating teachers). To be sure, my colleagues, both faculty and fellow graduate students, were more than open to any questions or advice that I might have solicited. The trouble for a new supervisor, of course, was that I was largely unaware of what sorts of questions I should be asking and what sorts of situational conflicts might arise.

Despite my novice position as a university supervisor, I also did not lack any conception whatsoever of supervision; I was not, to say it another way, a completely blank slate. In the first place, at the time that I took on the new role I was not far removed from the experience of student teaching myself. As a part-time doctoral student and a converted anthropologist, I completed the student teaching semester only three years earlier in the very program I found myself working with as a university supervisor. Naturally then, I had some conception of the program goals and the relationships expected between cooperating teachers, university supervisors, and student teachers in the field. In addition, as a part-time graduate student and a full-time, secondary-level social studies teacher during the years immediately preceding my initial experience as a university supervisor, I had held a variety of roles associated with the “training” of new teachers. Given my ties to the university, I was often asked to serve as a cooperating teacher. I frequently opened my classroom to both practicum students and to student teachers. And finally, I also worked with several other graduate student peers in the doctoral program to establish a research agenda in the area of mentoring and supervision, specifically, the pairing of student teachers in the field. With that in mind, through my varied experiences as a cooperating teacher, a graduate student, a former student teacher, and researcher, I had developed some understandings of the program framework and the processes associated with teacher education. Interestingly enough, and despite all of these rich and varied experiences, I entered my new role as university supervisor with a great deal of hesitation and uncertainty. While I was in a position, given my background, to act as field-based teacher educator, gauging the effectiveness of the processes that I initially adopted, not to mention the suitability of those processes in a particular teacher education program, was quite challenging.

Unpacking Program Themes

The teacher education program that I was affiliated with as a graduate student was committed to creating a certain type of social studies educator. Although our work was organized around several dozen components pertaining to teacher effectiveness, we were particularly committed to five core themes. In no particular order, the core themes of the program were diversity, collaboration, critical reflection, active student engagement in worthwhile learning, and rationale-based practice. Together, the themes intended to promote a sort of reform-minded social studies education, one
geared philosophically toward the promotion of certain conceptions of democracy and justice through the school and classroom.

Unpacking and making sense of program themes in a way that might be useful in my supervisory role was quite challenging for me, especially in the early stages. Conceptions such as diversity or rationale-based practice, or any of the other core themes for that matter, were not clearly articulated and I found that I was unaware of the boundaries and breadth of each domain. As I settled into my new role as a university supervisor, I became acutely aware of the fact that my understandings of those core themes were neither fully developed, nor unanimously shared. A significant source of discord grew up around the collective commitment to the social studies rationale, a central piece of our teacher education program. In short, I found myself troubled by the possibility that as a program we might be limiting the autonomy of pre-service teachers to develop their own conceptions of powerful practice in the social studies. I was bothered somewhat by the possibility that our own philosophies and principles might potentially overwhelm, if not discount, the beliefs and ideas of our students; that is, that our work could shift to become more about our own agendas than our young teachers and their development. The passage below from a recorded conversation with fellow university supervisors was indicative of my approach and the underlying dilemma surrounding my involvement with the promotion of rationale-based practice:

For the last three years I’ve been teaching [at the secondary level] and I don’t really have any experience with supervision. I’ve been a cooperating teacher and I’ve had lots of pre-service student teachers come and sit in on my classes and that sort of thing, but this is all pretty new to me…I don’t really have a definite idea of what I want to do, but I would say it’s probably a lot like what I want for my students in the classroom…I have a particular way of looking at the world, like we all do, and there are certain things that sit with me better than others, [but] I really don’t have a particular end in mind at this stage in the game; it’s sort of like I would like to help my student teachers develop their practices in a defensible way. Probably not going to look all the same for all those different people, but to develop a defensible rationale for why they’re doing it...

I’m perfectly willing [to disagree] with what the teacher does in the classroom,…Haven’t observed any student teachers yet…I’m just saying that I don’t have a particular agenda in mind. That’s up-front, that’s what’s I’m promoting. I’m more interested in [the student teachers] developing their practice…(Transcripts, 8.18.2009)

Elsewhere, in the same conversation, I highlighted the philosophical distinction more clearly, noting my growing realization that “…social studies can mean a lot of different things to a lot of different people…Unlike my peers, I don’t have a
specific version of the social studies that I’m trying to promote over another one… I’m not grading you against a template, you’re your own template…” (Transcripts, 8.18.2009). The rationale issue and the manner in which university supervisors were to orient themselves to that creative process remained a challenge for me throughout my tenure in the program. And while that struggle was not one that was unique to me, it was a task for which I was somewhat ill-prepared.

Prior to accepting a graduate assistantship, I honestly had not given a great deal of thought to the fact that my membership might imply emissary-like responsibilities. I was well aware that the program was guided by a set of core themes, but I was not particularly in-tune to what that might mean for me or for practice as a university supervisor. There simply was not a great deal of introductory discussion regarding the need or desire for coherence in the program, and I suspect that much was taken for granted on the part of all parties involved in terms of prior knowledge and expectations.

Negotiating Relationships

Another component absent in my training to work with student teachers surrounded institutional relationships with partner schools and cooperating teachers, or more specifically, my responsibilities in forging and maintaining them. Having only recently departed from the classroom, I felt a real sense of connectedness to practicing teachers. I imagined myself as a sort of hybrid character trapped somewhere in between the worlds of classroom practice, teacher education, and scholarship. In some ways, that split personality probably served me well, particularly where perceived credibility among pre-service teachers was in play. In that context, I often found that new teachers gravitated toward my illustrations of practice which, by virtue of my recent emigration, were perhaps fresher than my colleagues. But for whatever benefits my practitioner perspective may have afforded, it also created challenges.

As I entered the schools as a supervisor I was quite comfortable. The pacing of a 90-minute block period, the front-desk check-ins and name badges, and the sometimes excruciating bell ringing were, to me, commonplace. I was at home. My environment had changed little. What had changed, however, and perhaps without my full appreciation, were my allegiances. I was no longer a classroom teacher and I was no longer under the direct influence of a principal or a department head. While respectful, of course, to those stakeholders and hosts, my allegiances had shifted to the university. I had a new set of administrators, mentors, peers, and supervisors and the purposes and principles of social studies education were not always perfectly aligned with those of the parties that represented our school partners. As I recalled in a peer meeting with colleagues:

If we’re talking about challenges to being a new supervisor, one of the challenges is that you have to recognize that the university may have goals, the program may have goals, and that I have to carry those out on some level,
but that those [goals] are not always in line with the day to day operations of another institution, the schools that we work with...so I’m the intermediary and I’ve got to balance between those. (Transcripts, 9.11.2009)

In field-based teacher education, things go awry. My intermediate position was tested early and often. When problems arose in the field, the stances that I adopted seemed to matter, and that did not make the work any less troubling. In my first semester of university supervision I worked with five student teachers, one of whom struggled considerably with the entire process, the pacing of school, and with expectations of the program and the host school. Aside from several unannounced absences, the student teacher, a non-traditional candidate who had previously worked in a private, religion-based setting, had some degree of trouble relating to students. Complicating matters, the cooperating teacher in this particular instance had concerns not just about the performance of the student teacher, but about the direction of our teacher education program itself. So there I was, trapped it seemed, between competing interests of many parties, least of all my own. On the one hand, I obviously felt that it was my first responsibility to work toward improvement with the student teacher. Unfortunately, the types of suggestions and guidance that I wanted to offer, themes surrounding practice consistent with program objectives, were not entirely palatable to the cooperating teacher. That feature of the relationship represented a significant obstacle. Attempting to move the student teacher away from a purely lecture-based platform was somewhat of an impossibility as that was the preferred mode of instruction adopted by the host. “Who’s side do you take,” I wondered, “between the cooperating teacher and the student teacher” (Transcripts, 9.11.2009). My feeling was, and remains, that university supervision should be about the student teacher first. Of course it should be, we are teacher educators, after all. But that objective, I have since learned, is somewhat simplistic.

As a novice university supervisor, and I am not entirely certain that much has changed, I found that negotiating relationships and motivations was problematic. I was, for instance, ill-equipped to force the hand of an unhappy cooperating teacher, a partner upon whom I depended in many ways. As I illustrated the context at the time:

[The cooperating teacher] doesn’t feel like there is a lot of communication between him and the university and that the university is distanced from the school...He’s upset with the university...I think he’s had a bad experience with the student teachers that he’s had. He’s had one quit, he has one who is having a rough time right now, and he’s had two in the past that were bad...I think he’s a little concerned about what he [perceives] the university is trying to train people to do. He doesn’t think that they’re all well suited to teach,...that the rigor is not there...(Transcripts, 9.11.2009)

For this particular cooperating teacher, then, experimentation and mistake-making were not altogether appropriate. There was very little room for error. Given the
grievances held by the host, I simply did not feel as though there was a great deal of flexibility to deviate from the preferred practices of lecture and traditional classroom control. In the end, my work with the student teacher essentially collapsed into a “let’s just get through this” type of approach. Hardly a powerful example of university supervision in the social studies, but a rational decision nonetheless I felt at the time. In that instance, the most severe that I have encountered, I chose to maintain the relationship between the host school and the university. Rather than risk any further turbulence, I acquiesced to the demands of the cooperating teacher, a decision which probably did not serve the student teacher in question particularly well. Relationships do matter, and I learned early on that negotiating that terrain can be incredibly challenging, especially when you are inexperienced.

Norms of Intervention

In addition to the sometimes troubling obligation to navigate the minefield of institutional and personal relationships associated with university supervision, I encountered a whole range of situational occurrences that almost naturally arise as semesters accumulate. Particularly problematic for me were the expected norms of intervention; that is, under what circumstances, if any at all, should I abandon my position as an observer and involve myself directly in the happenings of a public school social studies classroom. Although decision-making often assumes a commonsensical, best-judgment sort of character, I found that the question of intervention represented yet another source of ambiguity in university supervision. I would be tested early.

I did not even complete my first semester of university supervision before I witnessed a fight during a scheduled observation. As was typically the case, there were no other adults in the room on the day of my visit. To allow the student teacher, most of whom are generally under a fair amount of pressure, to operate as an independent teacher seemed preferable and the absence of the host teacher, in my brief experience, often created a less threatening, more comfortable environment during the observation. I thought very little about the potential consequences up until that point and was taken completely off guard when tensions between two high school students escalated. Luckily, the fight was preceded by an impressive verbal exchange that was loud enough to alarm the hallway and the room next door. By the time the two actually engaged, the cooperating teacher was back in the room and in a position to handle the situation. But I thought about that event often in the immediate aftermath and since. Clearly, as an adult, a former classroom teacher, and now a parent, my instinct is to intervene, to stop the fight. Yet, what was the appropriate response as a representative of the university? I was not, at any time, an employee of the host school. We had virtually no relationship whatsoever beyond my three semester visits to observe a pre-service teacher. Indeed, the status of university visitor in a public school is a unique one. I doubt the situation arises
very often and that likely explains why norms surrounding intervention were not explicitly discussed prior to my first supervisory experience.

The case of a fight or an emergency situation represents one dimension of intervention, another is more instructional-pedagogical in nature. With regard to the latter, I found again that norms and expectations surrounding practice were ambiguous. I have often remarked to my colleagues that, in the main, I have been pleased with what I have encountered in the field. There have been some clear exceptions to that trend and the illustrations that I see are rarely without imperfection. All things considered, however, I have seen plenty of examples of what I believe to be effective and meaningful social studies practice over the past few years. What has been challenging for me in my field supervision is how to respond in those instances where things do not go well. More specifically, I have been tempted repeatedly in observational settings to intervene in various ways where I could see clear, if sometimes minor, changes that might improve learning. Is it appropriate, I have often wondered, to revisit stated directions with students in a classroom that I am visiting? Or, is the more appropriate response to instead to stay removed and to allow the student teacher to identify where gaps in understanding might exist? Should a field supervisor correct a student teacher, or a student for that matter, if an inaccuracy is stated? Am I more obligated to the student teacher or to the student teacher’s own students? These seem like critically important issues.

I received a partial answer to the intervention question when visited by my supervisor and department head. In part to stay acquainted with school partners, in part to gain a better sense of the relationship between a particular student teacher and host, and in part, I suspect, to observe my own supervisory practices, my department head accompanied me on a ninety-minute observation and post-conference. Whereas as I had tended play the role of observer-as-silent-visitor, I was quite surprised to find that my department head acted in a far more vocal and participatory fashion. He was up and about, walking around throughout the class period. He spoke with students and he participated, on some level, in the group activities in which students were engaged. We had never spoken about intervening explicitly, but it was clear to me after that moment that the norms of intervention within our teacher education program were probably not what I had imagined. Of course, that realization in itself left me guessing, and, perhaps second guessing many of the assumptions surrounding norms of intervention that I had operated under previously.

TRAVAILS

Finding a Voice

In my view, becoming a university supervisor is not altogether different from becoming a teacher in the sense that you begin to see patterns and confront similar situations and circumstances that demand reasoned response in practice. Those experiences and responses tend to accumulate over time and represent a form of
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professional knowledge, the process a form of professional training. By the end of my first semester, those patterns and circumstances were already becoming apparent, many of them framed around some of the same themes highlighted above. To be clear, it was not the case, then or now, that I reached fixed conclusions about my developing practice of field supervision. At the same time, however, my perspectives solidified to some degree and I began to develop a clearer sense of what I wanted to accomplish, what I knew and did not know, and how to go about working with new teachers.

A significant point of growth in my practice stemmed from my awareness of, and perhaps sensitivity to, my own perspectives in the context of larger program objectives. My concerns regarding rationale-based practice and the manner in which that objective might be introduced to and fostered in new teachers, for instance, intensified. Committed to the idea that social studies educators, and all educators for that matter, should develop a sense of direction in their work, I was nonetheless resistant to the notion that determining that direction could be anything other than self-determined. I spent a considerable amount of energy refining my position, and talking with and listening to my colleagues, all of whom were open-minded, if not supportive of my developing perspective. But the difficulty that I soon encountered in my critique was that it was far easier to imagine what I believed to be a more developmental approach than it was to operationalize my positions in practice in effective and meaningful ways.

A fair self-assessment of my first semester of university supervision would indicate that my capacity to allow the social studies rationale to develop autonomously was far from successful. With regard to creating room for personal development, I estimate that I did reasonably well. I was able to articulate for students my intent to avoid unwarranted imposition and I do believe that the message was received and mostly appreciated. In large part, however, I could account for very little in the way of development on the part of the student teachers and the reflective processes surrounding the generation and refinement of the social studies rationale. I did not facilitate that process particularly well in the early going and the strains of becoming accustomed to the challenges of classroom teaching seemed to overwhelm most of the pre-service teachers with whom I worked. In other words, because I adopted what amounted to a hands-off approach when it came to rationale development, the rationales were more or less set aside and saw relatively little investigation. As I recounted my developing approach and its efficacy:

What I’ve tried to do with the rationales is that I told students at the beginning of the semester, and this was in my initial [introductory] letter, was that my job is not to tell [them] how [they] should be a teacher, but to help [them] develop into the type of teacher that [they] imagined that [they] want to be. So what I’ve asked them to do in this last round of observations, now that we are not talking so much about classroom management and little problems that come up, although I think we’ll always do that, is that I asked them in
the last observation to look at what happened in this particular class period through their rationales and then [to evaluate] how they achieved it or didn’t… Hopefully, somewhere along the next couple of weeks when we meet I can kind of help them develop their understandings a bit more…(Transcripts, 10.23.2009)

As it turned out, my hopeful expectations did not materialize. In large part, I believe that the problem stemmed from the fact that I had simply waited far too long to push the conversations surrounding the rationales. My attempted engagements, while well intentioned, were largely rhetorical and not linked deeply enough to my practice of supervision and my expectations for student teachers. I certainly worked to broach the subject and I attempted to create a point of reflection around the third and final semester observation, but with little reward. Despite my efforts, the student teachers that I worked with in that first semester could only casually articulate their purposes and connections to practice were even less apparent. We were going through the motions.

In a significant way, changes that I made to my practice in subsequent semesters, and the move to adopt a more deliberative style of observation reporting, brought me far closer to the goals that I imagined, or least closer to an understanding of possibilities. I discuss each of those developments in greater detail below, but, and significantly, my objectives to facilitate a certain form of rationale development also shifted as a consequence of certain self-realizations.

Whereas my initial belief was that imposition in educational processes could be avoided altogether, I came to realize that my openness to different conceptions of educational purposes might be considerably narrower than I had originally suspected. Although I felt that I did possess the capacity to value reasoned perspectives and approaches different from my own, I came to recognize that I held certain positions that were amazingly fixed, and that I was imposing those positions heavily on pre-service teachers in my work with the social studies teacher education program.

To clarify, in reflecting on my practice, re-reading conversations with colleagues, and thinking through my development, I am more aware today of the centrality of conceptions of active student engagement in my thinking about schooling. As a mentor and program leader once illustrated for me, active student engagement can be thought of as a representation of those moments in which “the wheels in their heads are turning; when students are turning ideas over and over in the minds.”

Because I had gravitated so heavily toward certain aspects of the educational philosophies of John Dewey, namely those represented in The Child and the Curriculum (1902), Experience and Education (1938), and How We Think (1933), the notion of active student engagement had become for me something nearing a philosophical infatuation even before my first semester of university supervision. Questioned on my voice as a (teacher) educator, I responded to several colleagues in the following way:

My perspective sort of [mirrors] a general educational theory…Active student engagement, to me, makes all of the other core themes work. Nothing else
matters without that one. They are all relevant because of that one, and they all feed into that one. It’s sort of a general theory of how people learn…

It’s not just a matter of was it engaging. It’s “why wasn’t it engaging?” and “what could you do that was more engaging?” and that sort of thing. It’s not just identifying practices as engaging or not, it’s everything that went into it to get to the point of learning…(Transcripts, 9.25.2009)

Clearly, as the passages above indicated, the notion of active student engagement held real importance for me. In fact, my position was so strong that I often recall dismissing the second clause in the core theme stated as in worthwhile learning. Any real learning in the social studies at all, in my view, was worthwhile and I often struggled with engaging debates to the contrary. Strangely enough, despite rather strong sentiments, I did not fully recognize the imposition that my thinking represented. It simply did not occur to me that my insistence on considerations of certain notions of student engagement were, in some ways at least, incompatible with a stated approach to university supervision, and more broadly teacher education, that positioned self-determination as all-important. Open to deviations that students might direct, I came to realize that certain dimensions of my educational philosophy were probably more limiting than I would have cared to have imagined. While it probably does not amount to a crisis in teacher education, I have come to realize through experience that complete neutrality is an impossibility. That evolution in my thinking has not come easily, but it has certainly improved my understanding of my work with pre-service teachers and my appreciation of my own positionality in that setting. I remain a fairly strong critic of certain social reconstructionist pedagogies, but I have also had to take an accounting of the perspectives and biases that I bring to my own work.

Refining My Approach

Generally satisfied with the completion of my first semester as a university supervisor, it was clear that much adjustment was needed if the objective was to move beyond completion alone. I had two primary concerns before me. In the first place, I was determined to refine my approach to facilitating rationale-based practices in pre-service teachers. That adjustment was straightforward enough and largely mechanical-structural. Simply stated, I needed to make the rationales more of a priority, and not unrelated, I needed to get into them much earlier. The first move that I took was to require each student teacher to provide me with a copy of their written rationale in advance of the student teaching semester. By the time students reached the student teaching semester, they had generally drafted no less than two working rationale statements and the requirement hardly represented anything more than revision of previously completed work. I offered everyone the opportunity to recreate their rationale from scratch, but I placed no real restrictions on the document otherwise and made it clear that I did not expect, or desire, a finalized statement.
A relatively minor shift in practice, the move to include rationale statements paid real dividends and allowed me to gain a better sense of where we all were in the process of becoming social studies teachers. As I had done previously, I also made my own perspectives on rationale development clear. I explained to all that my intention was toward growth and development and that while they could expect tough questions throughout the semester, there was no particular endpoint in mind. If they adopted, as some did, a stated social justice perspective, that was wonderful. If instead, they described some other brand of citizenship promotion then that, too, was acceptable. The primary requirement was that all adopt a position and maintain a critically reflective stance with regard to our work together.

Another important turn in my supervisory practice was my use of breakout sessions to create a space to unpack the rationales of my student teachers. These sessions were spaces built in to our teacher education program that provided supervisors an opportunity to have conversations with student teachers outside of our formal observation visits. In the previous semester I mostly used this space to engage many of the organizational aspects of the student teaching experience, which by that point, were excruciatingly familiar to my students. I opted to arrange our first breakout session around the issue of rationales and gave each participant the opportunity to vocally articulate their objectives. Rather than a reading of their written statements, each shared a synopsis of her or his rationale for the social studies. Several, in fact most, expressed some reservation in putting their ideas out publicly, which I recorded as positive and indicative of something more than shyness; that is, the hesitation suggested to me that room for consideration and a lack of fixity were present.

In addition to creating space for the public sharing of student rationales, I also took my turn as speaker. The fact that I shared with the group my own developing rationale, including my understanding of and appreciation for a certain conception of active student engagement, also represented a significant pedagogical shift. But more importantly, I think, I left that initial meeting feeling far better about the role that the rationale might play throughout the rest of the semester and the clarity of my expectations to that end. Looking back, while I value the independent instructional changes that I adopted, I now recognize the significance of program structure in facilitating my development as a university supervisor. I now recognize the structural components represented in the break-out sessions and the programmatic adherence to rationale-based practice (e.g., the pre-drafted rationale statements) as the enormous assets that they were.

My desire to better manage my expectations for rationale development fell into close alignment with another pedagogical-philosophical shift that began to percolate in my early supervisory experiences. Surely a function of my recent departure from the classroom and my perspective as a former cooperating teacher, I found our program wanting where our relationships with cooperating teachers were concerned. In other words, and without overlooking the dynamics of the relationship between our institution and our school partners (i.e., the sometimes divergent perspectives
surrounding practice), I gathered that collectively we might reimagine our work together. In some instances, I encountered among my colleagues real frustrations with cooperating teachers. As one of my peers noted, “I will be pleasant and cordial with them, but I try to stay away from them as much as I can” (Transcripts, 11.06.2009). I was generally sympathetic, particularly to stories suggestive of inflexibility and the unwillingness to take the mentoring role seriously. At the same time, however, I was a classroom teacher transplanted and I was acutely aware of the realities of public school practice, administrative demands, workloads, and performance mandates. I was also sensitive to, and deeply regretted, the divide that often exists between college/university and practitioner perspectives. But I also imagined that, at least in some instances, a balance might be arranged. If nothing else, I felt that I needed to try foster more open lines of communication, as well as a more collaborative relationship between university supervisors, cooperating teachers, and pre-service students.

To my knowledge, most of my colleagues assigned supervisory responsibilities in the program followed a similar protocol where pre-observation and post-observation documentation were concerned. I, too, adopted the standardized format for the pre-observation phase. The general process followed was to have student teachers answer a series of short prompts, including a synopsis of their instructional plans, prior to the teaching observation and usually twenty-four hours in advance. In particular, and with my objectives to promote discovery in the process of developing a teaching rationale and a more collaborative arrangement between university supervisors and host teachers in mind, I altered my practice of post-observation reporting.

Without any real understanding of where the approach would take me, I elected to formally invite cooperating teachers into the post-observation process. In a few rare instances, this measure resulted in joint meetings between me, the student teacher, and cooperating teacher. Often times, joint meetings were logistically impossible as it was generally the case that cooperating teachers were teaching in the minutes immediately following an observation and therefore unavailable to participate. Where I found far more success was in the inclusive practices that I adopted surrounding the post observation write-up. In my view, the post observation narratives were probably my greatest contributions to the development of student teachers, reflection inquiry and rationale development as professional practices, and institutional relationship-building.

My style of post-observation narratives actually grew out of widely shared practices in the program; that is, like the pre-observation, the post observation was guided by a template addressing core themes and other aspects of student teacher performance. I maintained those themes, but expanded them, I believe, to better meet some of the objectives that I have outlined previously. A simple, but important point of expansion was the decision to include a section in which the student teacher was asked to self-assess the connections to practices observed and his or her developing rationale. I also adopted a thoroughly narrative style throughout the write-ups, which I hoped would serve the purpose of expressing my sentiments about what I had
observed, but limiting my tendency to assume the position of supervisor-as-truth-teller. Related to, but more important than, those transitions, was my desire to create dialogue on paper. To avoid the burden of complete detail, the process that I adopted was to draft an initial narrative assessment and to invite both student teacher and cooperating teacher to expand, reject, or question my thoughts through their own in-text narratives. The passage below from a conversation with peer supervisors adds further clarification to the process:

I haven’t really thought about this, but I’m not sure that there’s that many different ways to do [the post observation reports]. I guess you could have a check list like you were at the zoo watching orang-utans or something like that and then looking for very particular things, but talking to them about what they were doing and what they were trying to do is probably better. I don’t know how else to do it. One other thing that I’m doing in the observation reports in order to get the cooperating teachers more involved is that I write the observation report first. Then it goes to the student teacher and within the same document they write their agreements and disagreements, responses and elaborations, in a different color. Then they send it to the cooperating teacher and the cooperating teacher gets the last word on how things are going. (Transcripts, 9.11.2009)

To that description of my initial experiments, a colleague responded in surprise, “That’s actually working” (Transcripts, 9.11.2009). And, generally speaking, it was working. My assumption going in was that cooperating teachers should want to take part in the process and that contributing to the development of their mentee could be expressed through their willingness to provide substantive feedback. So I was pleased, when, over the next several years, the majority of cooperating teachers did buy in, to varying degrees, to the narrative framework that I had adopted. I was also quite pleased to find that in virtually all cases I was receiving far more in the way of thoughtful responses pertaining to the rationale from student teachers. I was getting better.

Despite what I believed to be genuine improvement in my supervisory practice, the move to a more participatory style did validate some of the concerns raised in regard to host schools and cooperating teachers. Sincerely pleased with how far simply inviting participation could move the process, I did encounter disinterest and those cases stood in stark contrast. To return to an earlier statement made by a frustrated peer, the move to “stay away” from certain cooperating teachers sadly had new meaning and validity. Although the methods that I adopted still need a great deal of refinement, they did tend to highlight a distinction between cooperating teachers and good cooperating teachers. My perspective has certainly shifted in that regard and I continue to be troubled by the difficulty in identifying and maintaining relationships with hosts that can, and will, provide solid experiences for new teachers.
OPPORTUNITIES

At the outset of this reflective chapter, I intimated that I received no real training for my work as a university supervisor. Given that I was not entirely new to the program, but rather an old member with a new role, I suspect a lot was assumed in terms of what I knew or did not know. I was regarded as, and in fact identified as, a novice, but the expectation that I was familiar enough with the program to the work effectively was probably shared. With the benefit of hindsight and several more years of experience, I have come to realize that I was actually surrounded by outlets for learning and training despite the absence of any sort of Supervision 101-type space.

Talking as Training

In the teacher education program of which I was a part, there was “hidden” mode of training for new university supervisors and graduate teaching assistants. Absent a formal series of training sessions whereby newcomers might be asked to adopt certain prescribed norms of practice, our program seemed to operate under a more open-ended talking-as-training model of induction. Through the process of sharing experiences with peers, asking questions, and, in some cases, defending positions and beliefs, each of our teacher educator perspectives were refined. With that in mind, it is now clear to me that all of us were in some sense “in training.” While I was perhaps the most novice member of the department throughout most of my tenure in the program, a function of experience in years, I sense that each of us were in a process of becoming teacher educators, university supervisors specifically.

As I have suggested elsewhere, I was fortunate to be a part of program where certain structural elements were in place to foster my development as a novice supervisor. Of particular value was the seminar space that was attached to our graduate coursework. In brief, the seminar was a space for dialogue about practice. The seminar was populated primarily by graduate students in the social studies education program, but faculty were also invited to attend and sometimes did so where schedules permitted. Primarily, though, the seminar was a graduate space hosted by our program coordinator. The seminar typically met twice per month on Friday afternoons and sessions were generally two to three hours in duration. With regard to content, the space was thoroughly open-ended. Although we elected at times to explore particular topics determined in advance of our meeting, the seminar generally assumed an open-forum, roundtable-type format.

Talking about supervisory practice with colleagues deliberately and frequently was perhaps the best training for the work that I could have received. Talking through the work allowed me to move toward developing my own practice of supervision, one reflective of broader program goals, but in which I was personally and philosophically invested. In the first place, the sharing of experiences that took place in the seminar
was my primary means of understanding the practices of my colleagues. In other words, participation in the space ensured contact with other members, preventing any tendencies that we might have had toward isolation. Without suggesting that participation was forced, which I think would be an overstatement, the expectation of attendance more or less guaranteed a certain degree of connectedness. That connectedness, in real ways, contributed greatly to the health of our program and the type of teacher education practices represented.

It was also through the seminar space that I was able to highlight my successes, explore concerns, and develop new directions going forward. In sharing our individual experiences regularly, I was exposed to new ideas and new possibilities. The supervisors with whom I was in company represented a diverse range of perspectives. Moreover, the contexts of the schools in which we were each working, as well as the student teachers themselves, were reflective of a wide range of possibilities. Hearing those stories, and perhaps more importantly, the rationales behind pedagogical decisions made, was quite valuable. Even where we found ourselves at odds over particular approaches or responses to supervisory contexts, the dialogue was, for me, quite a valuable source of learning. Simply stated, exploration of the decisions made and questions raised by my colleagues allowed me to better understand my own practice. And finally, the seminar provided an outlet of support as the space sent the clear message that a lack of certainty in my work was not unique to me, nor entirely undesirable.

I am not certain that the seminar was intended to model effective supervisory practices and I tend to believe that it was not. It is now clear to me, however, that my supervisory work came to resemble rather closely the exercise of talking through the work of teacher education. In the same way that I was asking students to think through their practice, I was thinking through my own with colleagues in a different setting. In a sense, the developmental process that I was going through was not unlike that of becoming a new social studies teacher, even if the conversations and topics of discussion may not have looked precisely the same.

The seminar space has affected virtually all of the graduates, and likely faculty, affiliated with the program. It was a unique feature that continues to raise important questions about the possibilities and purposes of teacher education programs, those specific to the social studies or otherwise. But the seminar, a formal, institutional feature of the program, was not the only space of its kind, nor was it the only influence on my practice. Aware of the unique opportunities available to us as a diverse set of university supervisors, several sub-groups formed outside of the seminar with the intent to focus intently and specifically on the practice of supervision. And, although the more inclusive, formal seminar represented a space for open dialogue, our subsidiary spaces were perhaps even freer, and less guarded, given the unranked make-up of participants. Much of the dialogue represented in this chapter extends from my collaborative engagements in those secondary spaces, an indication of the value that talking through supervisory work has had on my developing practice.
Program Character, Goals, and Objectives

Now that I find myself in a new institution, with new goals and program objectives, it has occurred to me that those goals and objectives really do matter, and, in fact, they matter quite a lot. Throughout this exploration of my experience of becoming a university supervisor, I have hinted at the role that I believe the unique aspects of a particular social studies teacher education program played in my entrée to field-based supervision, and in the ongoing development of my practice. The presence of a break-out session whereby pre-service teachers and university supervisors could collaborate outside of those several formal, observational contexts was a significant asset. Similarly, the official and unofficial collaborative seminar spaces that I have described were essential to my growth and my practice of field-based supervision. The five core themes, and the commitment to those themes, though at times, perhaps, in distinctive ways, were also critically important to my supervisory work. As I have stated, without the shared commitment to such conceptions as rationale-based practice, I suspect that my efforts would have been even more complicated and complex than they were. But beyond those structural components of the program, there were other, perhaps less tangible elements that provided real opportunities for growth, both my own and the student teachers with whom I was working.

I can say with confidence that I was a part of a program that valued a certain type of teaching, and thus, certain forms of supervisory practice. Those were not necessarily explicitly illustrated for me at the outset, but they existed and shaped the character of the program nonetheless. With few exceptions, university supervision was regarded as an integral part of promoting powerful practices in pre-service social studies teachers. Or, to say it another way, university supervision was understood to be a legitimate and important dimension of teacher education. Supervision was valued by my colleagues and that perspective mattered. With that in mind, the whole notion of “becoming a field supervisor” is a challenging concept to unpack. Becoming a field supervisor often means something quite different from one institution to the next.

CONCLUSIONS

Training for new college and university supervisors is surely in need of revision. Or, perhaps there are quality models in need of publicity. Regardless, it seems reasonable to suggest that models of induction deserve our attention and probably need to be reimagined in many instances. It might be the case that the teacher education program in which I was trained, one that emphasized critical reflection and rationale-based practices, among other core principles, molded teacher educators as university supervisors through processes of dialogue and collaborative inquiry. While my colleagues might have adopted a more explicit, hands-on induction process, the training of university supervisors in traditional, mechanical fashion probably was not possible or desirable in the context of the program. Had my colleagues insisted on certain pre-scripted practices, much
would likely have been lost. Options would have been limited, creativity and ingenuity stifled.

What my experiences highlight, I believe, is that the processes of induction and training that novice supervisors receive has a great deal to do with the objectives and motivations of particular teacher education programs. It has a great deal to do with the relative value attached to field supervision as a component of teacher education more broadly. I have come to understand university supervision and its purposes in the context of a program that valued dialogue, reflection, inquiry, and rationale-based practice over what might be regarded as the more mechanical aspects of teaching (e.g., lesson planning). Others have surely had very different induction experiences, a function of the diversity of teacher education environments. As such, the act of becoming a university supervisor, an ongoing process I now understand, looks rather different from one institution to the next. With that in mind, continued attention to the work of university supervision and the diversity of purpose and practice reveals much and likely provides valuable insight into the broader issue surrounding teacher education, including, among other critical considerations, program design.

NOTES

1 Much of the chapter is informed by a series of transcripts associated with a collaborative self-study undertaken by fellow colleagues and myself in the earliest months of my induction to university supervision. We engaged in and collected a series of unstructured conversations over a two-semester period in an effort to better understand our work as university supervisors.

2 This is a subtle borrowing and reference to Douglas Raybeck’s Mad dogs, Englishmen, and the Errant Anthropologist. The phrase “things go awry” is Raybeck’s comedic way of characterizing his sometimes unglamorous and haphazard work as a budding ethnographer in Malaysia.

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2. THE PROBLEMATOLOGY OF SUPERVISING STUDENT TEACHERS

Conceptualized as a structured space to collaborate with a field-based teacher educator, clinical supervision is typically considered beneficial because of the interactive and collaborative nature of talking together about the work of teaching and learning. Unfortunately, research paints a different picture about what goes on in supervisory conferences. Many researchers have characterized the discourse of supervision as prescriptive, hierarchical, directive, and dominated mostly by the supervisor showing and telling student teachers about the work of teaching (Valencia, Martin, Place, & Grossman, 2009; Veal & Rikard, 1998; Waite, 1995; Zeichner & Liston, 1987). Consequently, the monologic nature of these conferences often provides a dissonant discursive message, contradicting the values often promoted by teacher education. The “living contradiction” (Whitehead, 1989) on the part of field-based teacher educators between promoted values and enacted practice most likely contributes to conclusions that supervision is ineffective (i.e., Bullough & Draper, 2004; Rodgers & Keil, 2006). Additionally, the didactic nature of a conference where supervision is merely faultfinding and monologic does very little to help teachers identify for themselves the problems of teaching, failing to develop the capacity for self-awareness and self-direction of pre-service teachers (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Zeichner, 2005).

Based on the troubling picture of supervision as monologic, I investigated my efforts as a field-based teacher educator to cultivate dialogic spaces in the supervision of student teachers. My exploration revolved around two questions: (1) what kinds of questions do I ask in supervisory conferences? and (2) how do these questions permit or constrain dialogue? Because language is the semiotic tool of teaching and learning, questions are essential in any effort to establish and sustain a dialogic relationship (Burbules, 1993; Gadamer, 2004). Therefore, I hoped that engaging in the problematology (Meyer, 1995) of my work as a supervisor—the study of questioning—would provide some insight into the complexity of constructing dialogic spaces in field-based teacher education. Building on the arguments of those who have suggested that dialogue is an effective tool to engender learning (Fecho & Botzakis, 2007; Hess, 2009; Parker, 2003), I believe that exploring how questions beget dialogue can open up new ways of thinking about the possibilities of constructing more dialogic environments in field-based teacher education. Moreover, with the voices of prospective teachers often muted during the student teaching...
experience (Britzman, 2003; Wideen, Mayer-Smith, & Moon, 1998), finding ways to leverage voice by encouraging dialogue seemed like a worthwhile endeavor.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

My exploration relied on two theoretical lenses to understand the role of questions in dialogic supervision: the power of dialogic inquiry in advancing learning in teacher education and the agency of field-based teacher educators to actively construct their supervisory spaces.

The Role of Dialogue and Questions in (Teacher) Education

Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) claimed that our ideological development was “an intense struggle within us for hegemony among various available verbal and ideological points of view, approaches, directions, and values” (p. 346). Therefore, “with whom, in what ways, and in what contexts we interact will determine what we stand to learn” (Freedman & Ball, 2004, p. 6). Like many others who have placed “social” at the center of learning (Dewey, 1916/2007; Leon’tev, 1981; Vygotsky, 1981), Bakhtin also believed that the interanimation of voices in dialogue was what made learning possible. For Bakhtin (1973), if ideas remained isolated in a person’s head, they degenerated. In order for ideas to take shape, develop, and give birth to new ideas, they needed to into dialogic relationships with other foreign ideas. He wrote, “Human thought becomes genuine thought, i.e., ideas, only under the conditions of a living contact with another foreign thought, embodied in the voice of another person, that is the consciousness of another person as expressed in his word” (p. 71). However, for an interindividual exchange to take on a “dialogic quality” the speakers must take on an active responsive attitude toward each other, where “partners do not talk at cross purposes” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 360). In genuine dialogue, participants are focused on the meanings being co-constructed. In this sense, dialogue is not merely a verbal volley between two individuals, but an epistemological and ontological orientation that requires a reciprocal responsive attitude. As Bakhtin (1986) succinctly noted, “with explanation there is only one consciousness, one subject; with comprehension there are two consciousesses and two subjects” (p. 111).

Because understanding in dialogic exchange emerges when we orient ourselves to the utterances of our partner, discovering their beliefs, values, and experiences requires a questioning spirit that animates and maintains dialogic engagement (Burbules, 1993). Tacitly, questioning lies at the heart of dialogic exchanges. More explicitly however, questions in dialogic turns serve to clarify, analyze, and continue conversation. Given the fact that language is saturated with numerous meanings (Bakhtin, 1981), questions in dialogic exchanges can help us sort or elicit information to gain greater understanding. In other words, questions serve as a tool to pry into the thinking of others. It is in this capacity that questioning is most familiar with educators.
At best, questions in classrooms challenge authority (Morson, 2004), foster knowledge creation (Dewey, 1933/1981), and ultimately generate more questions (Hunkins, 1989). Unfortunately, in many classrooms, questions are used to reify teacher authority and manipulate students toward pre-determined endpoints (Dull & Morrow, 2008). Teachers typically utter questions to transmit knowledge or assess how much teacher-defined knowledge students have retained. These “apparent” questions asked in order to attain limited responses further calcify the authoritarian position of the teacher and serve little educational value (Matusov, 2009).

In the supervision of student teachers, the prevalence of apparent questions is regrettably the same. Waite (1993) in a study of supervisory conferences concluded that supervisors used uncritical and vague questions that were uttered merely to obtain acceptable responses. This feature of supervisor talk during conferences led to supervisors controlling much of the discussion and floor during meetings. As a result, the limited participation on the part of the teacher being observed led to little reflection or growth. Although other studies of supervisory conferences do not explicitly address the role of questions in supervisory discourse, the endemic depiction of supervision as monologic, uncritical and prescriptive (Guyton & McIntyre, 1990), taken together with the continual critique that supervision does not influence teacher learning can lead to the belief that the dynamic level of supervisory conferences—the ability of questions to stimulate additional questions and answers (Hunkins, 1989)—is as limited and uncritical as in the Waite study.

Given the central place of questions and questioning in sustaining dialogue, the lack of, or limited dynamism of questions in supervisory conferences must be troubled. As many researchers have noted, one of the major impediments of the student teaching experience is that the “pull” of traditional forms of schooling are difficult for student teachers to overcome (Putnam & Borko, 2000; Britzman, 2003; Zeichner & Liston, 1987). In leveraging dialogue to develop voice, supervisors can help student teachers unravel some of the developing tacit understandings of the work of teaching, schooling, and clarify the relationship between intention and practice. Additionally, in giving our student teachers a pronounced voice in their development, we move against the deficit models of teacher education that attempt to mute prospective teachers (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Grumet, 2010). This liberation, made possible through dialogue, holds significant transformative value in leading to the imagination of new ideas, beliefs, and values during student teaching.

**Active Construction of Pedagogy in Teacher Education**

Because any understanding of teacher education depends on the pedagogies and perspectives of practice teacher educators ultimately enact (Dinkelman, 2010), this study was grounded in a constructivist paradigm. From this perspective, my pedagogy as a supervisor was actively generated and transformed by the patterns I was able to construct. Of course, my work as a supervisor was always embedded in social, political, cultural, and historical contexts. However, within these contexts existed
agency to shape and reshape reality. It is from this theoretical perspective that I saw my work as a university supervisor. Although there are certainly discursive structures that can inhibit dialogue in supervision such as power imbalances, the elucidation of, and work against these structures—such as assumptions that supervision must be monologic—can in some ways reframe the way supervision is done. In other words, I considered the pedagogical moments in the processes of supervision as an interactive endeavor that I actively had a hand in shaping. As Loughran (2006) has contended, pedagogy in teacher education involves a “knowledge of teaching about teaching and a knowledge of learning about teaching and how the two influence one another in the pedagogic episodes that teacher educators create to offer student of teaching experiences that might inform their developing views of practice” (p. 1180). Because university supervision is no less a pedagogical encounter than any other mode of teacher education, developing an understanding of how I constructed my supervision can provide an important piece of the teacher preparation puzzle.

CONTEXT

Judy and Jane (pseudonyms) were pre-service teachers in the final semester of their secondary social studies teacher preparation program. The student teaching experience at Southeastern University (pseudonym), like at many institutions, was the capstone experience of teacher preparation. Both student teachers were secondary social studies education majors, and had taken a number of teacher education courses including introduction to social studies education, social studies methods, curriculum, and teaching United States history. Before being assigned as their university supervisor, I was the curriculum instructor for both student teachers the prior semester and taught Jane in the introduction to social studies course, and Jane and Judy in the teaching United States history course.

The two student teachers in this study were placed in Gray County (pseudonym), a geographically diverse county with pockets of poverty and affluence. Judy, a White female in her early twenties was placed in an 11th grade United States history class at Myers High School. Jane, a white female in her early twenties taught State history to 8th graders at Maltese Middle School. At the time, I was a third year Hispanic doctoral student in my early thirties who had been supervising student teachers since I began my graduate studies. Although the work of supervision was initially a difficult transition for me to manage (see Cuenca, 2010), a I progressed through graduate school I had begun to formulate a pedagogical perspective on my work. Influenced by the innumerable dynamics of becoming an academic and teacher educator I saw—and continue to see—the power of dialogue as a catalyst for learning.

THE PROBLEMATOLOGY OF MY SUPERVISION

Returning to the transcripts, and field notes, revealed three types of questions during my supervisory conferences: (1) summative reflection; (2) intrapersonal reflection;
and (3) phenomenological reflection. Below I detail an operational definition, purpose, and an example of each of the question types. Afterward, I provide a brief discussion on what how these questions supported and challenged my attempts to cultivate dialogue in supervision.

**Summative Questions**

As expected, many of my supervisory conferences were peppered with broad questions about the lesson I was about to, or had already observed. In virtually all of my pre-observation conferences, I began with the prompt, “tell me about the lesson I’m about to observe.” After students provided some sort of explanation, I usually followed up with something like, “what problems do you see with this lesson” or “what do you think will cause you the most problems during the lesson?” Using these summative type questions, my goal was not just to get my student teachers to recall the lesson, but to process the entirety of a lesson, pitfalls and all. Also, because as a novice teacher (and still to this day as a novice teacher educator) I remember having the tendency to think about methods as “plug and play” where I would read about a new idea and not think through the context of these lessons for my classroom, I considered these summative questions as a way to mitigate that potential impulse in my student teachers. In trying to get my students to gain a “birds-eye” (Reflective journal, March 1) perspective on the intricate symbiosis of planning and instruction, I also hoped to model for my students the kinds of questions they should be asking themselves as they conceptualize a lesson.

In my post-observation conferences, summative questions served a similar strategy. However, the use of these kinds of questions in post-observations also served a mining function. In starting post-observation meetings with summative questions about their lesson, I was looking to do more than just model what a post-lesson analysis should look like. In their response, I actively searched for phrases, ideas, concepts, and tensions that surfaced and served a pedagogical purpose on my part as a supervisor. For example, in an early observation with Judy (February 4), I asked her my typical summative question of “what went well?” In her response, she mentioned that she liked that students were asking her a lot of “why is that or what is this” questions. However she also began to doubt her ability to answer student-initiated questions: “my biggest worry though was my content…I’ll be honest, some of the answers I gave my students, I’m sure you noticed, was just like kind of saying something to not feel stupid, I was. There was a couple of answers I was like shoot, I don’t really know, which I hate that feeling.” At this point in the conversation, I felt that Judy was falling into the common “teacher as content expert” myth that many student teachers experience (Britzman, 2003). Our conversation continued…

Alex: Don’t worry Judy, some kids just give you doozies and you’re like wow, I’ve never heard anyone ask that question. It’s part of teaching, you’re not
going to know the answer to every question, you’re not a compendium of US history knowledge, there will be questions you just don’t have an answer for.

Judy: Yeah, it’s weird how like a teacher, I feel there’s certain questions I don’t mind saying I don’t know. For instance, Maria asked me about the deficit. Does she really expect me to be able to tell her the answer is? I don’t know…I just hate it when they ask me something, and I’m like darn, I should have known that.

Alex: I wouldn’t fret. The answer you gave your students was more than sufficient…

The summative question not only opened a pedagogical opportunity, but also provided me with a chance to reassure the Judy’s work and decisions as a developing student teacher. In addition, the summative question provided an entrance to scaffold further reflection on the act of planning and/or teaching. Usually, after a few exchanges with my student teachers, I would turn the summative question around, and ask them to reflect back on the negatives of the lesson.

As “conversation starters” summative questions provided an opportunity to mine their developing understandings of the lessons I observed. Certainly their vagueness and apparent openness can be problematic. One can imagine, and I have experienced, instances where the response to a summative question like, “what do you think went well?” leads to the response, “everything went pretty well.” Although there are innumerable reasons for this kind of response (i.e., supervisor/student teacher relationship, power dynamics, introverted student teacher, student teacher having a bad day, the genuine belief that everything went pretty well), the summative question still opens the door to conversations and opportunities to mine even the briefest of responses.

Intrapersonal Reflection

Intrapersonal reflection questions were the most common kind of question I asked during my supervisory practice. These questions were intended to help student teachers voice their developing understanding of the work of teaching. Usually, I phrased intrapersonal questions by asking students what they thought they learned about students or content during the lesson. More focused than summative questions, intrapersonal reflection questions aimed to capture student teachers’ thoughts about the complex relationship between self, students, and subject (McDonald, 1992; Hammerness, et al., 2005). By interrogating students about what they learned from certain moments, situations, or circumstances of teaching, my use of intrapersonal reflection questions sought to surface and give voice to the implicit thinking behind teaching. After observing a lesson where Jane asked her students to analyze difficult pictures of pictures of the Holocaust, I asked her the following intrapersonal question:

Alex: What did you learn about your students now that you’ve seen them interact with these pictures?
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Jane: They can handle things, their not babies. They can deal with things. For the most part, they showed me they were grown ups—I mean, not grown ups, but they’re young adults.

From Jane’s response, I was able to dig a little more into this new understanding that her middle school students can “handle” the difficult knowledge of the Holocaust, and I continued to interrogate this thinking:

Alex: They can do a little more, yeah. What gave you that impression?
Jane: Just the conversation and that they—even the really bad pictures, their reaction wasn’t bad. Yes, they understand that these pictures were horrible, but I didn’t see anyone that was totally distraught. I was like, ok, they can handle something a little more drastic next time.
Alex: Yeah, I totally agree…

The intrapersonal question of what Jane learned about her students in this lesson provided me an opportunity to vocalize, and hopefully sear the realization that emerged from the acts of teaching. In attempting to capture the broader implications of lessons through intrapersonal questioning, I hoped to not only cultivate a reflective disposition in my student teachers, but also develop the idea that teaching is a profession of lifelong learning.

Phenomenological Questions

The idea of teaching as a reflective practice has become engrained in teacher education vernacular. In cultivating a reflective practitioner teacher educators often structure activities or opportunities where pre-service teachers can reflect on action, where the practitioner pauses or stops altogether and looks back on action. However, as Vagle (2006) has suggested, in teacher education, reflection in action, is often overlooked, and lies at the center of being a reflective practitioner. In looking for a phenomenology of practice in education, Vagle suggested that we must actively investigate the moments of pedagogical interactions. Following his lead, I have sought opportunities in my supervision to question and unpack the phenomenology of the practice of teaching with my student teachers. This attention to the work of teaching during teaching is illustrated in the phenomenological questions that I asked during post-observation conferences, questions directed toward unpacking certain moments and decisions in the midst of teaching. Given the situated nature of teaching, having students consider their reflections in action during post-observation conferences seemed like a worthy goal. As I detail in my journal, I wanted to closely examine when a student teacher “turns right and not left” as they taught (March 2).

In one particular example, I asked Jane to reflect on her thinking about active student engagement as she walked around the classroom when she broke up her students into smaller groups. Mostly, her response reveals that she lamented a
decision to interrupt the group activity by asking her students to turn in a previous day’s project, a baseball card and speech activity.

Alex: Let’s talk about active student engagement. At what moments did you see that your students were engaged in the activity?

Jane: Sure, for the most part I think my students were with me. When I let them do the interview, and then started asking about the baseball cards and the speech, which I shouldn’t have done, they started talking or I felt like—maybe they were talking about the interview, I don’t know—but from what I could hear, I was like, ok, they’re not really reading or talking about the assignment.

I continued to probe her understanding of the phenomenon of student engagement through a drawing I made of her class set up during the observation.

Alex: I drew a little rough sketch of your class, it’s probably pretty bad, but here it is. While you were asking questions back and forth on all three parts of the activity, if you had to think about a distribution of where there was the most activity in these five tables, where would it be?

Jane: These and maybe one over here.

Alex: [Pointing to where she didn’t point] Then what was going on I guess here?

Jane: This group has a lot of people and I guess maybe I should move because they don’t tend to, they are kind of standoffish, and never want to have anything to do with me. So, maybe if I moved and sat somewhere different I could make them talk. Also, I was conflicted with what to do with groups that were done 5 minutes before everyone else and were just kind of chilling out. Like I don’t have an extra assignment to give them, and it kind of made me feel like I should just not worry about it. I mean, should I just let the chill for five minute? That’s when I made the decision, okay, you are all done. But then I ran into the problem of some groups still needing time.

Alex: Without a doubt there are tradeoffs to group activities, and I do think that you made the right decision at that point to cut off. Where the magic number is, I’m not sure, I think it’s a professional judgment call you make, and again, I think you made a good one.

From this sequence, I launched into the intrapersonal question “what adjustments can you make for next period?” Through the phenomenological questions, I wanted to provide an entrance to question, the on the spot thinking of teaching. More colloquially known as thinking on one’s feet. What I enjoyed and made an active effort to welcome from these phenomenological questions was the doubt that often crept in the midst of immediate decision-making. Getting at this kind of thinking is what I believe is one of the more valuable contributions of university supervisors
to teacher education. With the situated and idiosyncratic nature of teaching, there is only so much we can do in teacher education to prepare teachers for the work and act of teaching. However, as field-based teacher educators, surfacing the interactive pedagogical, instructional, and curricular thinking required of teachers is an important part of our work. In trying to get students to construct a phenomenology of practice, and reflect on reflections in action, I hope to help my students learn about learning from practice.

DISCUSSION

My self-exploration surfaced three types of prevalent questions in my supervisory conferences: summative, intrapersonal, and phenomenological. As noted above, these kinds of questions provided me access to the pedagogical thinking and reflections of my student teachers. For the most part, I was pleased with the conversations that ensued from our post-observation meetings, and the ideas that were batted around about teaching, learning to teach, students, and schooling. Yet, my perception of the success of these questions in tapping into “teacher thought” was not problem-free. Foremost was the power dynamic that continues to resonate with my position as a university supervisor. As much I tried to distance myself from the authority of my position by telling my student teachers that I was a collaborator, not a judge of their work, my position of authority saturated the questions I asked and the responses I received. Although I was actively looking for ways to assuage my authority by trying to position myself as a co-participant in the learning to teach experience, I was also aware that my questions demanded a response based on the institutional authority of being a university supervisor. In essence, the dialogue at times felt artificially created by our positioning as supervisor and student teacher.

Looking back at my exchanges with Judy and Jane, I also wonder about the educative value of my questions. From my perspective, the questions I asked stimulated reflection about certain issues, decisions, and moments of teaching. However, what is the added value of that reflection? As Zeichner (1996) noted, there is no such thing as an unreflective teacher. Therefore, what purpose did I really serve during my post-observation conferences? Certainly, one can argue that simply voicing these developing understandings did not really serve much of a purpose. Perhaps a journal would be equally as effective as a “tool” for drawing these reflections out. On the other hand maybe the idea that problematizing certain aspects of an experience in person provided an important pedagogical model for the aspects of classroom life that needed questioning. This is an issue that is still unresolved in my pedagogical practice.

Perhaps the most troubling aspect looking back at the questions I asked was the lost opportunities to continue conversations about teaching and learning. In revisiting my work, I realize that I often shifted the conversation without actively listening to my students. I moved on without acknowledging what my student teachers said. In trying to cultivate dialogue in supervision, this was the most problematic issue
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that I faced. My journals revealed that at times, the decision to move on was just a courtesy. I knew my student teachers were responsible for teaching the next period, and I had a limited amount of time, so I wanted to get in as much in as I could. However, in other moments, I would simply barrage students with questions and then move to the next topic, what Tannen (2005) described as the “machine-gun” questioning style. This interrogative technique in my supervision troubles me. By simply asking a laundry list of question I exhibited my lack of actively listening to my students reflections and developing understandings. My apparent disregard for what my student teachers were expressing through the questions I was asking also reified the hierarchy of the supervisor/student teacher relationship. In controlling the floor, I wrestled the agency from my student teachers, and by default silenced them.

Although there were several instances when my summative, intrapersonal, and phenomenological questions led to a dialogic exchange where both the student teacher and I asked questions of each other, and interrogated our experiences with teaching. These moments, at least for me, are too far and few between. The fusing of horizons that is possible through dialogic exchange and questioning occurred in bursts, but not in a sustained manner through the pedagogical moments of my supervisory experience.

CONCLUSIONS

A common refrain in teacher education is asking teachers to go “against the grain.” Encouraging teachers to actively push back at the common educational practices is vogue in the professional preparation of many teachers. Unfortunately, this against the grain lens is rarely turned on ourselves as teacher educators. What are we doing to reify the grain in teacher education? Moreover, what constitutes a “grain” practice in teacher education? In looking at the literature on supervision, the monologism endemic in supervisory spaces in teacher education seems like a “grain” practice. By interrogating the types of questions that I asked during the supervision of my student teachers, I hope to shed some light on my efforts to work against monologue and promote dialogue in field-based settings. However, as is evidenced above, despite my best intentions, I still continue to fall into “grain” practices, intimating authority and not collaboration with my student teachers.

Teacher education, much like teaching, is plagued by a chronic uncertainty of effectiveness (Labaree, 2004). Even in claiming what we believe is good pedagogy in teacher education, this doesn’t necessary translate into results. Yet, this realization should not preclude us from enacting and working toward visions of good pedagogy. As teacher educators, we must analyze and interrogate our thinking and question the role that questions play in our pedagogical practice. In letting the self bother itself (Britzman, 1988), we can surface the fissures that often appear between the thought and action of field-based supervision.
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