The Complexities and Discourse of Supervision for Equity and Justice in Teaching and Teacher Education

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Abstract

Supervision is essential to the preparation, support, and retention of teachers and other educational professionals. There are many models and responsibilities of supervisors at all levels. We discuss responsibilities of supervision during teacher preparation, within school contexts, and equity and freedom minded supervision. Additionally, we introduce this special issue. The special issue explores both the complexity and discourse found within situations and contexts pertaining to equity and social justice. Exploring cases of supervision allows for reflection, discussion, and problem solving. Each of these cases call for support and preparation for supervisors as they work within contexts and situations where equitable and just supervision is essential.

Keywords

case study; supervision; equity; justice

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Introduction

Supervision is essential in both the development and retention of PreK-12 teacher candidates, teachers, and school leaders. Supervision can take many forms and be included in individuals' roles and responsibilities: (1) administrators (principals, vice-principals, superintendents), (2) instructional support personnel (coaches, curriculum coordinators, assigned mentors), (3) informal collaborations (planning groups, peer confidants), and (4) research or university partnerships (student teaching triad, grant projects, professional development, and other collaborations). The variety of supervision roles also points to the value in varied supervision approaches and outcomes. Although assessment and accountability have undoubtedly begun to creep into supervisory roles, particularly for administrator supervision, the overarching goal of supervision remains teacher instructional improvement (Garman, 2020). The schooling disruptions that resulted from COVID-19 continue to highlight that supervision and accountability are not suited to addressing persistent schooling and learning discrepancies (Mette, 2020). Analyzing models of supervision reveals the complexities and discourse found within the supervisory roles and responsibilities as we focus on experiences with equitable and just approaches to supervision that provide a positive learning environment for PreK-12 students who are minoritized, marginalized, and otherized (Banks, 2013; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Freire, 1970, 2018; Gay, 2010; Giroux, 2020).

Supervision Responsibilities within Teacher Preparation

A mentor teacher and a university supervisor often supervise teacher candidates for them to build strategies, increase confidence, and ultimately succeed (Albasheer et al., 2008; Ediger, 2009; Flushman et al., 2019). "The quality of clinical experience depends heavily on the kind of coaching, supervision, and support prospective teachers receive as they develop their practice" (Grossman, 2010, p.5)**.** Often the mentor teacher is beneficial to teacher candidates (Bates & Rosaen, 2010; Borko & Mayfield, 1995; Matsko et al., 2020). Guenther and Wexler (2021) call on teacher preparation programs to provide professional learning and support for mentor teachers as increased focus in teacher preparation continues shifting toward equitable and just teaching practices. With most mentor teachers being white females, it is essential for mentor teachers to grapple with their bias and understanding through targeted time, resources and learning opportunities provided by teacher preparation programs to increase successful alignment of preparation (Guenter & Wexler, 2021).

A few studies have found the university supervisor to be a meaningful support in teacher candidate growth and development (Blanton, Berenson & Norwood, 2001; Smith & Souviney, 1997; Livers, 2012; 2016). Cuenca (2010) presented a conceptual framework supervision model for university supervisors. A combination of caring attitude, pedagogical thoughtfulness, and pedagogical tact; these three combine to allow for the university supervisor to focus on reflection, be adaptive, provide meaning to choices, and support through connections of theory to practice (Cuenca, 2010). University supervisors are the connector between the preparation program and the partnering school, they are responsible for keeping the focus on best practice and informing the school partners of the expectations for teacher candidates. As more teacher

preparation programs focus on equitable and just teaching practices (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009; Mills & Ballantyne, 2016), the role of university supervisors is essential.

For the multiple layers of support to be successful for teacher candidates, both the mentor teacher and university supervisor should be carefully selected and receive training and support of their own (Boz & Boz, 2006; Burns & Badiali, 2015; Sykes, et al., 2010). It is also essential for teacher preparation faculty to relate to practicing teachers and university supervisors in order for clear goals and transparency of program expectations (AACTE, 2010; Grossman, et al., 2008; Kern; 2004; Sykes, et al., 2010).

Supervision Responsibilities within Schools

Supporting new teachers has proven important to assist in acclimating and adjusting to the role of teacher (Hobson, et al., 2009; Howe, 2006; Ulvik, et al., 2009; Wang, Odell, & Schwille, 2008). This support can come in many forms: colleague mentor, university partnership, instructional coach, and/ or an administrator. Effective supervision can result in improved teaching, and a greater self-efficacy, and improved student outcomes (DiPaola & Wagner, 2018; Goldring et al, 2018; Mireles-Rios & Becchio, 2018). This is especially the case for novice teachers.

Effective supervision continues to be a dynamic blend of art and science. Although there are robust frameworks for supervision used in schooling for more than two decades (Glickman, Gordon & Ross-Gordon, 2017).), these frameworks remain only as effective as the individuals engaged in the supervisory relationship. The new positioning of principals from school managers to instructional leaders increases the needed supports to aid them in this nuanced work of supporting teachers' growth and instructional practice (Goldring et al., 2020; Honig & Rainey, 2020; Rigby et al., 2019; Thessin & Louis, 2019). Supervisors have noted that they do not have the preparation to address issues around racial injustice (Aveling, 2007; Ishimaru, 2013; Young et al., 2010). This is due to their preparation programs failing to address leadership for equity and justice (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005). "By employing a race-neutral or race-evasive focus in these programs, colleges and universities are effectively perpetuating color-blind racism in schools" (Bridgeforth, 2021, p, 87).

Much of the literature on supervision has focused on the role of school administrators, which is not altogether surprising as it is the role that is most traditionally known for supervision both in and out of educational circles. A growing body of research has begun to show that alternative supervisory rolls play a critical role in the development of schools and teachers (de Lange & Wittek, 2018). Whether this is due to the meshing of supervision, assessment, and accountability common with the administrator role, or other factors, the need for tangible and practical case studies both in administrative supervision and in other supervisory roles is much needed.

Equity and Freedom Minded Supervision

We (humans) have always existed as a diverse body of beings since humanity's beginnings in Olduvai Gorge, Tanzania Africa (Jackson, 2001). It was along the rivers Nile and Yellow that human civilizations developed, only reaching a zenith after establishing healthy

relationships with people groups of differing regions, languages, and cultural patterns (Jackson, 2001). Thus, from a human development purview, the current "demographic imperative" (Banks, 2013), which posits that the U.S. is "increasing in and growing more diverse" can be located and understood as a European colonial response to a societal order predicated on conceptual whiteness as the organizing culture around which our world is structured. Indeed, such a configuration holds significant implications for education including increased alienating interactions between children who are poor, disabled and ethnically, sexually diverse and their predominantly White, English-speaking middle class, heterosexual young women teachers (Smith et al, 2022). As it relates to clinical experiences in teacher education, we have learned that we must recreate supervision, a key component, to address the lived realities and inherent potential of historically marginalized and exploited children, families, and communities. To reach the full potential of equity minded supervision, there must be a shift from culturally blind supervisory practices toward explicit scaffolding of culturally responsive enactments as part of a freedom-minded framework of clinical supervision in teacher education (Jacobs, 2014; Jacobs & Casciola, 2016). It is our contention that as society, and therefore schools become increasingly diverse, it is also important that educator populations also reflect that diversity to the benefit of students, but also society at large. Equity minded supervision is an important component of that shift (Clayton et al, 2020). The cases to follow highlight critical issues related to equitable supervision and offer much to consider as we work toward the spiritual and material freedoms of the many diverse beings inhabiting this planet.

About this Issue

This issue diverges in format and style from the expected *Journal of Educational Supervision* issue. We sought educational cases that would highlight the existing complexities of justice and equity work from a supervisory perspective. We invited cases that provided innovative and promising approaches to supervision or would spark dialogue about approaches that increase learning opportunities for minoritized, marginalized and otherized within PreK-12 classrooms (e.g., Banks, 2013; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Freire, 1970, 2018; Gay, 2010; Giroux, 2020). The cases present readers with the opportunity to depict praxis toward racial and social justice and school transformation within various schooling context communities (e.g., teacher education programs and rural and urban schools) and from a variety of supervisory perspectives (teacher preparation, mentoring/ coaching, school, and district supervisors, etc.). The contexts and perspectives included in each case are particularly relevant and needed to spark reflection, conversation, problem solving, and change among readers.

Gerardo and Saclarides (2022) presents a case situated within the student teaching triad composed of the preservice teacher, mentor teacher and university supervisor. Tensions were displayed highlighting the uneasy equilibrium present in the student teaching triad as competing perspectives were evident regarding responsive instruction for Latinx students.

Similarly, **Baker et al.** (2022) provides a case situated in supporting a preservice teacher that includes a university faculty member's role in navigating and communicating with host schools when problematic practices and topics are encouraged, and teacher candidates are expected to comply.

Graham et al. (2022) also provides a case involving a preservice teacher but further pushes the discussion and dialogue as the principal becomes involved. The preservice teacher's lesson sparks parent concern. This case positions the principal as an instructional leader and highlights the need for the development of leadership content knowledge (LCK).

Jakubowski (2022) focuses on a new principal's supervision within a power imbalance. Specifically, a teacher provides a one-sided lesson on immigration policy. This case displays the ethical responsibilities to students that principals possess, as well as the opportunity for discussion about how to provide directives and supervision.

The authors across each manuscript centered supervision within a conflict highlighting the complexities of providing appropriate supervision within situations pertaining to equity and social justice. These cases provide the opportunity for discussion, problem solving, and will highlight the complex nature of supervision where there are multiple paths and choices, but which of these choices focus on equitable and just supervision. Additionally, these cases highlight areas for future work in the area of supervision of teaching and teacher education.

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A. Minor Baker is an Assistant Professor in the Childhood Education and Family Studies department at Missouri State University where he teaches in the Elementary Education program. Combining praxis and scholarship, his research focuses on supervision for equity and justice in schools, alternative forms of school leadership, community and school collaborations.

Patricia L. Guerra is an Associate Professor in the Education and Community Leadership Program at Texas State University where she teaches courses in equity and social justice leadership and culturally responsive supervision, leadership and school improvement. Her research focuses on issues of equity, teacher beliefs and culturally responsive schooling, supervision and leadership. Her publications have appeared in a variety of scholarly journals including *Journal of Educational Supervision, Educational Administration Quarterly, Journal of School Leadership, Education and Urban Society, Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership*, and in practitioner journals like *Phi Delta Kappan, Principal Leadership,* and *Multicultural Education.* In addition to her work in higher education, over the last 25 years, she has provided professional development (*Developing Culturally Responsive Classrooms & Schools*) to teachers, counselors, and school/district leaders in the field. As a result of this professional development work, she was invited to write a feature on cultural proficiency for the *Journal of Staff Development* (now known as *Learning Professional*) for five years. Previous to her position at Texas State University, she was Co-Director of the Leadership for Equity and Access Project based at the University of Texas at Austin, a Research Associate at the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL), and a school leader and teacher at Texas School for the Deaf.

Melanie M. Acosta engages in work for the learning and lives of African descent children, expressed through careful study of educational excellence emerging out of a culture-centered worldview. Currently, Dr. Acosta is an Associate Professor of Education at Florida Atlantic University where her scholarship centers African American educational principles, processes, and practices in teaching and teacher education. Her research and theorizing are featured in academic journals and community outlets. Dr. Acosta is also Founder and Co-organizer of *Liberate Literacy,* a community-rooted initiative purposed for securing *Better Literacy Learning Options for Black People* through increasing community ownership of children's literacy attainment and growth trajectory. Before her work as a university professor, Dr. Acosta was an elementary school teacher and a community organizer for a grassroots parent empowerment group.