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Beyond Conventional Boundaries: Advancing Equity and Inclusivity in Educational Supervision

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Abstract

This special issue of the *Journal of Educational Supervision*, Cases in Critical Supervision within School Contexts, critically examines educational supervision models, highlighting their limitations in fostering equity and inclusivity. As greater attention and awareness of diverse identities and experiences becomes more common in schools there also needs to be acknowledgement of how supervision is experienced by educators and enacted by instructional supervisors. We argue for a paradigm shift towards more empathetic and diverse supervisory practices that consider the varied backgrounds and needs of students. Throughout this special issue, researchers propose innovative approaches that prioritize collaboration, understanding, and the recognition of the unique potential of every teacher, educator, and student. Empowered with a willingness and an awareness of how educational experiences can be experienced differently, researchers suggest supervisory models to transform educational environments into spaces where all students, especially those from marginalized groups, can thrive.

Keywords

diverse supervisory models; transformational practice; equity-based supervision

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Introduction

As scholars and practitioners of educational supervision practices, we attempt to shed light on the transformative potential of divergent models and conceptualizations in supervision. We discuss supervision very broadly and across multiple contexts: support for teacher candidates and practicing teachers (Glanz, 2022), administrators supporting other administrators (Thessin, 2019), content specific instructional support (Woulfin & Rigby, 2017), teacher groups (Tomal et al., 2014), informal supervision, as well as school university partnerships that provide supervisory or expert support (Jacobs & Burns, 2021). Traditionally, educational supervision has been dominated by a top-down approach, characterized by hierarchical structures that often fail to adequately address the needs and experiences of marginalized, racialized, and othered populations (DiPaola & Wagner, 2018; Espinoza, 2020; Nazareno, 2015). As the field of education slowly shifts toward pedagogy and practice that is mindful and oriented toward diversity, equity, and inclusion, the practice of supervision must also be reconceptualized, practiced, and supported (Cotman et al., 2023; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994). The reliance on conventional methods that have often remained tethered to a one-size-fits-all model, neglects to embrace the diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and needs present in our schools (Delgado-Gaitan, 2006; Gay, 2018; Guerra, 2012; Hollins, 2008). There is a need for supervision practices and development that recognizes and responds to diversity (e.g., developmental variations, neurodiversities, race/ethnicity, language, gender, sexual orientation, economic class, country of origin, culture, community, and certain interests) in order to support others in seeing the brilliance of all students. The case studies presented in this issue challenge this status quo. They represent innovative, equitable, and empathetic approaches to supervision, emphasizing collaboration over authority, and understanding over oversight. These cases illuminate the pathways toward a more inclusive and effective educational environment, where supervision is not a means of control, but a tool for empowerment, growth, and collective success (DiPaola & Wagner, 2018). Through these explorations, we aim to not only critique the limitations of traditional models but more importantly, to highlight and celebrate the transformative power of alternative supervisory practices in creating equitable educational spaces for all.

The transformative power of more humanized supervisory practices is not just important; it is a long-overdue paradigm shift in a landscape that has historically been slow to adapt to the evolving needs of a diverse educator and student population. Traditional hierarchical models of supervision, while providing structure, have often stifled the voices and unique needs of those from marginalized and racialized communities (Cormier & Pandey 2021; Cotman et al, 2023). This oversight not only undermines the potential of educators from these backgrounds but also deprives students of rich, culturally responsive, and inclusive educational experiences (Cotman et al, 2023). The shift towards more collaborative, empathetic, and equitable supervisory models mark a crucial step towards rectifying systemic inequities within our educational systems. Such practices acknowledge the diverse experiences and expertise of educators, fostering an environment where all voices are heard and valued (Yosso, 2005; Yosso & Solorzano, 2005). This approach is vital for nurturing a generation of educators who are not only skilled and knowledgeable but also culturally competent and sensitive to the diverse needs of their students.

While acknowledging the limitations of traditional supervisory practices, it's important not to entirely discard them, as they can provide a foundational structure and consistency vital to

educational settings. However, the knowledge base and practical experiences of this foundational structure must be remade such that the diversity and equity is its chief cornerstone. That is, the foundational structure must bring together and build on the knowledge, theories, and practices of historically and continually exploited and underserved people. This is paramount to undoing institutional and structural inequities at the root of the harm in traditional supervisory practices. This approach fosters a balance between established methods and innovative practices, ensuring that supervision is not just about maintaining standards, but also about evolving and adapting to meet the diverse needs of all students and educators. Such a holistic approach is crucial in steering our educational systems towards an environment that is not only equitable but also deeply engaging and nurturing for every student, replacing the traditional emphasis on rigor with a focus on comprehensive, empathetic, and diverse experiences.

External Factors Clash with Supervisory Purpose

The three articles featured in this special issue, while focusing on diverse aspects of equitable and just supervision in educational settings, operate within a broader educational landscape that is significantly influenced by external factors such as high stakes testing and teacher evaluations. Although these factors are not explicitly discussed in the articles, their impact acts like an invisible string, subtly but powerfully pulling supervisory practices in directions that may not always align with the progressive goals of supervision as discussed in these articles (Mette et al, 2017). High stakes testing and stringent teacher evaluations, often driven by policy mandates and standardized frameworks, can inadvertently create a tension between adhering to these external requirements and pursuing the more emancipatory, inclusive, and relationally focused supervisory approaches highlighted in the articles (Fusarelli & Fusarelli, 2018). This tension underscores a critical challenge in the field of education: navigating and balancing the demands of external accountability measures while striving to implement supervisory practices that truly reflect the needs and realities of teachers, students, schools, and communities (Sullivan, 2015). Acknowledging and addressing this dichotomy is essential for the evolution of supervisory practices that are not only just and equitable but also responsive to the complex, multifaceted environment in which they exist.

Truthtelling in Teacher Supervision: Calls for Change

The three articles collectively contribute to an evolving discourse on the need for more inclusive, responsive, and culturally sensitive approaches in educational supervision. While each article approaches the challenges in supervision from unique angles, they share an overarching thesis: traditional supervisory models in education are often inadequate in addressing the diverse needs of educators and students, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds.

In *"Navigating Challenges in a Non-Open and Affirming Practicum Placement"* the focus is on the experiences of a queer-identifying teacher candidate in a non-affirming educational setting, highlighting the necessity for inclusive and supportive environments in teacher education. This contrasts with *"Early Childhood Field Experience Supervision: Negotiating Praxis,"* which explores the tension between theoretical education and practical application in early childhood settings, underscoring the pivotal role of field supervisors in bridging this gap. Both articles

emphasize the importance of environments that respect and cater to individual identities and educational philosophies.

In “*Relational Supervision: Jegnaship and Eldering as Emancipatory Pedagogy for Black Teacher Supervision and Mentoring*” on the other hand, delves into the cultural and historical aspects of African and African American educational traditions, advocating for a relational, community-focused approach in the supervision of African American teachers. This article introduces the concept of Jegnaship and Eldering, rooted in African pedagogical principles, to create more meaningful and culturally congruent supervisory relationships.

Each article, while distinct in its focus — be it on LGBTQ+ inclusivity, the practical-theoretical divide in early childhood education, or culturally responsive practices for African American educators — converges on the common theme that traditional supervisory models often fall short. They collectively argue for a shift towards supervision that is not just a process of oversight but an empathetic, culturally responsive, and empowering practice. This shared vision points towards a more equitable future for educational supervision, where diverse needs, identities, and backgrounds are not just acknowledged but are central to the supervisory process.

About this Issue

This special issue of the *Journal of Educational Supervision* is the second in a two-part series. The first was published in September 2022 (Livers, et al., 2022) and presented critical supervision cases within teaching and teacher education. This second special issue continues the conversation through the presentation of critical supervision cases within school contexts. The issue does distinguish itself through a unique divergence in format and style, deviating from the traditional academic journal presentations. Central to this issue are a series of case studies, each crafted to emphasize the practitioner's experience in educational supervision. These cases are not merely descriptive; they are interactive and dynamic, designed to provoke thoughtful discussions and reflections. Each individual case includes a narrative, teaching notes, classroom activities, and discussion questions. The discussion questions are particularly valuable within professional learning settings, be it in school professional development sessions or teacher preparation programs, facilitating a deeper exploration and understanding of the authentic challenges and scenarios of supervision. We have provided a synopsis as an outline for this issue.

Howard and Dove (2023) present a compelling case study that delves into the experiences of a queer-identifying teacher candidate, John, within the challenging environment of a non-affirming educational practicum. This case study stands as a poignant exploration of the struggles faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in traditional educational settings, particularly highlighting the stark contrast between non-supportive and supportive environments. Through John's journey, the article sheds light on the profound impact that the atmosphere of a practicum placement can have on the mental health, professional development, and overall well-being of teacher candidates. The narrative underscores the critical importance of fostering inclusive and supportive spaces within teacher education programs, emphasizing that such environments are not just beneficial but essential for the growth and empowerment of all students, irrespective of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

This case study not only offers insights into the specific challenges faced by queer-identifying individuals in education but also serves as a critique of conventional supervisory approaches in teacher preparation. By juxtaposing John's experiences in two vastly different classroom settings, the article compellingly argues for the necessity of moving beyond traditional, hierarchical models of supervision that often overlook the needs of marginalized populations. The case pushes for a more equitable and just approach to supervision, one that embraces diversity and cultivates spaces where all students can thrive. This shift is not only crucial for the individual development of teacher candidates like John but is also instrumental in shaping an educational landscape that is truly inclusive, empathetic, and reflective of the diverse society it serves. As such, the article stands as a vital contribution to the ongoing discourse on equitable and just supervision in educational settings, championing the need for systemic changes that acknowledge and support the diversity of educator and student populations alike.

Kelly (2023) explores the complex interplay between university teacher education programs and host school districts, particularly focusing on the challenges of aligning theoretical and research-based methods of early childhood coursework with the realities of classroom practice. The case study presented in the article examines the tensions and conflicts that arise from differing expectations and requirements of educational institutions, and the subsequent impact on fieldwork supervision.

The article highlights the critical role of field supervisors in navigating these complexities, serving as a bridge between university classrooms and primary classrooms. It delves into the difficulties faced by teacher candidates and mentor teachers in negotiating rigid curricular programming while maintaining professional partnerships. The case study specifically addresses the challenges posed by school and district-wide mandates, which often override pedagogical and developmentally appropriate practices, thereby posing significant hurdles for teacher candidates striving to apply culturally responsive teaching and leading standards in real-world settings.

The narrative underscores the importance of effective communication and collaboration in resolving these challenges. The article posits that the adoption of initiatives like Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leading standards by university teacher education programs must translate effectively into fieldwork. It calls for a deeper understanding and reconsideration of supervisory roles and approaches, advocating for a more integrated, responsive, and equitable framework of supervision. This case study pushes against traditional supervision approaches by emphasizing the need for flexibility, adaptability, and an understanding of the diverse educational contexts in which teacher candidates operate. Such an approach is not only crucial for the professional growth of teacher candidates but also for the advancement of educational practices that are truly inclusive and responsive to the needs of diverse student populations.

Strozier and Acosta (2023) delve into the rich cultural and historical foundations of African education, emphasizing the vital role of elders and community in the learning process. This article, set within the context of African and African American educational traditions, explores how these philosophies, deeply rooted in the experiences of African people during the Middle Passage, can be adapted and applied in Western contexts for the mentoring and supervision of African American teachers. The case intertwines culture, history, education, and storytelling to

underscore the unique contributions and strategies derived from African American educational experiences, arguing for their significance in the liberation struggle and the transformation of Black teacher development.

The core of the article revolves around the importance of relational supervision, a concept firmly anchored in African and African American cultural knowledge. This approach is seen as pivotal for nurturing Black novice teachers and fostering their professional development. The article presents a critique of the existing supervisory models in education, which often fail to acknowledge and support the diverse experiences of African American educators. By highlighting contemporary issues such as the limited presence of African American educators and the pedagogical negligence they often face, the authors propose culturally centered tools for community preservation and well-being. This case study serves as a vital exploration of alternative supervisory practices, emphasizing the need for culturally responsive and emancipatory pedagogies in the supervision and mentoring of Black teachers, thereby pushing against traditional, hierarchical models of supervision and advocating for a more inclusive, empathetic, and equitable approach in educational settings.

We envision both researchers and K-12 practitioners using these cases to support learning around equitable and just educational supervision. Cases provide a meaningful context for learning opportunities for small groups, professional learning communities, mentoring/ coaching support, as well as fuel for discussions in educational courses (Fossey & Crow, 2011). These cases are essential reads for members of teacher preparation programs and school partners. In order to create a more inclusive learning experience for teacher candidates and teachers. We hope these cases can be fuel to support and foster change.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this special issue of the *Journal of Educational Supervision* serves as a small but critical platform for reexamining and reconceptualizing traditional approaches to supervision of teachers and teacher candidates. It is through the thoughtful contributions of our authors, whose diverse perspectives and rigorous analyses have provided a unique focus and approach that challenges the traditional approaches and collectively underscores the imperative for more inclusive, responsive, and culturally attuned supervisory practices.

We extend our deepest gratitude to the reviewers of this special issue. Their diligent efforts, insightful feedback, and unwavering commitment to academic excellence have significantly enriched the quality and depth of each article. Their contributions have been invaluable in shaping this special issue into a meaningful and impactful compilation of work.

Our thanks also goes to the *Journal of Educational Supervision* and its editor, Ian M. Mette, for providing us the opportunity to explore and challenge traditional narratives in supervision. This special issue represents a necessary exploration into the diverse realities and needs within the realm of educational supervision.

Lastly, we must acknowledge and thank all those who continue to engage with the practice and theory of supervision — the scholars, educators, students, and practitioners. Your experiences,

reflections, and continuous efforts form the cornerstone of our collective endeavor to evolve and improve supervisory practices. It is only through our shared commitment and collaborative efforts that we can truly respond to the call for change. This special issue is a testament to that ongoing journey, and we look forward to continued dialogue and advancements in this crucial area of education.

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