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ABSTRACT

This article examines the contextual supervision (CS) model that has been developed and applied in several practicum settings of teacher education programs over the past 12 years. The study synthesizes the research findings on the potential effectiveness of CS in assisting faculty supervisors and classroom cooperating teachers with the task of monitoring preservice teachers to develop their instructional repertoire. The CS model is described, its rationale is presented, research results on its application are summarized, its strengths and limitations are identified, and implications of its usefulness as a mentoring tool to enhance teacher performance are drawn. (Contains 61 references.) (Author/SM)

The Convergence of Supervision and Mentoring Via "Contextual Supervision": Promising Findings

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Biographical Sketch

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Abstract

This article examines the *Contextual Supervision* (CS) model that has been developed and applied in several practicum settings of teacher-education programs over the past twelve years. The study synthesizes the research findings on the potential effectiveness of CS in assisting faculty supervisors and classroom cooperating teachers with the task of mentoring pre-service teachers to develop their instructional repertoire.

The CS model is described, its rationale is presented, research results on its application are summarized, its strengths and limitations are identified, and implications of its usefulness as a mentoring tool to enhance teacher performance are drawn.

I'm desperate! ... . Roma is not communicating with me nor giving me any feedback to speak of.... She says I should know what is to be done and not have to be told. She expects me to know the routines and procedures, and that I must get in there and do it! I am so upset...Could you meet with her and try to help me?

This request from Gwen (a teacher-intern working with Roma, her classroom cooperating teacher) was made to me, the college supervisor, during the third week of the 16-week extended-practicum program in a primary classroom in a rural school in Western Canada.

What has caused this problem? What should each member of the triad do to resolve this dilemma? What can be done to help prevent this and other similar difficulties within the supervisory process from arising in the future?

This paper seeks to answer these questions through the framework of a mentorship model called *Contextual Supervision.*

Contextual Supervision: Its Foundation and Background

Although usage of the term *supervision* in educational circles has been less fashionable than applying such labels as *mentoring, coaching, induction* or *professional development* (Glickman, 1992), the fundamental aim undergirding all of these processes is the same (Lasley, 1996; Shanker, 1996, Scherer, 1999). This essential aim of these processes is for experienced professionals (who already possess a certain degree of knowledge and skills) to assist their novice colleagues to develop and/or improve professionally (Glatthorn, 1990). In fact, a review of the related body of literature spanning the last half-century reveals that the key objective of all instructional supervision (regardless of its unique label) was and is -- and in all likelihood will continue to be -- to enhance the teaching/learning process (Wasley, 1999), for all age-levels, subject areas, and contexts. Thus, in this paper, supervision and mentorship are used interchangeably.

Description of Contextual Supervision

Contextual Supervision (CS) is a mentorship model that may be used by *supervisors* (i.e., experienced individuals in either permanent or temporary mentoring roles) to promote the professional development (i.e., the acquisition or the improvement of job-related skills, tasks, or

knowledge) of *supervisees* (i.e., individuals in this relationship whose goal is to learn or improve these specific skills or tasks, Ralph, 1993a, 1996, 1998, 2000, in press).

Within the perspective of the CS approach, this learning experience occurs within a particular context that is unique in terms of the participants involved in the mentorship relationship, the task being pursued, and the physical and psychological environment in which it occurs. Thus, the whole process is situational or *contextual*, as indicated by the border in Figure 1.

Insert Figure 1 about here

The CS model is rooted in the original *Clinical Supervision* approach developed by Cogan (1973) and Goldhammer (1969). Clinical Supervision provides a mentoring framework in which a protégé receives constructive criticism from a supervisor, who observes and coaches the former in his/her practice of professional skills.

As shown in Figure 1, the heart of the CS model is first that the person in the mentorship role varies his/her supervisory style according to the supervisee's particular developmental or readiness level to perform the specific task being learned. Then, as the latter advances in his/her level of development in that particular knowledge component or task, the mentor purposefully adjusts his/her supervisory style to reflect this protégé's growth. Thus, with CS, supervisors do not employ a single best leadership style, but modify it to match the contextual variables unique to the learner with whom they are working in the mentoring relationship. (Ralph, 1993c, 1996, 1998)

The context. As portrayed by the border surrounding the practice component in Figure 1, there are situational factors that affect the mentorship process just as is the case in any human social activity. During the day-to-day routines of work-life these elements become intertwined. These variables may be: psychological, social, organizational, political, cultural and economic.

Although supervisors will recognize the presence and the effect of these factors upon the supervisory process, they often may not be able to alter many of these contextual influences. However, they are able to modify their own task and support responses (e.g., see Ralph, 1993b;

Stones, 1984), and this, in fact, becomes the critical step in implementing CS.

The practice. The actual mentorship process, which is the central core of Contextual Supervision, is represented in the central portion of Figure 1.

At the core of CS is that the individuals filling the supervisory or mentorship role will vary their supervisory styles in order to meet the professional needs of the novices with whom they are working. This leadership style consists of two dimensions: (a) *task* (i.e., the mentor's concern for the substantive content or subject-matter, the accomplishment of the pre-established objectives, or the quality of the supervisee's performance of the specified skill); and (b) *support* (i.e., the supervisor's concern for providing the human elements of encouragement, positive reinforcement, affiliation, consideration, acceptance, and psycho/emotional warmth). Both of these supervisory elements may vary in the intensity with which they are administered by the mentor -- ranging from low to high levels, as represented along the axes of the S-grid.

Styles and levels. The mentor's style adjustment occurs in direct relation to the supervisee's existing level of development in being able to perform a particular skill being practiced or to internalize the specific material being learned. The supervisee's development level similarly consists of two aspects: his/her *confidence* (i.e., their assurance, poise, security, or comfort level) and his/her *competence* (i.e., current ability, skill, capability, and expertise) in actually performing the particular task or procedure in question. As with the case of supervisory style, both of these developmental components can also range along a continuum from high to low levels.

In the center portion of Figure 1, a pair of grids is shown, each with two axes and four quadrants, which indicate the four typical supervisory styles (in the S-grid) and the four characteristic development levels (in the D-grid). Each of these grids represents a range of possible combinations, but the four quadrants in each grid provide *typical* categories for the purpose of focusing the pair's analysis and action in the supervisory process.

CS and its Relationship to the Broader Field of Supervision

How does the CS model compare to other supervisory approaches in the field of educational administration (Ralph, 1993b, 1998)?

The heart of the practice component represented within the border of Figure 1 is an adaptation of Situational Leadership developed in the 1970s by Hersey and Blanchard (1988). The original Situational Leadership model had initial intuitive appeal for educational leaders in that it was both comprehensible and comprehensive (Schermerhorn, Templer, Cattaneo, Hunt, & Osborn, 1992). However, it was criticized as being too simplistic, reductionist, and unsupported by adequate research; and as with many educational innovations, its original popularity waned (Sergiovanni, 1979).

Ralph (1998) enumerated seven refinements to the Situational Leadership Plan. Based on some of these suggested considerations, he reframed the original Situational Leadership model into the Contextual Supervision approach by incorporating several improvements, three of which are summarized below.

One improvement is CS's commitment to the human values of fairness and respect as guides for the actions of all participants in the supervisory relationship (Ralph, 1996, 1998). A second major modification is CS's direct acknowledgment that supervisory practice is influenced by situation-specific contextual variables, which may exist alone or in varying combinations and degrees of complexity. It is *not* the scope nor function of CS, however, to attempt necessarily to remove or to change these variables, but rather to help participants to recognize the effects of these factors and to take them into consideration in supervisory decisions (Ralph, 1998, 2000). A third key difference between Situational Leadership and CS is that CS provides for a closer fit between the mentor's supervisory style and the supervisee's development (readiness) level throughout the mentorship period.

The rationale supporting CS also incorporates the strengths and avoids the limitations of seven respected supervisory approaches. The CS model, as an adaptation of Situational Leadership (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988; Ralph, 1991, 1992), shares Situational Leadership's advantages: it emphasizes adaptive leadership rather than "one best method"; it is intuitively appealing because it is relatively easy to understand (Caskey, 1988; Hersey, 1985); and it helps bridge the theory-practice gap by clarifying the conceptualization of supervision, holistically, and by offering practical mentorship guidance to individuals in mentorship roles (Niehouse, 1988b).

A second supervisory approach bearing some resemblance to CS is *Developmental*

Supervision (Glickman, 1990). Both CS and Developmental Supervision emphasize self-development, and both follow an interactive process between mentor and protégé in determining the fit of supervisory style with development level. They differ in some areas, however. One difference is that Developmental Supervision appears to be more interventionist, in that supervisors have the responsibility for diagnosing and prescribing what they decide supervisees need. Although CS agrees with Developmental Supervision in assuming that prescriptive structure may be required on occasion, CS is broader than Developmental Supervision in that it provides for supervisee-regulated decisions at the D4 level.

A second difference is that Developmental Supervision has only one middle development category, whereas CS has two (i.e., D2 and D3). CS thereby requires a more refined determination of protégés' developmental-levels by mentors before selecting the appropriate combination of supervisory task and support behaviors in quadrants D2 and D3.

A third model, *Differentiated Supervision* (Glatthorn, 1990, 1997), also shares some commonalities with CS. For instance, both approaches are developmental and appear less prescriptive than Glickman's approach (1900). A main difference between CS and Differentiated Supervision, as was the case with Developmental Supervision, is CS's provision for four rather than for three supervisory styles, a condition which provides for more accurate determination of supervisee skill-specific developmental level. This differentiation in turn facilitates subsequent synchronization of supervisory action within the two middle categories. Similar to Differentiated Supervision, CS retains the high task (directive) mode in S1 and S2 because certain protégés (at the Dl and D2 levels) may not yet have developed the expertise to self-select the type of mentoring they would like for a particular task and thus may require specific supervisory guidance from the mentor.

A fourth supervisory model that shares similarities and differences with CS is Acheson and Gall's (1997) clinical supervisory approach. These researchers advocate the supervisor's application of the four basic leadership styles, as promoted by the Situational Leadership (and the CS) approaches, ". . . depending on the situation" (Acheson and Gall, 1997, p.240). However, they tend to emphasize employing some form of the clinical supervision format (i.e., the planning, the observing, and the feedback cycles) with teachers, regardless of the teachers'

developmental levels.

Yet, research on the supervision and evaluation of experienced teachers shows that the latter generally reject the traditional clinical process of data-recording and oral feedback-giving, in favor of a more collaborative and supportive relationship that stresses the pursuit of mutually established goals between peers (Fullan, 1991; Showers & Joyce, 1996; Showers, Joyce, & Bennett, 1987).

However, it is evident that Acheson and Gall (1997) do acknowledge this fact, when they advocate that an effective supervisor (even though he/she may still employ some semblance of the clinical cycle with an experienced teacher) must consciously seek to: build interpersonal trust in the relationship; apply observational and communication skills delicately; encourage collegial decision-making between/among participants; and maintain a sensitivity and commitment to assisting colleagues to grow professionally.

A fifth supervisory approach with which CS may be compared and contrasted is Waite's (1995) *Situationally Contexted Supervision* model. Both this model and CS acknowledge the intricate web of complexities and unique influences characterizing each supervisory relationship: its participants and their experiences and personalities; the organization, its culture and its history; and the specific conditions under which the players interact in each supervisory environment. Where the two models differ, however, is in how proponents of each approach would respond to these contexts.

Waite (1995) suggests that supervisors and supervisees need to conduct an ethnography of the entire supervisory scenario in which they are involved by examining all levels of the culture (i.e., the formal, the informal, and the technical aspects of their educational environment. They would strive for " . . . supervising the contexts not just the behaviors", p.75). Waite does concede, however, that: "Such an undertaking is a tall order, requiring the investment of untold hours of work. . . . " (p.24); and further that "... it may prove inaccessible to most teachers and students, and hence not inform local concerns" (p. 104).

A key difference between CS and Situationally Contexted Supervision lies in the choice of focus of each model: the latter appears to invert the figure/ground frame by concentrating on the ground aspect (Waite, 1995, p.99), while CS is oriented more toward the figure perspective

— that is, the actual supervisory action in response to protégé level of development in practice.

Furthermore, CS shares some likeness and dissimilarities with a sixth supervisory model, Cognitive Coaching (Costa and Garmston, 1994). A key point of agreement between the CS and Cognitive Coaching approaches is that the goal of the participants in any supervisory process is to: "Learn which stage of transition each person is and then organize the message to be congruent with that stage . . . " (Garmston, 1994, p.66).

One area where the two approaches differ is that the Cognitive Coaching model does not provide a structured framework of four quadrants that specify how mentors typically synchronize their leadership styles to match the task-specific developmental needs of their partners. On the other hand, the Cognitive Coaching model emphasizes specific techniques that mentors would employ as interventions to help protégés at any stage of growth, in order to improve and refine their cognitive processing and decision-making in their respective fields (Costa, 1995). Although the CS model would not discourage participants from employing these cognitive strategies (e.g., mental rehearsal, metacognition, restraint of impulsivity, and analysis/synthesis of experience), CS focuses less on developing generic cognitive skills for supervisees at *all* levels, and more on differentiating supervisor *task* and *relationship* responses at each level to meet supervisees' specific professional needs.

A seventh recognized supervisory approach comparable to CS is Sergiovanni and Starratt's (2002) *Supervision II.* Both models are congruent in at least three aspects: (a) they both avoid the false dichotomy of technical/rational skills vs. interpretive/individual decisions, by including both the traditional management role with the transformational leadership elements in their approaches; (b) they both assert that the *assessment* and the *assistance* aspects of supervision are inseparable activities that need not necessarily be conducted by different individuals; and (c) that supervision (i.e., the interactive process designed to assist both the supervisor and the supervisee to improve their respective professional practice) is contextually-bound and situationally determined, thereby requiring supervisors to accommodate supervisee differences.

The CS model distills much of the information presented in Sergiovanni and Sarratt's (2002) approach into a manageable and practical framework that is immediately applicable by busy supervisors in their mentoring practice—whether they find themselves in university/school

practica, in school district/school site staff-development, or in other staff-evaluation programs.

How is CS Applied?

To implement the CS model in actual practice, mentors apply three steps during their normal supervisory duties: (a) they determine with their protégés the particular instructional task or skill to be practiced and how the supervisory observation will be conducted and how the mentoring feedback will be provided; (b) they ascertain the protégés' specific development levels for the skills being practiced at that point in time; and (c) they synchronize their supervisory style to match that level. This key process is represented in the central portion of Figure 1.

1. Determining the Developmental Task

For the first step, the supervisory pairs mutually determined the specific teaching skill(s) on which the protégé is to work. Because a critical principle in most colleges' extended-practicum programs is for teacher-interns to become self-evaluative, reflective practitioners (see, for example, University of Saskatchewan, 2002-2003), the teacher-interns in the program in which I work are required to designate on their lesson plans their daily professional targets. These targets are selected form among eight broad categories of effective teaching skill consisting of 85 discrete instructional sub-skills emphasized in the internship program, and they are the skills on which they want their supervisor(s) to provide observational feedback for them. All of these skills are derived from three major sources: (a) the three decades of findings from Teacher Education Research (e.g. Borich, 2000; Wittrock, 1986); (b) the Teaching for Understanding literature (e.g., Cohen, McLaughlin, & Talbert, 1993); and (c) the synthesis of research findings presented by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (1994).

The eight broad teaching skills (i.e., planning, presenting, questioning, responding, conducting classroom management, assessing/evaluating, applying instructional methodologies, and exhibiting personal and professional conduct) each consists of several sub-skills.

The teacher-interns practice these sub-skills in their teaching throughout the practicum, and they receive formal and informal supervisory feedback on their performance from their classroom cooperating teachers and a college supervisor, who is responsible for cohorts of 20 to 25 pairs in one geographical location. The interns also engage in a self-evaluation process because

student teachers who carry out such critical and analytical self-appraisal " . . . are making a rigorous study of the theory and practice of teaching in its most potent exemplification: their own" (Stones, 1984, p.148).

Although the focus, here, is on teaching behaviors, the ultimate goal is for these behaviors to enhance students' learning.

2. Ascertaining the Supervisee's Developmental Stage

In the second phase of implementing the CS model in practice, supervisors determine their interns' skill-specific development level(s), a step that Glickman and Gordon (1987) called the diagnostic phase. Supervisors determine this level in three ways: by observing supervisees in their daily school-based practice; by conversing with them in pre- and post-conferences and in informal discussions; and by asking them specific questions about their instructional decisions/actions and/or their levels of confidence and competence in performing the task or skill in question (Glatthorn, 1990, 1997; Niehouse, 1988a, 1988b; Ralph, 1998, 2003).

The D-grid in Figure 1 shows four developmental quadrants consisting of four typical combinations of supervisee competence and confidence levels. D1 represents a protégé with low competence (or ability) and high confidence (or self-assurance) to perform a certain instructional skill. A D2 level describes supervisees with a low degree of both competence and confidence, who may have experienced a loss of confidence after the initial honeymoon period with a new class.

A learner at the D3 level has low confidence but high competence, and a teacher-intern at the D3 level in classroom management skills may arrive already equipped with many of the necessary abilities to gain students' attention and to motivate them (i.e., they may have high competence), but because of inexperience in school/classroom settings may be uncertain and/or uneasy about how to maintain order when the cooperating teacher is not in the classroom. The D4 level describes a teacher-intern who has developed high levels of both competence and confidence in a teaching skill.

Typically, the majority of beginning teachers start the practicum at the D1 or D2 level, and end it at the D3 or D4 level in the majority of the eight skills.

3. Matching Supervisory Style to Supervisee Development

After ascertaining the supervisee's task-specific developmental level, mentors initiate the

third phase in applying the CS model: to adjust their own task and supportive actions to correspond in inverse proportions to the supervisees' levels of competence and confidence in performing an instructional task. The linkage between the two inner grids in Figure 1 illustrates the ideal matching process. The key to employing CS in practice is this reciprocal or inverse relationship between the dimensions connected to the supervisee's development level (shown in the D-grid of Figure 1) and the mentor's supervisory style (shown in the S-grid of Figure 1. See Ralph, 1992, 1993b, 1996, 1998, 2002b).

For the task/competence relationship, the extent of a supervisor's task or directive response is to be inversely proportionate to the degree of the supervisee's demonstrated competence in a specific skill (e.g. a low level of supervisee ability or expertise to perform the particular skill requires a greater degree of specific supervisory guidance and direction to help the learner master the skill).

For the supportive/confidence relationship, the degree to which the mentor provides the protégé with support and encouragement is inversely proportional to the latter's confidence level to engage in the particular skill being practiced. For example, a supervisee's low confidence level will be reciprocated with the supervisor's response of showing increased encouragement and consideration for the supervisee as he/she practices the skill.

Mentors synchronize the task and supportive dimensions of their supervisory style with the supervisee's respective level of competence and confidence. For example, in the supervisory grid in Figure 1, the S1 quadrant is characterized by the supervisor's high task orientation and low supportive behaviors. Hence, the S1 style is directive, with the supervisor using specific and structured guidance (in order to match the supervisee's low skill level: i.e., "telling"); while at the same time administering less interactive/collaborative support, because of the supervisee's already relatively high D1 level of confidence, willingness, and motivation to practice the skill.

The S2 supervisory style is characterized by high degrees of both task and encouragement responses, to correspond to a supervisee's respective D2 lower competence and lower confidence levels. The mentor using an S2 supervisory style combines a high directive orientation, which was also characteristic of the S1 style, together with a high degree of collaborative support, sharing, and/or positive reinforcement.

Ideally, the mentor meets a learner's D3 level (high competence, low confidence) reciprocally with an S3 style (low task, high support), thereby modifying the extent of the dual task and support elements to assist the protégé in accomplishing the specific task being practiced. The S4 style is a delegating mode of leadership, in which the mentor responds to the supervisee's D4 level (of high competence and high confidence) by providing an inverse supervisory response--less direction and less support. The S4 style does not represent a laissez-faire permissiveness; rather, it empowers the confident and competent protégé with increased authority and responsibility to exhibit more leadership and expertise in a particular field. Mentors implementing S4 will tend to step back and monitor protégés' performance of an instructional task and its results via supervisees' own self-assessments, rather than by supervisory inspection or high directiveness—such as characterized by an S1 or S2 style.

In cases where inappropriate matching of the S and D quadrants occurs, however, the potential for disagreement and conflict between/among the partners increases.

Keys to Implementing CS

The four developmental levels and four mentorship styles of the CS model are not fixed over time. Rather, they are skill-specific, temporary, and different for different skills—within the same person, and among individuals of similar ages/stages/experiences (Ralph, 1993a, 1996, 2002a). Moreover, individuals do not necessarily develop mentoring styles nor change developmental levels in a lock-step linear order, through which all individuals pass. Rather, both mentors' and protégés' skills tend to improve as a result of experience and learning, or, on the other hand, these skills may occasionally deteriorate as a result of disuse or negligence. The strength of the CS model is that it provides participants with a sensible and systematic means of conceptualizing these changes (Ralph, 1993b).

The CS model is not meant to be applied in a prescriptive, technically restrictive manner, not is it perceived as a supervisory panacea. Rather, in practice, it is implemented—as are most other conceptual models in the social sciences—by individual participants according to their own personal and practical knowledge in unique contexts (Duffee and Aikenhead, 1992).

CS was designed to be an individual-developmental model, providing for the adaptation of supervisory behavior according to the rate of professional growth of each protégé. Thus, in CS

no single leadership style is stressed, but supervisory activity is eclectically matched in a sensible, sensitive manner to the specific needs of the individual in each context (Ralph, 1993c 1996, 1998, 2003).

An Actual Case

Returning to the scenario described at the beginning of this paper, I now summarize what I as the faculty supervisor did in applying the CS model to help resolve the conflict in this case. According to CS, a central reason for the problem was Roma's misalignment of her mentorship style with Gwen's then-existing developmental level for her classroom management in the primary classroom.

First, I recognized that although Roma, herself, was an excellent primary teacher with several years of successful experience, she was not providing Gwen with the amount of both task and support response she needed at that point in time. Gwen began the practicum—as do most interns—at a D1 level in classroom management (i.e., relatively high in confidence but low in actual competence), and thus required a matching S1 supervisory style from her cooperating teacher (i.e., low in support but high in the task or structure realm). However, Roma's style reflected the S4 characteristics of low support and low task direction, leaving Gwen to become increasingly frustrated and discouraged, until she began to demonstrate the classic attributes of the D2 level—low confidence and low competence in her classroom management procedures. Yet, instead of providing the required S2 response at that time (i.e., high rates of both encouragement and structure, in order to boost Gwen's lagging levels of self-assurance and competence), Roma continued to exhibit an S4 response—the very opposite of what Gwen needed at that point.

When I intervened in a two-way conference with Roma, I referred to the CS model in gauging Gwen's performance in classroom management. I stated to Roma that in terms of the model, I thought Gwen was currently at the D2 level, having declined from her initial D1 level. I mentioned that the model suggested that we as supervisors (I included myself in the supervisory team) therefore needed to use an S2 approach (high support and high task). I told Roma that I would demonstrate what this S2 style would look like in our subsequent 3-way post-conference with Gwen.

In that meeting I began by acknowledging Gwen's frustration, and according to the CS model, we as her two supervisors, were responsible to assist her to grow both in her confidence and her classroom management skills. I attempted to bolster her confidence by acknowledging her previous successful experience in school settings as a teacher assistant and as a mother of four young children. I commended her for already establishing a good foundation for her classroom routines. At the same time, I endeavored to build her level of competence by having Roma offer her some specific, practical advice about managing the classroom the way that Roma felt it should be structured, since both Gwen and I were visitors in her classroom from the university, and that Roma's first priority was for the welfare of her pupils.

Thus, some specific directives we offered to Gwen were: when helping individual pupils at their desks, to ensure that she showed "withitness" by simultaneously scanning the rest of the classroom; and because of her hearing impairment, to remind the students how to get her attention in an appropriate manner if she did not happen to hear.

As Roma observed and participated in this conference in which I demonstrated how to use the CS model to adjust one's task and supportive behaviors, she quickly began to adapt her own response to reflect more adequately the changing levels of Gwen's professional development. In fact, as the practicum progressed I observed that not only did Gwen grow in her competence and confidence in managing the classroom (from D2 to D3 and D4), but Roma correspondingly adjusted her leadership style (from S2 to S3 and then back to S4—where she had mistakenly begun). She later acknowledged that she had initially expected too much from Gwen, without clearly giving her the guidelines and procedures she expected.

She later confided: "I had wanted Gwen to experience the same difficulties I had to go through during my internship...I had to sink or swim, and no-one held my hand. I had to learn it all through hard knocks, and I felt that Gwen should, too..." Fortunately, Roma was willing to adjust her style. In fact, during my last visit to their school, Gwen declared, "Things are much better now; she even asked me to teach the class when she was going to be absent. I felt like she had finally began to trust me...she would never had done that before... and yesterday she smiled at me as we talked..."

In this scenario I was able to employ the CS model as if it was a conciliatory "third party" to help deflect retaliatory reactions, to reduce negative emotions, and to de-fuse an escalating interpersonal conflict. Ultimately, the major cause of the difficulty was the supervisor's mismatch of her mentoring style with the protégé's developmental needs, but by having Roma to concentrate on changing the only element over which she had sole control (i.e., her own responses), this mismatch was corrected and the harmful tensions were reduced.

Research Findings on the Application of Contextual Supervision

Early Studies

The researcher who developed and refined the CS model conducted several studies on his personal application of CS in his own mentorship work, both as: (a) a faculty advisor of several cohorts of classroom cooperating teachers/teacher-intern pairs in the 16-week extended-practicum program offered by the College of Education at the university where he is employed. (Ralph, 1991, 1992, 1992-1993, 1993b, 1994a); and (b) an instructional developer with a variety of groups of university-based personnel who were interested in developing and/or improving their pedagogical skills to enhance the teaching/learning process in their own contexts. (Ralph, 1993c, 19994b, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2000,2002a, 2002b, 2003, in press).

A synthesis of the key findings of these early studies revealed that: (a) interpersonal problems typically arise when mismatching of mentor style and protégé development level occurs; (b) these conflicts subside if this misalignment is corrected by the person in the mentoring role; and (c) most mentors tend to prefer using a high supportive/low directive style (i.e., S3 or S4) and thus limit the professional development of supervisees who may be at a Dl or D2 level, unless of course they make deliberate decisions to vary their styles, such as occurs with the CS approach.

Later Studies

Results from a later series of studies that investigated the use of CS by groups of supervisors trained in its application have also been reported, in which the CS designer—in the role of a workshop leader—presented the model to several cohorts of supervisory pairs with whom he worked in several internship periods (Ralph, 1998, 2000, 2003, in press).

A summary of the essential findings of the whole body of this research has consistently revealed distinct positive and negative attributes of the CS model (Ralph, 1993c, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2002a, 2002b, 2003, in press). Its strengths are that: (a) it helps supervisors clarify their conceptualization of the entire mentorship process; (b) it replaces the one-size-fits-all view with a process that promotes adjustment of mentor style; (c) it is relatively easy to learn and is intuitively appealing to the practitioner in the field; (d) it avoids dismissing supervisory conflict by such simplistic misrepresentations as a personality clash, intransigence, retrenchment, or egotism, and (e) it often identifies the underlying cause of such problems to be mentors' mismatching of their supervisory style with the protégés' then-current development level in performing a specific task or skill.

A chronic limitation of the model that has been repeatedly identified in the CS studies since 1995 is that 25% to 30% of the classroom supervisors, who had been instructed in the model's use, mismatched their mentoring styles with their protégés' developmental levels. Thus, even though they had been trained in the application of CS, this subgroup of classroom teachers did not achieve the intended results in their supervision.

These strengths and weaknesses are analyzed in the following section. A summary of these results are represented in Table 1, some key inferences are drawn, and some implications of these findings are identified for supervisory personnel at every level and in all fields to consider as they seek to improve their future mentoring practice.

Method and Data Sources

Insert table 1 about here

In Table 1, the results of several studies that were conducted over a twelve-year period are synthesized. These studies examined the extent that the two partners in each of the supervisory pairs with whom the researcher worked were in agreement, as to where each partner perceived themselves, and each other, in terms of their respective locations on the two CS grids. (Each intern and classroom teacher located their own and their partner's respective positions within either the development or style grids of the CS model at both the 5^{th} and 11^{th} week of the 16-week internship period. The researcher then collated and calculated the number of matchings and mis-matchings of partners'

positions that existed for all pairs at the Week 11 assessment. He sought to discover to what extent were S1 styles matched with D1 levels, S2 with D2 and so on.

Several studies investigated the supervisory process with each pair as it related to the intern's classroom management skills (Ralph, 1998, 2000, 2003), other studies dealt with the skills of instructional presenting, and some studies examined the supervision of interns' oral questioning (and responding) skills (Ralph; 1998, 1999). In the extended-practicum program at the researcher's college (University of Saskatchewan 2002-2003), the area of classroom management addressed thirteen sub-skills that teacher-interns practiced (e.g., gaining attention of students before beginning a lesson; implementing appropriate intervention strategies to deal with inappropriate classroom behavior); the presenting skills focused on 12 sub-tasks (e.g., clearly stating objectives; starting a lesson with a motivational set); oral-questioning dealt with five sub-skills (e.g., asking clear concise questions; distributing questions equitably to learners); and responding sought eight discrete behaviors (e.g., using varied forms of praise and reinforcement; encouraging students' critical and creative thinking).

As teacher-interns sought to internalize this variety of instructional skills, their mentors engaged in a clinical supervisory process, in which the latter observed the formers' ongoing performance and provided feedback on their progress. As the protégés improved, their supervisors were instructed to modify their mentoring styles accordingly, as described in the CS model.

Developmental Level

An investigation of the values presented in the upper portion of Table I indicates a high level of agreement at Week 11 (i.e., 85%) between partners, regarding the developmental level of interns to perform the skill being practiced; however, 15% of the pairs did not agree on the style/level match. One half of this mismatched sub-group (7%) had interns who rated themselves higher in development for the skill than their cooperating teachers rated them (or, alternatively, the teachers assessed their interns to be lower in development than the interns ranked themselves).

A possible explanation for this phenomenon is related to the difference in accumulated professional experience between expert and neophyte teachers: the former tend to be more realistic, holistic, and sophisticated in their observation and decision-making practice; while the later tend to be more limited, narrow, or premature in their professional decision-making (Berliner, 1989; Glickman, 1992; Veenman, 1984).

The other 8% sub-group who disagreed as to the intern's developmental levels consisted of interns who plotted their levels lower on the CS grid that did their cooperating teachers (or, alternatively, their teachers ranked these interns higher than did the interns themselves). Two plausible explanations for this misalignment, from the interns' perspective, are that (a) some novices do not feel they have gained a high degree of confidence and/or competence in performing the skill by the 11th week of the internship, and thus they may under-rate their own development; or (b) some interns are still concerned with *self* and *task* issues, and have not yet reached the stage that Fuller and Bown (1975) have identified as a concern for *others* (e.g., in this case, "Are the pupils learning?"). From the classroom teachers' perspective in this sub-group, they may have ranked the interns higher than the latter rated themselves. The supervisors may have based their judgments on the interns' outward appearance, without detecting their inner concerns or fears about performing the skill appropriately.

To deal with all of these mismatched perceptions represented in the entire 15% mismatching sub-group, mentors espousing the CS approach could engage in the following process: (a) to address the difference by inviting a collaborative approach, (b) to review the procedures and expectations for each partner, (c) to identify each partner's present and future grid positions, and (d) to ensure that both partners communicate clearly throughout the internship.

Supervisory Style

An examination of the values shown in the lower portion of Table 1 reveals several findings. For instance, one may conclude that the majority (i.e., approximately 2/3) of the pairs agreed on the supervisor's grid position for supervising classroom management at Week 11. Thus, one could conclude that the mentors participating in the CS studies did succeed by Week 11 in appropriately matching their leadership styles with the task-specific developmental levels of their respective supervisees. For these pairs it appears that the mentorship process functioned in the way for which the CS model was designed: that the classroom teachers provided their interns with the necessary combination of both task and supportive responses that the latter needed in order to develop their competence and confidence in performing the skill-specific task.

However, the figures also show that nearly 1/3 of the cooperating teachers were not correctly establishing this match. Table 1 shows that the majority (i.e., 17%) of this latter group ranked themselves numerically higher (e.g., at S3 or S4), apparently perceiving themselves as not

being directive enough (or alternatively, as being higher in support) with their interns, compared to the way the interns interpreted the cooperating teachers' leadership style. The interns in this 17% subgroup ranked their cooperating teachers numerically lower on the S-grid with respect to their mentoring behavior. For example, if a cooperating teacher saw herself at S3, but the intern saw her at S2, the supervisor would be obligated to initiate efforts to help them clarify and adjust their perceptions.

The cooperating teachers' perceptions are in accord with findings from previous research indicating that practicing teachers when working with adults tend to prefer using leadership styles that emphasize the human relations elements of support, encouragement, and cooperation—while at the same time down-playing the highly task-oriented or directive dimension (see for example (Glatthorn, 1990; Zimpher and Grossman, 1992). On the other hand, the intern's judgments in this situation may be explained by the fact that novice practitioners' perspectives typically tend to be simplistic, idealistic, and inadequately informed because of the relative newness of the classroom environment for them, and their relative paucity of experience and background in the teaching routines (Ryan and Kokol, 1988; Shulman, 1987). Thus, the interns in this sub-group may have ranked themselves higher in ability than they actually were.

In any case, to ameliorate this mismatch in the 17% sub-group, the mentorship pairs could re-examine the following elements: the basic mentorship process, the specific skill being practiced by the intern, the performance objectives being set for the protégé, the expectations for both partners in the process, and the then-current locations of both partners within their respective grids in the CS model. The CS studies have revealed that pairs must deal with these types of mismatching situations, rather than attributing such incidents to human relations problems.

Occasionally, CS studies have indicated that the interns may have reached a higher level of development than that for which supervisors would give them credit (for example see Ralph 1996, 1998). Thus, the cooperating teacher may still be too task-orientated for his/her intern who may have reached a D3 level in the skill—which, according to the CS model, should require a reciprocal S3 style (i.e., less direction but high support). Correspondingly, if the intern had achieved a high development level (D4) in the skill, then the supervisor would be remiss to continue applying an S3 style (i.e., providing more supportive response than the supervisee actually needed or wanted at that point in time).

For the remaining 11% portion (making up the 28% "mismatched subgroup" in the second and third rows in the bottom part of Table 1), the cooperating teachers plotted themselves numerically lower on the S-grid than their interns plotted them. Or, by contrast from the interns' perspective, the interns in this sub-group ranked their cooperating teachers numerically higher in the S quadrants, than the cooperating teachers positioned themselves on the style grid.

As was the case with the 17% sub-group, an explanation for this sub-group's mismatching may lie in the differences of perceptions and preferences between the groups of veteran and novice teachers. Thus, because of their sensitivity about being too directive (or, alternatively, not being supportive enough), the cooperating teachers in this sub-group may have perceived their relatively directive behavior (which the interns in the group were in fact *desiring*) as being overly domineering. Their interns, on the other hand, who may have been at a D1 or D2 level—thus *requiring* higher levels of guidance and direction to accommodate their lower levels of competence in the particular skill being practiced—may have become frustrated or resentful with their cooperating teachers. This resentment may have grown from their perception that their supervisors seemed to them to be wasting time on providing encouragement, warmth, and support, rather than by telling them precisely what to do and how to do it in these situations. This interpretation seems to account for the conflict between Roma and Gwen in the scenario described earlier in this paper.

Mentors using the CS model have discovered that these mismatching situations may be resolved by the mentor if he/she would initiate the following procedures according to the unique context in each scenario: (a) re-examine the perceptions of each partner in terms of the instructional skill being practiced, the intern's current development level in the skill, and the mentor's current style of leadership for helping the intern master that skill; and (b) adjust the supervisory style to match the intern's then-existing ability level (see for example Ralph, 1998, 2002b). This process takes time and care, but as is the case in all successful human relationships, the results of such efforts prove to be beneficial for all participants.

Other findings

A comparison between the values presented in the upper and lower portions of Table 1 shows that there was greater consistency of match between the partners' locations of interns' grid positions (85%), than there was for the consistency of match for classroom teachers' styles on the CS grids (72%). A possible factor explaining this greater agreement for interns' grid-positions relates to the differences being evaluated. The generic instructional skill being practiced by the interns in the

practicum were logically more familiar to both parties than were the new mentorship skills expected in the CS model.

Similar results to many of those reported by Ralph on the effectiveness of the CS model were found by Watt (1998) in her study of the supervision of preschool practicum students.

Implications for Teacher Development

A further observation related to the lack of congruence between the two sets of values shown in Table 1 has been identified in all of the CS studies. This variance suggests that although considerable agreement did exist between partners' views of their own and their partners' actions in the mentorship process, there was still a significant degree of mismatching that persisted by the eleventh week of the practicum. One advantage of having mentors to use the CS approach is that it enables them, and interested researchers, to identify such problem-areas. A second advantage accruing to mentors employing CS as a conceptual guide to their supervisory practice is that they are able subsequently to identify specific supervisory actions or reactions to apply in the situation that may help to remedy the conflict. Ultimately, the onus is on the supervisory personnel--by virtue of their leadership position and assigned responsibility in the professional role—to adjust reciprocally the degree of their task and supportive behaviors.

Some Supervisory Insights

The accumulating research results for the CS model have demonstrated that it is a useful conceptual and analytical guide with potential to assist supervisory personnel in their mentorship practices. It has been shown that CS is a practical tool (but not a panacea), and that, if applied sensibly, it can be employed to help analyze conflict-areas resulting from supervisory error. Also, the model can help identify solutions to these relationship problems by suggesting adjustments in mentorship style.

Although the CS model has advantages over the seven approaches described earlier in this paper, there is a lack of empirical research that compares the relative effectiveness of all eight models. However, the existing research on CS, and its prototype Situational Leadership, has demonstrated its usefulness in such fields as: the professional development of teachers (Niehouse, 1988a, 1988b); nursing education (Hersey & Duldt, 1989); middle management training in business (Bateman & Snell, 1999); college-level instructional improvement (Ralph, 1995, 1996; Ralph &

Konchak, 1996); and the supervision of pre-service teachers in practicum programs (Ralph, 1998, 1999, 2000, in press; Watt, 1998).

Another implication of this body of research relates to the professional development of the supervisory personnel, themselves. Mentors familiar with the CS model appear to enhance their own supervisory skill, and they seem increasingly able to sidestep the traditional weakness characterizing formal supervisory behavior in education. That weakness is the tendency of many educational supervisors to rank their protégés only in favorable terms (Glatthorn, 1990). However, when supervisory personnel develop their own mentoring competence and confidence by employing the CS model, they are able to vary more easily the degree of directedness and support they need to deliver in each supervisory situation. Hence, it appears that CS has potential for improving supervisory expertise of personnel at any stage of their career development.

In sum, it is clear that familiarity with the model (i.e., mentors being skilled at how to determine the supervisee's task-specific development level, and to adjust their own leadership behavior to the developmental needs of supervisees) will only develop among mentoring personnel as they, themselves, are mentored to learn and to apply CS. This familiarity will emerge when they see in CS the characteristics that researchers have identified for all effective professional development initiatives, namely: (a) the innovation must be able to enhance practitioners' competence and/or status; (b) the practitioners must be convinced of this claim; (c) the new practice must be relatively easy to learn and to apply; and (d) participants must be supported, themselves, in their implementation, evaluation, and adjustment of the practice (see, for example, Fullan, 1991).

Familiarity with the CS model will render the controversy between "supervising" and "mentoring" as a non-question, because those applying CS will employ the proper blend of structure and considerateness, according to the contextual needs of the individual with whom they are working. Concern about the label is of lesser importance than accommodating the learner's professional development.

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Author Note

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Footnotes

[1] *Teacher-intern* is used interchangeably with *protégé, supervisee*, and *intern.*
[2] *Classroom cooperating teacher* is used interchangeably with *mentor, supervisor*, and *classroom supervisor.*

Table 1

The Degree of Match Between Individuals' Self-and Partner-Plotted Quadrant

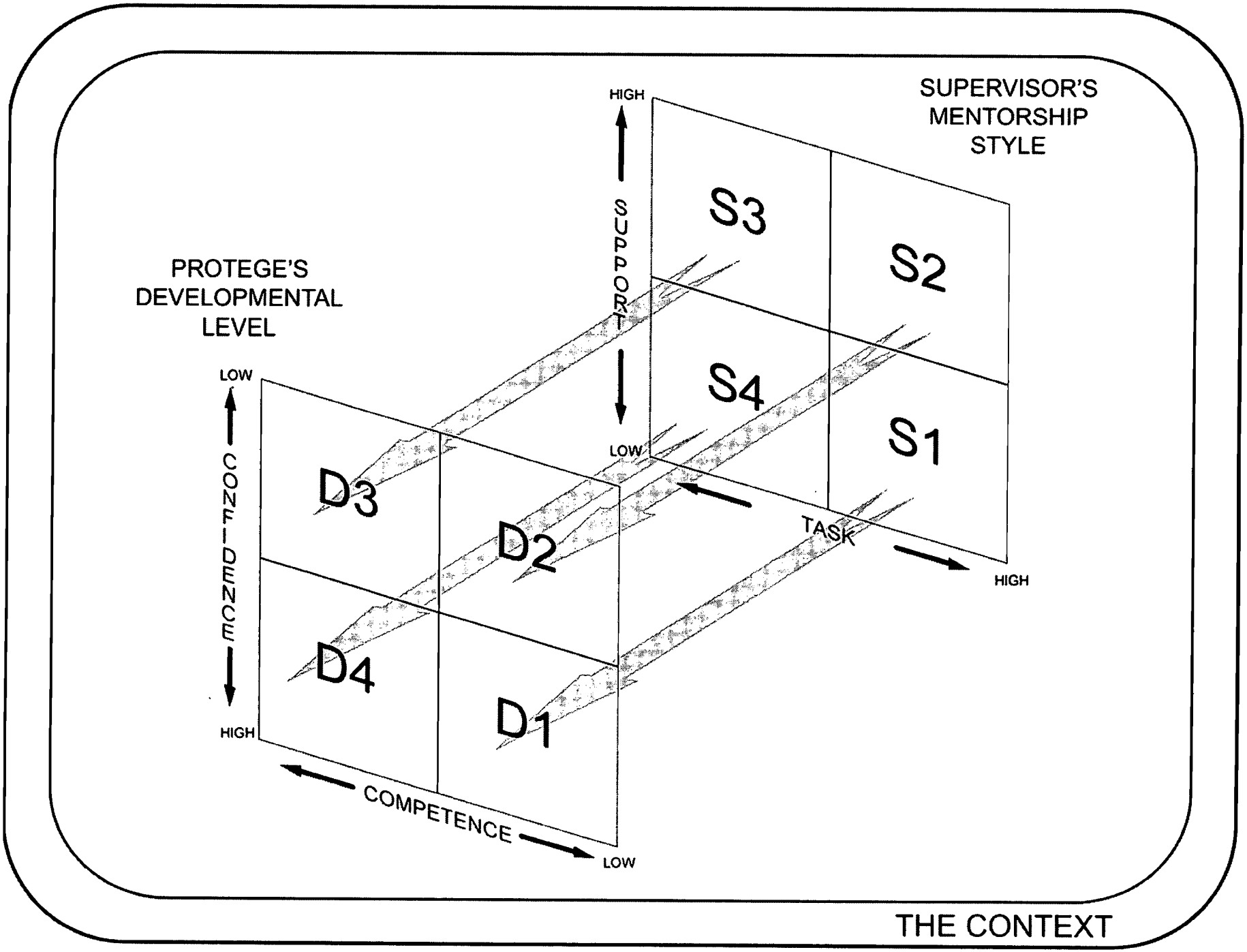
Positions on the CS Grids (Week 11, N = 204 pairs)

Interns' developmental-level grid	
Consistent match between partners' plottings	85
Interns plotted selves higher on grid than did teachers	7
Interns plotted selves lower on grid than did teachers	8
Cooperating teachers' mentorship-style grid	
Consistent match between partner's plottings	72
Teachers plotted selves higher on grid than did interns	17
Teachers plotted selves lower on grid than did interns	11

Note: Values represent mean percentages of several sub-groups. Several studies in this summary focused on interns' classroom management skills, while others examined interns' presenting or their oral-questioning (and responding) skills.

Figure Caption

Figure 1. Contextual Supervision. From Edwin G. Ralph, "Contextual Supervision: Matching Supervisory Style with Learners' Needs," *The Canadian Administrator, 35* (February 1996): 2. Copyright 1996 by the Department of Educational Policy Studies, University of Alberta. Used with permission.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MENTORSHIP
STYLE
HIGH
SUPPORT
LOW
S3
S2
S4
S1
PROTEGE'S
DEVELOPMENTAL
LEVEL
LOW
CONFIDENCE
HIGH
D3
D2
D4
D1
TASK
HIGH
COMPETENCE
LOW
THE CONTEXT

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