University-Based Teacher Supervisors: Their Voices, Their Dilemmas

Bede McCormack
LaGuardia Community College, CUNY, bmccormack@lagcc.cuny.edu

Laura H. Baecher
Hunter College, City University of New York, lbaecher@hunter.cuny.edu

Alex Cuenca
Indiana University, cuenca@iu.edu

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Bede McCormack[1], Laura H. Baecher[2], and Alex Cuenca[3]

Abstract

Despite university supervisors' critical role in the success of PK-12 teacher candidates, research is limited on how to best prepare supervisors to mentor their supervisees and interact with cooperating teachers and school administrators. By using two surveys and a focus group meeting, this qualitative study explores supervisors' experiences to surface dilemmas of supervisory practice. Results indicate supervisors suffer overwhelming workloads, feel marginalized by their institutions, lack ongoing training, and are often unclear as to what their role is. The success of the cadres of clinical supervisors ultimately depends on training, but more crucially on full engagement by their home institutions.

Keywords

university-based teacher supervision; teacher candidates; cooperating teachers; supervisor preparation and training

[1] LaGuardia Community College, CUNY
[2] Hunter College, CUNY
[3] Indiana University

Corresponding Author:
Bede McCormack (Education and Language Acquisition, LaGuardia Community College, CUNY, 31-10 Thomson Ave., Long Island City, NY 11101, USA)
Email: bmccormack@lagcc.cuny.edu

Introduction

Effective university-based clinical supervision is seen as essential in advancing teacher candidate development (Bates, Drits, & Ramirez, 2011; Gimbert & Nolan, 2003; Lee, 2011). Yet despite increased attention to the clinical preparation of candidates within US teacher education, (INEI, 2008; NCATE, 2010), the complexity of university-based supervisors' roles and responsibilities in this preparation often goes unrecognized and supervisors themselves are often marginalized in institutions of teacher education. As Burns and Badiali (2016) note, supervisors may possibly be "the most undervalued actors in the entire teacher preparation equation when one considers the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they must have to teach about teaching in the field" (p. 156). This complex array of "skills and dispositions" is surfaced in Burns, Jacobs, and Yendol-Hoppey's (2016a) meta-analysis of research on supervision, in which they identify an interrelated array of moves university supervisors employ to promote pre-service candidate learning. Burns, Jacobs, and Yendol-Hoppey (2016b) broadly define supervision as "the enactment of multiple tasks and practices aimed at supporting PSTs' (pre-service teachers') learning in clinical contexts" (p. 420), a definition which embraces the wide variety of activities supervisors perform.

In an effort to better understand clinical teacher supervision, then, we went directly to university-based supervisors, inviting them to offer their perspectives on their work through three phases of data collection: national, regional, and institutional. The national phase was designed to broadly understand university supervisors' experience and training, and identify the dilemmas they face in the course of supervising candidates. In our regional focus, we utilized the results of the national survey to delve deeper into issues of supervisors' workload, time expenditure, and institutional support. In the institutional phase, we further explored supervisors' perspectives about their personal engagement with candidates and schools. Our overriding objective is to advance the work of clinical teacher supervision by documenting, through their voices, the hurdles they face as they engage in their supervisory work, and to use these findings to suggest ways to better support clinical supervisors in their critical role of guiding candidate development.

Literature Review

Research on university-based teacher supervision can be examined via three dimensions. In this literature review we first examine the preparation university-based teacher supervisors have for their work. Next, we look at the complex nature of supervision itself. Third, we critique the institutional leadership provided for clinical supervision. This literature review helps inform the study, specifically the dilemmas university-based teacher supervisors face in their work.

How are Supervisors Prepared for and Supported in Their Role?

Despite the critical nature of supervision as an interface between learning theory and classroom practice, supervisors are typically ad-hoc hires who assume their roles as supervisors with little or no preparation. Beck and Kosnik (2002) and Zeichner (2005) attribute this to an implicit belief that providing observation feedback to candidates can be accomplished by anyone with teaching experience and requires no specialized training – prior experience as a teacher will simply transfer to mentoring novice teacher candidates. This belief contributes to institutions generally

dedicating few resources to assist in the professional development of supervisors as teacher educators. Levine (2011) notes that the field of teacher education knows surprisingly little about how supervisors are trained, supported, or provided with ongoing professional learning. Yet, supervisors are expected to support candidates' development, maintain harmonious relations with school personnel, recommend courses of action, and serve as a diplomat from the sending college of education. In a wide-ranging survey study of elementary teacher education programs across the US, Jacobs, Hogarty and Burns (2017) explored this multi-faceted role placed on supervisors and confirmed across a diverse range of both public and private schools of education that, despite the critical nature of supervisors in supporting candidates and establishing strong partnerships between institutions and schools, supervisors tend to be undersupported by their sending institutions. Supervisors may be overworked, barely briefed on the observation assessment rubric to be utilized in the field, have little understanding of the operations of the program they serve, or rarely meet with program faculty (Baum, Powers-Costello, VanScoy, Miller & James, 2011; Grossman, Hammerness, McDonald & Ronfeldt, 2008).

However, at some smaller institutions, or within institutional programs, we can find models in which university-based supervisors meet more intensively within communities of practice to reflect on their work with other supervisors (e.g. Baecher, Graves & Ghailan, 2018; Dangel & Tanguay, 2014). This reflective, collaborative approach to learning, while familiar to teacher candidate curricula (Farrell, 2012), seems largely absent from the literature on supervisor training. We might ask, then, whether supervisors can benefit from engaging in activities which reflect current teacher learning theory?

What is Involved in Supervision of Teacher Candidates?

Supervision of teacher candidates clearly requires complex and precise skills applied in a highly aware, responsive and individualized manner to foster candidate learning (Bates, Drits & Ramirez, 2011; Nguyen, 2009). Among these skills are (a) the ability to support adult (i.e., candidate) learning (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007); (b) knowledge of the social, cultural, and political conditions of schools (Valencia, Martin, Place & Grossman, 2009); (c) an understanding of the candidate's previous learning experiences relative to the goals of the particular teacher preparation curriculum (Feiman-Nemser, 2001); (d) expertise in the pedagogy of the content area and K-12 pupil learning (Hertzog & O'Rode, 2011); (e) human relations skills for maintaining cordial and supportive relationships with the school staff who support candidate learning (Henry & Weber, 2010); (f) expertise in classroom observation and ethnographic data collection methods (Dinkelman, 2012); (g) ability to provide feedback in a way that encourages uptake (Trout, 2010); (h) experience with balancing a developmental with an evaluative stance in their work with candidates (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2010); and (i) capacity to help candidates adjust to the socioemotional stresses of the clinical setting (Burns, Jacobs, & Yendol-Hoppey, 2016b). Seen as expectations of supervisor practice, the sheer magnitude of this list of skills engenders a greater appreciation of the need to not only recognize these expectations, but also to purposefully develop and assess them within teacher education. Understanding more about these responsibilities and the varying ways institutions of teacher education interact with supervisors in relation to them is essential to advance the knowledge base on teacher education.

What Institutional Leadership is Provided for University-based Supervisors?

Research has shown that active leadership of university-based supervisors by programs of teacher education can positively influence a clinical supervisor's approach to working with candidates (e.g. Heafner, Petty & Hartshorne, 2012; Meegan, Dunning, Belton & Woods, 2013). However, several studies suggest that a clear articulation of supervisory-related expectations to supervisors is often lacking. Steadman and Brown (2011), for example, identified three roles and responsibilities clinical supervisors assumed they should take on, but which were never clearly articulated to them by their sending institutions: (a) decisions about the logistics of supervisors' visits (i.e., number of visits, scheduling of visits, length of observation); (b) university related paperwork; and (c) the kinds of requirements placed on candidates. They found that a program's lack of guidance led to supervisors making idiosyncratic decisions about how they proceeded with their work, causing a certain amount of discord. They concluded that programs may not see the job of supervisor "as rising to the importance worthy of a discussion" (p. 59) and that it is usually carried out by teacher education staff rather than faculty. This lack of interest by programs in providing leadership for supervisors has been echoed in other studies going back to the late 1990s.

Slick (1998), in a study of one supervisor's efficacy in university and school communities, determined that supervisors were often considered "disenfranchised outsiders" within their teacher education programs and identified four issues: (a) the program's lack of commitment in preparing, advising, or assisting in defining the role of supervisors; (b) the program's silence over placement decisions; (c) the program's lack of direction for supervision; and (d) the program's insensitivity toward concerns about placements. Based on this study, Slick noted that teacher education programs must make a more concerted effort to provide supervisors with direction, support, and clearly defined goals. More recently, Cuenca (2010), in a self-study of his supervisory practice, illustrated how a lack of preparation for the work of supervision led to a troubling pedagogy of essentially relying on a limited understanding of the work of teaching and teacher education, leading to a pedagogical style that was merely based on "tricks of the trade" and ultimately "was unable to make explicit to student teachers (candidates) the tacit knowledge of teaching" (p. 39). Taken together, these and other studies illustrate how the absence of program guidance impacts supervisors negatively, and suggests, in contrast, that effective program guidance could engage and support clinical supervisors as teacher educators, leading them to develop and refine their practices (Bransford & Darling-Hammond, 2005; Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

Research on clinical supervision tends to portray the supervisor, wittingly or unwittingly, as simply responding to the expectations of teacher education programs, cooperating teachers, and candidates. Unfortunately, the current assortment of stances, approaches, and techniques utilized in supervision too often emerges not from a purposeful sharing of approaches, but rather from the absence of institutional leadership in the area of clinical supervision. This lack of direct engagement with supervisors with respect to their experience and authority ultimately diminishes an institution's ability to support supervisors in ways which can best cultivate candidate learning.

Research Design and Methodology

The research question guiding our inquiry was: What do university-based teacher supervisors perceive as the greatest challenges, or dilemmas in their work? In order to build upon the core issues surfaced in the review of the literature concerning supervisors' backgrounds, preparation, institutional support, and demands from *their* points of view, we utilized "dilemmas" as an entry point. Our notion of dilemma comes from Connelly and Clandinin (1994) who position dilemmas—the stories teachers tell each other to narrate and problem-solve their work—as ways to reckon with the challenges they persistently face. They describe relating dilemmas to each other as essential, noting that "teachers' professional and personal stories are important to teacher education, teacher development, and the improvement of schools" (p. 145). Tillema (2004) suggests that "the teaching realities of a teacher educator's teaching techniques can best be interpreted through the dilemmas they encounter. The construct of "dilemma" is advanced as a way to link conceptual reflection, deliberate choice and professional action" (p. 277).

We then developed a nested, sequential approach to our investigation to gain three levels of insider insight from supervisors across a broad range of teacher education programs: a national survey, a regional questionnaire, and a focus group at one institution in that region. By collecting data at these three concentric circles, we sought to better capture representative dilemmas clinical supervisors faced from an emic perspective in a wide variety of contexts. The decision to use a three-tiered approach to our inquiry was also grounded in the belief that teacher education operates as a complex system of interconnected participants, networks, and contexts (Cochran-Smith, Ell, Ludlow, Grundoff & Aitken, 2014). By illuminating the perspectives of supervisors operating within a variety of networks, greater understanding of the system of supervision can be developed (Valencia, Martin, Place & Grossman, 2009).

Researcher Positionality

Our positionality as researchers is rooted in years of our own work as clinical supervisors at different institutions which effectively makes us insiders within our research project, a situation which raises a myriad of potential pitfalls which have been well documented in the literature (Unluer, 2012). Of particular concern for us was bias and loss of objectivity which could foster preconceived notions about the dilemmas faced by supervisors, both in selecting survey and questionnaire items and in analyzing data. In an effort to minimize the potential for bias skewing our interpretation of data, we maintained a heightened awareness of our potential for bias by consciously raising the issue in our conversations and communications, and questioning each other's comments and data interpretations. Despite the potential drawbacks, however, insider research also offered us advantages such as readily available access to potential participants as well as a degree of collegiality that allowed for candid participant responses. In the end, we felt that being insiders helped us engage with all phases of the study in ways that supported participants' willingness to trust our line of questioning and enabled us as a research team to make sense of the data.

Design of the Study and Data Collection

Each phase of this study involved refining questions based on responses from the preceding phase in order to help us fully investigate our research question. As the initial corpus of survey questions was generated, and as the geographic scale narrowed, so did our emphasis, from general questions about training and support in the national survey, to specific issues and problems in the regional questionnaire and local focus group.

Survey Development. Before the onset of the study, initial question-generation took place. Participants at 12 different supervisor training workshops conducted by the researchers over the course of a year were asked to write down original dilemmas they had personally encountered in their work as university-based teacher supervisors. In this way, a corpus of supervisor-based questions about dilemmas was generated that was drawn on in the three phases of the study.

Phase 1: The National Survey. The first phase of the study was an anonymous, electronic survey administered nationally in order to confirm trends we noticed in the dilemmas we elicited from our workshop participants, as well as to identify additional dilemmas. The national survey asked questions about teaching experience, training or experiences as school-based supervisors, years of experience as a supervisor, professional development experiences, and dilemmas of practice. This was a mixed-question type survey with twelve questions related to teaching and supervision experience, 6 Likert scale-type questions (1-5) about degree of institutional support, 12 Likert scale questions about supervision practices, and 10 Likert scale questions about various aspects of readiness to serve as a clinical supervisor. Each section included a dialogue box for "Additional comments."

For this phase of the study, we recruited participants through colleagues known to the researchers, professional association listservs, and by word of mouth at presentations at major conferences such as the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE) and the American Educational Research Association (AERA). Over the course of 4 months, 103 supervisors from eleven states, representing nine different teacher preparation areas such as childhood education, secondary education, and TESOL completed the survey. We believe that the variety of individuals and institutions we contacted constitutes as fair a sample of supervisors as we could expect to recruit given the challenges in reaching supervisors at institutions other than our own. Although the Phase 1 (national) survey results were based on volunteer samples and lack reliability as being representative of supervisors across the nation, results broadly aligned with our own experiences. Nonetheless, we do recognize the limitations of our sampling method and treated the national survey results as a pilot study which we used to inform the next stage of the study.

Phase 2: The Regional Questionnaire. The regional questionnaire included twelve questions related to teaching and supervision experience, 6 Likert scale-type questions (1-5) about degree of institutional support, 12 Likert scale questions about supervision practices, and 10 Likert scale questions about various aspects of readiness to serve as a clinical supervisor. However, guided by results of the national survey, we refined the regional questionnaire for the second phase of our study with more open-ended prompts in order to gain a more nuanced account of the dilemmas faced by supervisors. We wanted to focus on issues such as workload, the amount of

time spent in post-observation meetings and institutional support, and decided to distribute this survey regionally, in a large, public urban university system in the Northeast United States. Invitations to the regional survey were sent electronically across the university system. Unlike recruitment for the national survey, we targeted specific teacher education programs across the consortia colleges within our institution and randomly selected individuals who responded to our recruitment call. Participant selection was done by simply selecting every other one of the 88 respondents who replied in chronological order, to give us a sample of 44 participants. As with the national survey, we collected both quantitative and descriptive data. The results from the regional questionnaire in turn informed the framework for designing the third data collection component of the study, the local focus group.

Phase 3: Local Focus Group. In the final phase of the study, we were motivated to speak directly with supervisors about some of the dilemmas Phases 1 and 2 raised by conducting a focus group from a single supervision program within one of the regional institutions. For this we agreed to adopt an individualistic social psychology perspective approach (Belzile & Oberg, 2012) for conducting the focus group, as this approach assumes participants' opinions are relatively stable (Fazio, 2007), and that the results of the discussion will result in a multi-faceted view of the topic in question. Given the complexities supervision presents, we felt a focus group meeting would allow us to seek clarification of dilemmas raised in Phases 1 and 2 in a deeper and more fluid manner. We planned to bring together a diverse group of supervisors from one institution in an effort to discuss Phase 3 participants' experiences in terms of dilemmas raised in Phases 1 and 2. We also intended to elicit their suggestions about what could be done to better support their work as supervisors within that particular institution in light of those dilemmas.

Table 1. Focus Group Participants' Background and Position

Participant pseudonym	Educational background	Participant pseudonym
Carlos	BA, MA	Bilingual Education, adjunct faculty, Ph.D. student
Scott	BA, MA, Ph.D.	Early Childhood, adjunct faculty
Nancy	BA	Special Education, adjunct faculty, retired administrator
Pamela	BA, MA, Ed.D.	TESOL, full-time faculty

Recruitment for the focus group was done via emails sent to Phase 2 participants. We specifically targeted individuals within one institution according to their status (full or part time), and their experience as supervisors. Table 1 summarizes these four focus group participants' backgrounds and current supervisory assignments. The focus group meeting took place towards

the end of a spring semester and two of the three researchers attended and took turns taking notes.

Data Analysis

For the survey (Phase 1), questionnaire (Phase 2) and the focus group (Phase 3), the participants' open-ended responses were coded inductively using a grounded theory analytic approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In order to organize our qualitative data, we engaged in three cycles of inductive analysis. For each phase of the study, we developed a list of initial codes based on the responses by supervisors, and then collapsed and condensed the codes. Major themes which emerged in participants' responses included comments about: Cooperating Teachers (CT), Teacher Candidates (TC), institutional support (IS), and training and preparedness to supervise (TG). As we analyzed quotes we pulled from the qualitative data, we constantly returned to the original data set to confirm and disconfirm our emerging understandings of the themes surfaced by this process. Our interpretations of both the coding scheme and our emerging understandings were tempered by our concern over being insiders in this research project as discussed above. Taken together, these focused codes reflected some of the core elements of the dilemmas shared by supervisors at each phase. In the next section, we discuss the findings as they pertain to our research question.

Findings

Survey results from the national survey (Phase 1) of the study revealed an experienced group of participants hailing from 11 US states and representing a diverse range of subject areas including special education, early childhood education, childhood-literacy and math, secondary English, math, science and social studies and TESOL. More than 84% of respondents had at least 6 years of K-12 teaching experience before becoming a supervisor, and of those, 60% reported having at least 5 years' experience as a supervisor at the time of taking the survey. Despite this range of experience and content area expertise, just over 25% of these participants reported specific, hands-on training to be supervisors.

Frustrations about their work as supervisors raised by the Phase 1 data included issues with host teachers, the host schools, heavy supervision loads, and a sense of a lack of institutional support. These complaints were found across all 11 states and all nine teacher preparation areas represented in the data. Almost 70% of the national participants reported that the number of student teachers they took on limited the amount of time they could spend mentoring them. This resulted in cursory pre-observation "meetings", usually in the form of brief emails, and hurried post-observation conversations. Based on supervisors' survey comments, the causes of heavy workloads appear to be twofold. At one level, teacher education programs typically have far more students enrolled than the number of available supervisors can comfortably mentor. And at another level, supervisors tend to be adjunct faculty who must take on inordinate amounts of work in order to maintain a viable living standard. Overall, our data shows that Phase 1 supervisors' frustrations were in line with those identified by Slick (1998). These include their institution's lack of guidance in defining whether their role was as evaluator, coach, or institutional representative, as well as a lack of support in juggling these roles with concrete tools such as an up-to-date handbook, realistic rubric, and clear protocols and training.

The regional questionnaire results (Phase 2) also portrayed a cadre of professionals with experience and diversity comparable to Phase 1 participants. Phase 2 questions probed more deeply into issues raised in the national survey. For instance, responses to questions regarding dilemmas related to teacher candidates' cooperating teachers' classroom practices, as well as workload issues such as the number of observations per candidate, and the amount of time spent per post-observation meeting, all aligned with the Phase 1 survey results. One incongruence with Phase 1 results was that Phase 2 supervisors reported favorably in response to questions about support from their home institutions in terms of professional development workshops offered to supervisors, though less than half (43%) of Phase 2 participants actually attended workshops due to commitments such as heavy observation loads and teaching responsibilities. Those who did attend suggested that even when workshops are offered, they do not address the dilemmas supervisors are most concerned about. For instance, one supervisor described her disappointment at the inability of a workshop leader to effectively address her concern about how to handle situations where she witnessed poor CT practice.

The local focus group discussions (Phase 3) elicited details of the dilemmas surfaced in the first two phases of the study, and portrayed a nuanced view of the complex nature of supervision. All four Phase 3 participants aligned with the Phase 1 and Phase 2 survey responses in that they found the issue of a weak or unsupportive CTs very troublesome. They also found dealing with school administration to be daunting and generally agreed that supervising was unlike anything they had done before, and, even with experience, felt unprepared to work with teacher candidates. On institutional support, although all four participants agreed with Phase 2 findings in that their sending colleges were supportive of them and offered orientation sessions, none of the Phase 3 participants described attempts by their sending institutions to provide opportunities to discuss specific supervisory-related issues such as concerns about how to address perceived inappropriate behavior by a candidate or by a CT.

Two themes regarding the complex nature of supervision emerged from the data. By all accounts, the most pressing dilemma was supervisors' unpreparedness in working with weak cooperating teachers. The second, related dilemma was a lack of effective, targeted institutional support.

Concerns about Weak Cooperating Teachers

Fully half of the 103 Phase 1 supervisors noted that, while the majority of CTs were strong models of effective teaching, they felt their lack of training or experience rendered them impotent to professionally address instances in which they encountered CTs whom they perceived to be poor models of effective practice. This was echoed by 32% of the Phase 2 supervisors who reported that they had felt at a loss when observing CTs they believed had failed to provide appropriate feedback to the candidates, or who made discouraging comments about teaching in general, about specific students, or even about the candidates themselves. Phase 3 focus group participants were unanimous in their concern about their uncertainty of how to handle CT-related issues.

This recognition by supervisors in all three phases of the study that they lacked training, felt at a loss or were uncertain about how to handle CT-related issues, illustrates potential consequences of the lack of institutional support described in the literature. Research findings by, *inter alia,* Jacobs, Hogarty and Burns (2017), Levine (2011), and Zeichner (2005), all point to inadequacies in supervisor training that can potentially lead to dilemmas such as described here.

Although disparate in nature, the following two excerpts from the data serve to demonstrate the range of emotions, frustrations and professional questioning this type of dilemma elicits as supervisors carry out their work. In the first example, a Phase 1 supervisor noted that:

> I've experienced less than helpful cooperating educators ...under par teachers who offered poor to downright bad examples of practice at the HS level. I've questioned how a student teacher might be influenced in negative ways about the state of students overall...developing bad attitudes about high school subject matter as well as students.

Although not within her purview to evaluate CTs, her experience and professional concern for her candidate leads to a sense of frustration at not being able to address a dilemma such as this.

Another example of this type of CT-related dilemma that close examination of the national survey data revealed was that CTs can be unwilling to completely turn over control of the classroom to the candidate. This was reflected in approximately 28% of the national survey respondents. For example, one supervisor noted:

> …a cooperating teacher who would not let go of control, tended to "jump in" while she (the candidate) was teaching, which did not help her build confidence or truly see how her plans would play out. This was another situation where I just didn't know what my place was or how to address this politely and appropriately with the cooperating teacher.

Again, while not her role to determine whether or not the TC leads the lesson, the supervisor nonetheless feels a responsibility to her TC, and is frustrated by her perceived lack of agency in controlling the situation.

Such concerns were also voiced in responses to the Phase 2 questionnaire and during the Phase 3 focus group discussion. For example, Carlos recalled seeing

> …teachers – the cooperating teacher – who were teaching some content like… US history to ELLs without using any of the scaffolds or supports we always use with these students. I somehow asked the teacher about this and she just said she needed to teach the content for the Regents (NY State test). I think I made some comment about ELLs needing more language support than regular students, but the conversation didn't go anywhere. I just felt so stymied.

This was indicative of situations where the supervisor had expertise—either in a discipline area or developmental level—but did not know how to bring it forward in ways that would not offend the CT.

Concerns about Lack of Institutional Support

The data also exposed dilemmas supervisors face from their home institutions. These included comments in all three phases about problems with workload and their institution's lack of guidance and support as identified by Slick (1998). As such university-based teacher supervisors often question their role (evaluator, coach, or institutional representative), and about the lack of tools to carry out their work (up-to-date handbooks, rubrics, and protocols).

As also noted above, workload was an institution-related dilemma that emerged from the data. Of the 39 Phase 1 participant comments that coded negatively for institutional support, 27 participants reported that the large number of candidates they took on limited the amount of time they could spend mentoring them. And of the 44 Phase 2 participants, only eight (18%) reported having face-to-face pre-observation meetings with their candidates. It is not coincidental that these eight supervisors were also full time instructors at their institutions where the opportunity to meet with candidates was far greater than for supervisors hired from outside the institution. Time for post-observation conferences as reported by Phase 2 participants was limited to an average of 20 minutes. Unsurprisingly, supervisors with lighter loads (4-6 supervisees) tended to spend more time on post-observation conversations, and those with heavier loads less.

The sense of powerlessness in the face of perceived weak classroom practice seen in the data might be mitigated by the supervisor's home institution offering effective professional development workshops, seen as missing by participants. As we saw in the Phase 1 national survey results, supervisors are experienced professionals in their field, whose efforts could be enhanced by such institutional support. During the Phase 3 focus group, Nancy pointed out that whether it was related to the sending institution, the host school, the host school's administration or a cooperating teacher, all supervisors faced similar dilemmas which nonetheless went largely unaddressed:

> What I think would be really helpful is if we had more meetings in which supervisors could get together and talk about issues so that if there is something that somebody experienced that somebody else didn't, they could benefit from it and have some idea about how to handle it. They (only) do that once a year, that meeting.

It appeared that, from the perspective of the Phase 3 participants, the focus group meeting itself had been a model for the type of meaningful conversation about their work they sought, and they inquired about the possibility of meeting again. This enthusiasm was somewhat unexpected and later bolstered our sense that, even with a small number of participants, focus group meetings can offer the kind of collaborative, reflective peer engagement and support that many participants in all three phases of the study seemed to want.

Highlighting participant supervisors' concerns here about weak CTs, workload issues, and institutional support are but the most frequently mentioned dilemmas identified in the data. Yet they serve to underscore the complex range of "knowledge, skills and dispositions" Burns and Badiali (2016: 156) recognize as necessary to effectively carry out their supervisory roles and responsibilities, roles and responsibilities supervisors seem all too often unsure of how to fulfill.

Discussion and Implications

The findings of our study reveal the need for greater understanding of the complex skills needed to be an effective supervisor, and for a greater institutional commitment to experimenting with models of professional development for clinical supervisors. Clearly, this call for more attention to the critical work of university-based supervisors is not new. However, the unique contributions of our study are two-fold. First, our study demonstrates the widespread nature of the problem. And second, our study demonstrates the self-reinforcing nature of restricted institutional support for clinical supervisors and problematic practices in the field. Our national survey, for example, reflects a diverse range of teacher education programs across 11 states and 9 different preparation programs that vary in their curricula, instructional scope and sequences, and clinical experience placements. Yet regardless of these program differences, our results show that over 100 supervisors, diverse as they are, identified roughly the same kinds of tensions of limited support and problems with cooperating educators that limited potentially powerful practices in clinical supervision. To us, then, our data suggests that these dilemmas and problems were not simply the result of certain types of teacher education programs or the nature of some program areas, but can rather be seen as due to a broader, systemic cultural perception about the value of clinical supervision to teacher preparation in the United States.

If major national teacher education organizations such as AACTE (2018) are looking to reform clinical preparation, our data suggests that a useful anticipatory step might be to work on reforming what can only be seen as an ostensible deficit orientation toward the value of clinical supervision within teacher education programs. As our study demonstrates, there is a tautological relationship between limited institutional support and field-based problems. The lack of professional development of our clinical supervisor participants effectively rendered them incapable of working with cooperating teachers who were poor models of effective practice. This in turn suggests the parallel need for professional learning for cooperating teachers, in tandem with supervisors. Both cooperating teachers and supervisors have an enormous impact on the quality of the learning experience of teacher candidates. Reforming professional development opportunities for clinical supervisors must thus coincide with other efforts to reform clinical experiences. As Burns, Jacobs, and Yendol-Hoppey (2016a) conclude, the role of the university supervisor requires a shift from "supervisors *of* learning to liaisons *for* learning. As this role shifts, PST supervision will continue to require increased attention and support" (p. 68).

In an effort to foster a deeper recognition by teacher education programs of the enormously complex task of supervision, the following two questions might be considered as a means of identifying ways to better support supervisory practice: (1) What kinds of backgrounds are connected to supervisory skills and styles? and (2) What kinds of professional learning experiences will enhance the supervisory skills of supervisors of varied backgrounds? Our results indicate only 37% of the combined participants reporting extensive supervision training, a factor that manifested itself in widely disparate approaches to supervision. For instance, in our focus group meeting, Carlos, the doctoral student, tended to approach his supervision with an eye to developing critical consciousness in his supervisees, while Nancy, the retired teacher, was focused on providing her candidates with insight into the politics of schools and concrete classroom management techniques. Clearly, there are benefits to including both foci within supervisory practice, however dependent they are on supervisors' backgrounds and beliefs. How

then, can a culture of differentiated and reciprocal professional development be fostered that captures the strengths of supervisors with different backgrounds and beliefs?

In order for the clinical supervisor is to become a liaison *for* learning, then, institutions must provide regular opportunities for supervisors to examine and discuss the dilemmas of practice they encounter, much as we ask our teacher candidates to actively reflect on their own teaching practice, both in groups and individually. Supervisors in our study relished the opportunity to be asked about their experiences and come together for a group discussion about the dilemmas of supervision they were facing. They talked about the isolation they experience and the times when they needed to reach out and talk through a problematic episode, but could not. Clearly, an orientation about rubrics, or simply making the coordinator available to discuss isolated problems does not help supervisors mitigate the complex practical and conceptual dilemmas they face in supporting candidates. Institutions must begin to provide regular spaces for reflection and conversation about supervision. Additionally, as described by (Cuenca, 2010), self-study can also provide an opportunity for supervisors to take stock of their work. As several self-studies of supervision have illustrated, the systematic and empirical attention to the details of supervision not only yields knowledge for future supervisors, but also provides a level of reflection and critical analysis that helps develop and refine the work of supervision (Baecher & McCormack, 2012; Bullock, 2012).

Conclusion

When educator preparation programs engage in iterative cycles of reflection and reform, it is easier to focus on structural changes such as curriculum or course sequence than to consider how the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of those most directly responsible for the experience of teacher education—teacher educators—influence outcomes. In an era when there is growing consensus around the need for clinical-based teacher preparation (INEI, 2008), our study illustrates that clinical supervisors remain where they have always been – disenfranchised. If teacher education is to be transformed through clinical practice (AACTE, 2018; NCATE, 2010), institutions must also concern themselves with empowering supervisors through reflective practice and with building the capacities of clinical supervisors by recognizing the array of tensions and complexities that exist for supervisors.

In order to build this capacity, teacher education could turn to school leadership programs that often co-exist, but at a distance, from teacher education programs. And in turn, school leadership faculty who prepare principals and district leaders could access the expertise of university-based teacher supervisors. Additional sources of expertise teacher education could explore to improve clinical supervision are the related fields of Nursing, Social Work, and Counseling. These fields possess mature research bases about the supervision of practitioners, and recognize the kinds of resources necessary to support supervisors. In nursing, for example, studies have determined the conditions necessary for supervisors to promote practitioners' learning and professional development such as creating significance for the role of supervision, and the assessment, evaluation, and opportunities for feedback of their performance as supervisors (Myall, Levett-Jones, & Lathlean, 2007). Ultimately however, without reconsidering the irony that a turn toward clinical practice often ignores the clinical educator, teacher education will continue to tinker with aspects of preparation without sustained results.

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Author Biographies

Bede McCormack is an associate professor of ESL and Teacher Education at LaGuardia Community College, CUNY. His research interests focus on examining how supervisors can promote connections between teacher candidates' clinical experiences and teaching and learning theory, as well as the impact of teacher feedback on ESL student writing assignments.

Laura H. Baecher is associate professor of TESOL at Hunter College, City University of New York. Her research interests and publications relate to ESL teacher preparation including content-language integration, teacher leadership, the use of video for teacher learning, and practicum and supervision in teaching English learners. Her 2019 book *Video in Teacher Learning* (Corwin) provides a number of avenues for supervisors to continue their own professional learning.

Alexander Cuenca is an assistant professor of Curriculum and Instruction at Indiana University. His research focuses on social studies teacher education, teacher education policy, and the pedagogy of teacher education.