

## Caring Communities as Tools for Learner-Centered Supervision

By Brian P. Yusko

### Visions of Learner-Centered Supervision

Well, you know the word — liaison — just really captures it for me. Liaisons are people that go between different worlds, different people, different ways of doing things and they try to build connections. (Rose, Interview transcript)

Rose<sup>1</sup> works as a “liaison” for a group of interns, i.e., student teachers placed with a single teacher for a full academic year at a large Midwestern university. As a liaison, Rose supervises all of the interns placed in a single school and leads a weekly discussion seminar, called a “guided practice seminar,” for them. Providing an opportunity for interns to discuss problems, concerns, and issues they face in their student teaching, the seminar is one setting where liaisons act as what Rose calls a “go-between.” Liaisons must go between what interns see happening in their school placements and what they are being taught at the university, between what interns believe and what their cooperating teachers tell them, between what interns want to learn and what liaisons believe they should learn, and between differing concerns and perspectives of the interns

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*Brian P. Yusko is an assistant professor in the Department of Curriculum and Foundations of the College of Education at Cleveland State University, Cleveland, Ohio.*

participating in the seminar. Rose views her facilitation of the seminar as an extension of her one-on-one supervision of interns, and her focus on the “go-between” aspect of the role leads Rose to promote connections among the interns that allow them to participate as partners in one another’s supervision. This article examines Rose’s facilitation of the seminar and offers implications for incorporating community building as a tool for learner-centered supervision.

***Supervisor and Supervisee Roles in Learner-Centered Supervision***

As scholarship on teaching has emphasized the importance of treating learners as active constructors of knowledge, scholarship on teacher learning has reinforced the importance of treating learning teachers as active participants in the improvement of their teaching. Recently, Paris and Gespass (2001) have described their efforts to promote “learner-centered supervision” among groups of prospective teachers. They argued that authoritative forms of supervision do not model the kinds of learner-centered teaching they wanted student teachers to develop. Instead, Paris and Gespass (2001) used a form of “learner-centered supervision,” where student teachers took greater responsibility over their own learning. They invited their student teachers to set personal goals that determined the focus of each supervisory visit. Afterwards, the supervisor and student teacher engaged in a dialogue to co-construct the report of the visit. Paris and Gespass invited their students to recommend grading criteria, establish class agendas, select readings, organize groupings, and suggest modifications to planned activities. Paris and Gespass’ methods are consistent with a shift in the literature on supervision away from the supervisor as a neutral, objective evaluator toward the supervisor as a coach who acknowledges the commitment, intelligence, and dignity of supervisees (Gensante & Matgouranis, 1989; Glickman, 1992; Gordon, 1992; Greene, 1992; Poole, 1994; Redekopp, 1989; Sergiovanni, 1992; Starratt, 1992).

Supervision originated in the early twentieth century as a mechanism to exercise greater control over teachers’ classroom practices by documenting teachers’ practices and sanctioning teachers for failure to implement curricular reforms properly (Bolin & Panaritis, 1992). Since the late 1960s, there have been a string of efforts to make supervision more “learner-centered.” Goldhammer (1969) and Cogan (1973) were among the first to criticize hierarchical, bureaucratic supervisory methods. Goldhammer (1969) charged that “supervision is often wasted on superficialities” (p. viii), hampered by a lack of proven knowledge about efficient teaching strategies, or rendered ineffective by the supervisors’ inability to use the teaching strategies they promoted. To remedy these problems, Goldhammer and Cogan developed “clinical supervision,” which includes a pre-conference, formal observation, analysis and post-conference. During the pre-conference, the teacher and supervisor jointly identify what the supervisor will look for, and they collaborate to analyze the supervisor’s observation data in the analysis and post-conference. Cogan and Goldhammer argued that this process was more likely to promote

teacher growth than more hierarchical supervision by enhancing the supervisor/teacher relationship, preserving teachers' autonomy, and allowing for the possibility of teacher self-supervision. Unfortunately, as Poole (1994) points out, during the 1980's, clinical supervision "became almost synonymous with the behavioral, technical approach of Hunter" (p. 286), which views supervision as primarily an instrument of teacher control.

During the era of "teacher centers" in the 1970s (Devaney, 1977), the "advisory model" (Apelman, 1980; Manolakes, 1977) was introduced as a form of "learner-centered supervision." In the advisory model, teachers initiate a relationship with an advisor, who works one-on-one with them to address concerns that the teacher identifies. The advisory model depends on the idea "that teachers are very much concerned about improving their teaching and that they will do so provided proper support conditions exist" (Manolakes, 1977, p. 103). The 1992 Yearbook of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, entitled *Supervision in Transition* (Glickman, 1992), refers to a transition from hierarchical to learner-centered versions of supervision. Costa and Garmston (1994) have recast the role of a supervisor as a "cognitive coach" for teachers. They identified three major goals of cognitive coaching: (1) establishing and maintaining trust; (2) facilitating mutual learning by the teacher *and* the coach; and (3) enhancing growth toward "holonomy," or "individuals acting autonomously while simultaneously acting interdependently with the group" (p. 3). Some theorists, such as Starratt (1992), have even gone so far as to suggest, "in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, supervision of teaching as it is currently practiced will be seen as increasingly counter-productive, if not altogether impossible" (p. 77).

Learner-centered supervision of both practicing and prospective teachers is founded on the belief that teachers have immediate, legitimate concerns that can provide the focus for observations and discussions of classroom teaching. All require that supervisors share their power and responsibility by allowing supervisees to identify learning goals, to choose the focus for classroom observations, to assist in the analysis of observational data, and to participate in the selection of learning materials or resources. The role of the supervised teacher shifts from being the object of supervision to being an active participant in supervision through setting individual goals, choosing a focus for their professional growth, and discussing their teaching with the supervisor. The supervisor shifts from being a bureaucratic evaluator to one who listens to teachers' concerns, assists teachers in selecting appropriate goals, observes classrooms according to a jointly agreed-upon focus, and helps teachers analyze their teaching practices.

#### ***The Potential Role of Caring Communities of Peers in Learner-Centered Supervision***

Switching the supervisor's role from evaluator to coach opens up new possibilities for potential participants in supervision. Supervision is typically viewed as

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a dyadic and hierarchical relationship between a supervisor and supervisee. The responsibilities of learner-centered supervisors to listen to concerns, assist in goal setting, observe in classrooms and analyze teaching practice may be performed equally well by fellow teachers.

Sergiovanni (1992) has argued that when schools function as communities where teachers are committed to helping one another work more effectively, principals are freed from “the traditional management functions of planning, organizing, controlling, and leading” (p. 42). One of the ways this has been done is through “peer coaching” (Showers & Joyce, 1996; Sullivan & Glanz, 2000) or “peer review” (Elliott & Chidley, 1985; Koppich, 2000), in which teachers are paired to observe one another, to provide feedback, and sometimes to evaluate. Although Perkins (1998) argued that it can be difficult and time-consuming for teachers to adopt effective peer coaching strategies, Poole (1994) reported that, in spite of initial trepidation, many teachers came to believe that “collegial supervision” helped them become “self-directing, self-evaluating, and self-correcting within a collaborative relationship” (p. 300). Neubert and McAllister’s (1993) success with preservice teachers suggests that peer coaching can also be applicable at the preservice level.

Noddings (1986) proposed that peer supervision could occur in a “caring community” as participants demonstrate “fidelity” and “caring” toward one another. Fidelity calls for supervisors to act in “direct response to individuals” rather than making decisions based on fidelity to principles. A stance of fidelity is crucial, Noddings argued, if teacher educators hope to educate teachers who will be caring toward their own students:

In the best of practice-teaching situations, new teachers would observe their professors, master teachers, and novice colleagues working together in fidelity. They would be part of a community in which people simultaneously care for each other and strive for the supreme level of competence that I have called ‘high fidelity.’ (p. 505)

Noddings described four features of a caring community: modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. *Modeling* calls for community members to demonstrate the skills and attitudes that new teachers should be developing, such as “meticulous preparation, lively presentation, critical thinking, appreciative listening, constructive evaluation, [and] genuine curiosity” (p. 503). *Dialogue* involves treating ideas about teaching not as unquestionably correct methods, but as “material to be analyzed, discussed, critiqued, and considered” (p. 503). *Practice* means that new teachers have opportunities to practice caring in the company of fellow novices and master teachers who are models of caring. *Confirmation* calls for community members to understand one another’s goals well enough to support each person’s progress toward “the ethical ideals that each strives toward” (p. 505).

Caring communities may offer opportunities for novice teachers to learn not

only what it means to be cared for, but also how to care for one another. Even as supervisors enter into caring relationships with supervisees, interns enter into caring relationships with one another. Noddings' idea of a caring community suggests that supervision could be broadened from a one-on-one relationship between a supervisor and a supervisee to include supervisors, master teachers, and fellow novice or student teachers. To reap the full benefits of this community, supervisors must create conditions to foster these communities of caring, where modeling and confirmation may provide a powerful stimulus for new teacher change and development.

There is a small but growing literature on the use of groups as a venue for peer supervision among practicing teachers (Benjamin, 1989). Brundage (1996) reported that veteran teachers felt the feedback they received from administrator supervisors was not helpful; they expressed a desire for greater collegiality with fellow teachers. Arredondo (1995) proposed the "Dimensions of Learning" model of supervision, which includes group collaboration as one of its dimensions. Tsui and her colleagues (Tsui, 1995; Tsui, Lopez-Real, Law, & Tang, 2001) outlined collaborative supervisory conferences with supervisors and pairs of teachers to minimize the tension arising from the asymmetrical power relationship between supervisor and supervisee. In Japan, teachers routinely convene to engage in "lesson study" (Shimahara, 1998) in which groups of teachers jointly plan a lesson, observe one teacher teaching the lesson, collectively analyze and revise the lesson, and write a reflective report that is often published as a resource for other teachers. Recently, there has been increased interest in the applicability of this process in the U.S. context (Fernandez & Chokshi, 2002; Stigler & Hiebert, 1999; Watanabe, 2002).

There are even fewer published articles on the use of groups as a component of preservice teacher supervision. Studies of groups of prospective teachers have focused primarily on promoting reflection among student teachers (Korthagen, 1992; Mayer & Goldsberry, 1993; Silva & Dana, 2001) rather than involving student teachers as participants in one another's supervision. I identified only one study documenting the attempt to use groups of student teachers as a site for supervision (Caruso, Beck, & Graham, 1993). In that study, student teachers participated in pre-teaching group planning, teaching the lesson, analyzing the lesson individually, and analyzing the lesson as a group. After practicing this form of clinical supervision as a group, student teachers were divided into groups to carry out the cycle without their supervisor present. At the conclusion of the study, student teachers indicated a statistically significant increase in their attitude about the helpfulness of fellow student teachers as a source of supervisory support. Their scores suggest that they viewed their fellow student teachers as nearly as helpful as their assigned college supervisor.

There is a general recognition in the literature of the value of learner-centered supervision and an acknowledgment of the possibilities of peer involvement in supervision. However, there are no detailed studies documenting what learner-

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centered supervision looks like in groups of preservice teachers or analyzing what supervisors must do to create effective groups. Rose's facilitation of her guided practice seminars provides one example of what it might look like to practice learner-centered supervision in a "community of caring." The remainder of this paper uses the principles of learner-centered supervision and community of caring to analyze the features of Rose's practice.

### **Methodology**

This study used case study methods (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2000) to examine Rose's thinking and practice. Since case studies involve a small number of cases, subjects are typically chosen through "purposive sampling" (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1980; Stake, 2000) to maximize the benefits of the study. Although some case studies identify subjects by seeking typical or representative samples of general phenomena to be studied, it is equally common that researchers choose to study unique or interesting cases that present themselves and are accessible to the researcher (Creswell, 1998). Such was the case with this study.

At the time of this study, Rose was a second-year graduate student in education who had held a quarter-time appointment for two years as a liaison. Before graduate school, she taught secondary social studies for several years and had limited supervisory experience. Although the university provided no formal supervisor training, Rose had taken a course entitled "Learning to Teach" during her first year, and the university had a strong reputation for research on teacher learning and teacher education. Rose also participated in bi-weekly staff meetings with fellow liaisons and program leaders to analyze supervisory practices, to refine program policies, and to discuss ways to address challenges inherent in the work.

I had worked as a liaison during the same time period and had felt the difficulty of maximizing the benefits of the guided practice seminars. During the staff meetings, as Rose shared descriptions and transcriptions of her seminars, I became convinced that she was a skillful supervisor and seminar leader. When I invited Rose to participate in a case study of her guided practice seminar facilitation, she consented.

Stake (1995) notes that case study researchers must make strategic decisions about what kinds of data to collect. I collected data that would allow me to see Rose's seminars first hand and to learn about the thinking behind Rose's decisions in the seminars. My data consist of field notes and transcripts from observations of Rose's guided practice as well as transcripts from interviews with Rose. I audiotaped and took field notes during observations of Rose's seminars. During the observations, I familiarized myself with Rose's interns, learned about the general structure of the seminars, and paid attention to the interactions among Rose and her interns. During the interviews, I asked Rose to describe her understanding of the liaison role, her planning for the seminars, and some examples of activities she had conducted in past seminars. She described the evolution of her thinking about the role during

the two years she had been doing the work. She also described a “typical guided practice seminar” and described her plans for the sessions I observed. During one interview, I used a form of stimulated recall. Rose and I listened to the audiotape of a seminar together, and I invited Rose to stop the tape whenever she identified a “critical point” where she had to choose between different courses of action. I also stopped the tape at places I considered “critical points.” Each time one of us stopped the tape, Rose discussed what she had been thinking and what factors contributed to her decisions.

I transcribed the tapes and analyzed the transcripts for instances where Rose was responsive to interns’ concerns, and instances where Rose helped the interns function as supervisors for one another. Using the ideas of learner-centered supervision and caring community as analytic tools, I wrote the case description highlighting instances of learner-centered supervision. A close analysis of this description and interview transcripts allowed me to identify specific practices that Rose used to promote the seminar as a site for learner-centered supervision.

I am not suggesting that Rose is typical or representative of a broader population of supervisors, or of liaisons leading guided practice seminars, nor am I making claims about Rose’s one-on-one supervisory work with her interns. Instead, I am using the data to present an “instrumental case study” (Stake, 2000) that “draws attention to what can be learned from a single case” (Stake, 2000) with respect to learner-centered supervision. Case studies such as this are valuable for “refining theory and suggesting complexities for further generalization” (Stake, 2000, p. 448). This study provides evidence to suggest that an examination of Rose’s leadership of the seminar offers a set of intrinsically interesting practices that broaden the notion of learner-centered supervision to include community settings of preservice teachers such as guided practice seminars.

### **Modeling Fidelity and Caring**

Rose viewed her first responsibility as modeling the habits of fidelity and caring that she hoped to foster among the community of interns. For Rose, this meant that she worked to understand and take seriously the interns’ concerns. Just as Dewey (1902/1990) argued that “the child and the curriculum are simply two limits which define a single process” (p. 189), Rose saw her job as helping the interns make connections between their ideas about teaching and the teacher education program standards. Her habits of careful listening, keeping track of changes in interns’ thinking, and planning activities that responded to their immediate concerns provided a model for the interns to follow in their interactions with one another.

### ***Paying Attention to Individuals***

Rose believed that her most important responsibility was to keep track of

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interns' thinking and development over time. To facilitate this, she developed a record-keeping system for documenting the development and growth of individual interns' ideas about teaching:

Let's say Jane is one of my interns. I'm keeping a file on Jane. I'm trying to be aware of her thinking and how it changes over time, her behavior in the classroom, ... a sense of her relationship with her [collaborating teacher], what her areas of strengths and areas to work on are.

Rose hoped to help individual interns see how their thinking changed over time by referring to previous comments or actions in the classroom:

I'm able to say things like, "It's very interesting you would say that because two months ago seems like you were asking the opposite question," and they just go wild with that stuff. They love it, and I would too. They love having someone remember what they said and knowing that they're changing and growing like anybody does. The process has shown me a way of teaching when you have a small number of people, when you're able to listen and keep track of how their thinking changes over time and then pull that out of the folder. They forget and don't see it. It's like the ultimate mentor — the person who stands by and watches and can show you things that you experienced but you didn't see it yourself because you were in it.

Working with a small number of interns, Rose felt fortunate to have time and resources to pay careful enough attention to individual interns to document changes in their comments about their experience, the questions they asked, and their journal entries. This careful observation enabled Rose to be an "ultimate mentor" who interpreted interns' learning.

#### ***Giving Voice to Interns' Ideas and Following Their Lead***

Rose's goal of documenting changes in individual thinking led her to develop tools and activities to give greater voice to the interns' thinking throughout the year. She wanted her interns to succeed and believed that each wanted to succeed. She "modeled" caring by listening carefully to what interns said in the guided practice seminar and by trying to understand the source of their anxiety when they expressed concerns. When she presented her plans to the group, she paid attention to whether her planned activity was responsive to the interns' immediate concerns.

Rose planned the weekly seminar activities by using the interns' ideas and questions as the starting point for their discussions. Rose reported success in developing activities that were learner-centered and responsive to the interns' immediate concerns. When I asked Rose whether the interns ever felt resistant to her planned activities, she said that did not happen regularly:

I think that happens and probably did happen but I sort of minimize that by making a really overt demonstration of how much I care about their growth and development, how much time I'm willing to put into shaping an activity that seems relevant to them: thinking about what constitutes good teaching.



Rose reported that her interns were generally willing to do whatever she asked them to do. She admitted that sometimes

I get some grumbling and complaining about feeling overwhelmed. Sometimes when I'm asking them to do some hard thinking. It's not like they're mad, just so tired. So they start feeling too tired to do it. But I don't take that personally. Those are real human emotions and all I can say is if I was in [their] situation I'd feel the same way.

Rose attributed the interns' willingness to the fact that she planned activities that were responsive to the interns' individual needs and at the same time promoted dialogue about important topics.

For example, early in the year, Rose held a series of conversations in which she helped the interns become more articulate in their ideas about good teaching. She started these conversations by asking the interns to brainstorm their ideas and taping the ensuing conversation:

Then the next week we built on that. ... I typed up their statements about where that idea of teaching came from and then I gave them back to them ... I chose some words that seemed like key words from what they were saying—like “exciting” or “engage” or “perfectionistic.” Then I went to the [*Oxford English Dictionary*], took the words out that I had chosen, and copied those pages and then brought the typewritten dialogue as well as the [*Oxford English Dictionary*] to the next class. I'm smiling because that feels like the first time I started getting comments from them. They have this image of me as someone that puts a lot of work and time into preparing for guided practice. I did that time and I think about my interns a lot.

This seminar demonstrates that Rose was strategically balancing her own goals with the concerns of the interns. Even while giving interns' voices greater prominence, Rose did not act as just a reflecting mirror or sounding board. Rather than simply allowing the interns to discuss their ideas about teaching during a single week, she planned an activity to bring the interns' ideas to a higher level of sophistication. *She* decided which words to bring back the following week. *She* chose to use the dictionary definitions as a tool to force interns to think carefully about the meanings of the words they had used. The activity showed Rose's interns that they were legitimate participants in conversations about teaching, but not the only legitimate participants. Sharing responsibility with interns still involves many important decisions on the supervisor's part.

This activity demonstrates Rose's ability to shift the power relationship and give her interns' voices a prominent place in their conversations about teaching. Rose's thoughtfulness indicated to the interns that Rose's purposes were consistent with their own. By being attentive to individuals, she established her care for their individual thinking and “confirmation” of the interns as contributors to a dialogue about teaching. By taking time to choose key words from interns' statements, type up their comments, and compare their meanings to definitions in the dictionary,

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Rose demonstrated Noddings' (1986) "modeling" by listening carefully to interns' ideas in ways that she hoped they would eventually do for one another. Bringing the interns' language into the conversation served as "confirmation" (Noddings, 1986) that the interns' ideas were valid contributions to this dialogue. By typing up the interns' comments, Rose made the interns' thinking public in a way that opened up new possibilities for Noddings' (1986) "dialogue," which treats teaching not as correct or incorrect, but as something problematic to discuss. Rose believed that this work was important because it demonstrated her caring stance and because the interns began to see that she valued their contribution to the group's ongoing conversations about teaching. Rose believed that this seminar set the tone for the rest of the year.

### **Structuring Seminars To Promote Caring Communities**

In addition to modeling skills and dispositions, Rose provided "practice" for interns to participate in one another's supervision. Rose believed that the guided practice seminar could be a "community of practice" in which individual interns entered into caring, supervisory relationships with one another. She described the dual nature of her role as "walking the tightrope" between individual and community. She viewed her challenge as figuring out how to create a meaningful community of practice without sacrificing her ability to attend closely to individual interns' development.

At the beginning of the year, she explained her vision to the interns:

I talked about what I wanted to have happen in the group for it to be a teacher learning community. They were things like everybody talks. If somebody didn't get to share that week, they'll share the next week. It's important to both ask questions to make sure you understand what the person is saying as well as to offer suggestions and ideas.

To create a "teacher learning community," Rose monitored both the group process and the individual interns' thinking. Rose hoped that, with her help, the interns would learn to monitor one another's thinking closely enough to recognize changes in one another's thinking over time:

In the context of a community ... you talk about your practice with other people and you ask them to comment on what you said. [They might] say things like, "Well, that reminds me of something you said earlier and so how has your thinking changed?" People start developing a sense of responsibility for one another. In the past that was my role *only* in guided practice which was ... just another way of looking at individual interns. [Now] my purpose was to remind them of their role in keeping track of their own thinking and learning over time *as well as* others' thinking and learning over time.

Constructing the guided practice seminar as a community of caring called for an additional layer of complexity. In addition to monitoring individual interns' thinking, Rose needed to create ways to make that thinking public, to invite

responses from fellow interns, and to encourage reflection so interns could recognize growth in one another's ideas. This additional responsibility meant more work for Rose, but it also opened up the possibilities for a richer form of supervision.

### ***Weekly Seminars as an Opportunity To Practice Caring***

To illustrate Rose's efforts to promote the guided practice seminar as a caring community I will describe one seminar. During the previous seminar, Rose had invited school principals to attend and ask the interns typical interview questions. The interns enjoyed the experience, but they felt unsettled because they believed their answers were inadequate. Rose was surprised because she thought the principals' questions were similar to those she had been asking all year.

In her planning, Rose wanted to "bridge the gap" between interview questions and guided practice questions. She wondered whether the interns had felt nervous to be put on the spot, had felt self-conscious about having others listen to their answers, or had simply been unable to make connections between guided practice discussions and the interview questions. She decided to address the last possibility by helping interns see connections between seminar talk and interview questions.

Rose expected the interns to respond enthusiastically to her plan:

After the principals [visited the seminar] last week I said, "It seems like something that might be useful to all of you is if we could revisit these questions and talk about different ways of answering them," so that was a clue right there that this was of the highest priority right now. If I went to guided practice and said, "Now we're going to read this book by Fried about passionate teaching," then [that's another story] ... I'm pretty sure this is going to go pretty well.

Rose demonstrated a learner-centered stance by choosing to follow-up on an activity that had caused concern among the interns. Her interpretation of the causes of interns' uneasiness led her to create an activity that demonstrated how the interns could participate in learner-centered supervision.

### ***Demonstrating Caring by Evoking a Mental Image***

Rose's strategy, which she used regularly, was to evoke a mental image for the interns by recreating their emotions at the end of the previous seminar. Typically, Rose gave interns an activity at the beginning of each seminar to introduce her plan for the day. This might be time to think about a question, writing in a journal, or using guided imagery to help interns recreate previous situations or conversations. Rose felt that this activity allowed interns to collect their thoughts after what she knew was probably a hectic day. The activity also prepared the interns to talk about the planned topic. Perhaps most importantly, this portion of the seminar enabled Rose to show interns how her planned activities were consistent with their perceived needs. If Rose discovered that interns were not receptive to the activities, it allowed her the opportunity to make on-the-spot modifications.

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On this day, Rose asked the interns a question to recall the seminar from the previous week:

Rose: OK, so, what was it like again, last week, when the principals said, “OK, why did you go into teaching?”

Amy: I thought it was a really good idea. I really appreciated that they took the time out to do that, but I don’t know it was just, when he kind of jumped down my throat and was like, “What’s your name?” I was just so unprepared ... I didn’t think it was authentic because I didn’t have my emotions set up, you know?

The interns offered detailed descriptions of their nervous feelings during the principals’ visit. Rose’s question enabled the interns to re-create their emotions during the previous seminar. This strategy is consistent with her teaching philosophy:

Part of my philosophy of teaching is that people are motivated to learn when they have a need, felt need to learn that, and if they don’t feel a need to learn it, then it’s a pretty stupid waste of time. And I feel like I’m constantly [paying attention to that]. Even though the students might be quite motivated internally to learn it, I can’t know that, I can’t tell that by just looking at them, just because they show up. I can’t assume that they’re motivated to learn what I had to teach, so I had to create something that was sort of at the emotional level, so it was re-creating. I wasn’t trying to create new emotions for them; I was trying to remind them of what they felt before.

The strategy of evoking a mental image is an example of how Rose shared responsibility and power with the interns. She learned whether her planned activity was based on a correct interpretation of the interns’ reactions to the previous seminar and allowed the possibility of shifting her plan in mid-stream. In addition, the technique allowed Rose to show the interns her goals and how she hoped to accomplish them. She felt confident that her plan was responsive to interns’ concerns because she had spent so much time interpreting their responses, but she accepted the possibility that her interpretation could have been wrong.

### *Connecting Interns’ Ideas with Teaching Standards*

After determining that her interpretation was correct, Rose helped interns to “practice” caring as they participated in a dialogue connecting their ideas about teaching with the four program standards (knowledge of content, teaching for student understanding, managing a learning community, teacher professionalism). Rose described her plan and how she thought it would address their needs:

I was thinking about this this week because it was interesting for me to hear the questions and try to put myself in your shoes about how to answer them. In some ways I thought ... that there are things that you guys have been doing and thinking about all year that ... might help you answer the questions. But when you were on the spotlight that maybe it felt like, “Wow, this is totally new. Nobody has ever asked me these questions before.” But in some ways every time you have an

assessment conference or every time we do something in guided practice where I'm asking you "What do you think about teaching?" or "What do you believe is a characteristic of a good teacher?" in a way you're already starting to think about those big questions . . . Then I started thinking, well, what would it take for it to feel [less nerve-wracking] ... I guess I have the idea that an interview could not be so, feel so tense, like you're not prepared for it, that it is possible to go into an interview and feel like, "I'm ready for their questions." Now, what do you think? Do you think that's too much to ask? I thought maybe we could work toward that goal a little bit today.

Rose showed them that she had been thinking about them and trying to imagine how they must have felt. She pointed to evidence of their growth by reminding them that they had spent a year doing, thinking, writing, and talking about teaching. She described her goal of helping them connect guided practice experiences with the interview process. The interns were visibly and verbally supportive of her plan.

Rose asked the interns to categorize potential interview questions using the four program standards as a framework. Rose hoped that this activity would reinforce their understanding of the standards. She said, "I'm trying to get them to think about the standards more as a whole piece of cloth — as a framework for them to think about their whole set of beliefs about teaching." She also hoped that this categorization process would help interns formulate responses to unfamiliar interview questions by relating them to one of the four program standards.

### ***Making Interns' Thinking Public***

After categorizing the questions, Rose planned an activity to make interns' thinking public in a non-threatening way. She asked interns to prepare answers to two questions, provide examples from their teaching, and consider a possible portfolio artifact to illustrate their point. The interns took turns answering the questions while the group posed as the interview team, asking follow-up questions, giving feedback and suggestions based on their knowledge of the intern. Finally, she planned to audiotape each of their answers so they could listen to themselves and perhaps realize that their answers did not sound dumb even though they felt dumb in the midst of answering.

After preparing for a short time, the interns took turns answering practice interview questions. After each response, Rose invited the other interns to ask follow-up questions and evaluate one another's answers. In every case, at least one other intern offered a follow-up question or comment. Some of the comments were positive evaluations about the intern's response:

I think you did address your philosophy as well because you said that you think it would be unfair to judge [students] against each other ...

I liked how you brought in responsibility, self-esteem, mainstream, and then you just brought in reality. You made them all concrete.

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I thought your first answer for #2, the one about comparing [students], you stole my answer. It's a matter of comparing [students] against themselves and developing and getting better.

The interns also challenged each other by asking clarification questions or making suggestions for improvement:

Have you had any specific incidences of students where you're really seen how a student has come from or has really progressed in terms of their own?

Can I try to stump you? What if one of the administrators says, "Don't you think you might be holding back that student because they're not keeping up with the rest of the class? What would you do in that situation? You're trying to prepare that student for the [state proficiency test] and everybody else is at this level and you know this student is capable of doing it, and you said you were looking for progression. How do you bring them together?"

What if you start to discuss about this violence, and you start a violent uproar in the classroom — people are against each other in the classroom, and people know the people involved, let's say the girlfriend. You're not really talking about that situation, but it's kind of going back toward that way again. What would you do if there was a violent outbreak in the room?

One thing that I think you could add... You could say... "I implement theory into my practice." You know how we learn about the different learning styles... or if you talk about Nancy Applebee and conferencing and the revision process...

These comments and questions prompted the interns to clarify their positions and initiated conversations in which other interns shared how they would respond to the same question. For three out of the four interns, Rose waited until the fellow interns had finished asking questions. Only then did she respond in one of three ways: asking a follow-up question, commenting on possible reactions to the intern's response, and offering additional ideas for how to respond to the question. Rose led the interns in a round of applause after each person finished.

Preparing answers to interview questions, sharing responses, and answering feedback questions combined all of the features of Noddings' "caring community." Asking the interns to share their responses made the interns' thinking public in a non-threatening way as part of a genuine "dialogue" (Noddings, 1986) about teaching. By asking the interns to ask one another follow-up questions, Rose was inviting the interns to "practice" (Noddings, 1986) caring by participating in the dialogue. After the interns had asked their own follow-up questions, Rose "modeled" caring behavior by asking her own follow-up questions. By celebrating each intern's response, Rose and the other interns displayed "confirmation" (Noddings, 1986) of each person's ideas.

The interns expressed enjoyment with the guided practice seminar. They appeared to appreciate the opportunity to practice answering questions and to get feedback about their answers. At the end of the seminar, one intern commented on

her enjoyment of the seminar, and Rose reiterated her goal of helping the interns participate in one another's supervision:

Intern: Gosh, I love guided practice ... I do though ... I'm not kidding, and I'm not just saying it. I'm dead serious ... It's like, I get all my feelings out, you know? Not just my feelings but ... if Amy wouldn't have [made the connection to our other seminar], I never would have thought I have something to back this up with.

Rose: That's a part of the beauty of being all together in one place, having a common experience. We know each other well enough to be able to say those kinds of things now to each other.

Throughout the seminar, I was impressed with the lively verbal exchanges between Rose and her interns. This seminar demonstrated the potential of a well-developed "caring community" as a tool for including peers as participants in learner-centered supervision.

## **Conclusions and Implications**

This case study examined the thinking and practices of one university supervisor with a small group of interns to examine the boundaries and possibilities of learner-centered supervision. This case enriches and extends the idea of learner-centered supervision by demonstrating what is possible when caring communities of interns are carefully developed and nurtured. Though sufficient to suggest the potential involved in extending learner-centered supervision into peer groups, further study will be necessary to address the many unanswered questions.

### ***Limitations and Unanswered Questions***

Rose's liaison practice demonstrates one way to include group settings as opportunities for learner-centered supervision, but the case also raises additional questions. For example, there are questions about the context in which Rose worked. As with any teaching and learning situation, it is plausible that the teacher/student ratio was influential; Rose could offer individualized attention because she worked with only four interns. The small seminar size may also have helped interns to develop closer relationships and had an easier time keeping track of one another's growth. Since Rose worked with interns for a full academic year rather than a single semester, it may have been easier for her to see patterns of interns' growth and development. All of Rose's interns were placed in a single school, so she may have had increased contact with interns even when she was not supervising them or facilitating seminars. Finally, Rose participated in regular staff meetings with other liaisons who were interested in developing their supervisory practices. These conditions raise questions about the degree to which any of these factors contributed to Rose's ability to provide meaningful learner-centered supervision.

This case also raises many new questions. For example, there are questions

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about the impact of these practices on the interns. Are there trade-offs of incorporating peer supervision into seminar settings, and if so, what are they? What impact does learner-centered supervision in group settings have on preservice teachers' teaching, their students' learning, or their ability to grow over time? Finally, there are questions about the relationship between these modes of supervision and consequences for school reform and renewal. What are the differences of learner-centered supervision among groups of preservice and practicing teachers? Would involvement in such communities as preservice teachers make it easier to be involved in such communities once they begin teaching? How would it affect school cultures if groups of teachers formed such communities on their own? Rather than detracting from the value of the study, these questions demonstrate the generative nature of the case.

### *Implications for Supervision*

Supervisors who work with many interns or student teachers for shorter periods of time in multiple schools may wonder whether Rose's case can be applied to their own. Of course, one potential implication of Rose's case would be to structure teacher education programs so that supervisors' experiences more closely resemble Rose's situation, i.e. small numbers of supervisees, concentrated in specific schools, and supervised over long periods of time. Even without such changes, supervisors whose experiences differ significantly from Rose's can adapt Rose's strategies for their situations.

Rose's practice of learner-centered supervision included two goals: (1) modeling caring and fidelity by demonstrating careful attention to individual thinking and growth over time; and (2) structuring the seminar as a community where interns participated in one another's supervision. The specific practices that helped her accomplish these goals are listed in Table 1.

By demonstrating careful attention to interns' thoughts and ideas, supervisors can provide a model of caring that can extend outward to influence prospective teachers' interactions with one another. Presumably, most supervisors already keep records on their students. As the numbers of students increase, it may be necessary to limit the amount and scope of records that supervisors keep, but supervisors should still reflect on individual records for evidence of growth and development as well as patterns in thinking, not just current performance. By acting as a mirror for interns' thinking, documenting and calling attention to changes in interns' thinking, supervisors can model a learner-centered stance. Even with large numbers of interns, supervisors can bring in concrete examples of their responsiveness, such as transcriptions or recollections of particular interns' previous comments. Through such strategies, supervisors indicate the value of interns' ideas while simultaneously challenging them and raising new questions to consider.

In addition to modeling a learner-centered stance, supervisors can foster the development of the seminar as a "caring community" to tap into the strengths of



**Table 1**

*Practices that Support Learner-Centered Supervision in Community Contexts*

<p>Modeling Caring and Fidelity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ Developing a system for attending to interns' individual thinking</li><li>◆ Using the system for tracking changes in thinking over time</li><li>◆ Talking openly about interpretations of interns' comments and concerns</li><li>◆ Demonstrating thoughtfulness about interns' comments and designing seminars that were responsive to these concerns</li><li>◆ Calling attention to individual changes in thinking, and using evidence to support these contentions</li></ul>	<p>Structuring Seminars to Promote Caring Communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ Monitoring the community development—articulating the vision, monitoring success, and fostering productive participation</li><li>◆ Using interpretations of interns' comments and concerns as a starting point for the seminars</li><li>◆ Evoking a mental image to generate a perceived need for planned activities and to ensure that plans were responsive</li><li>◆ Making individual thinking public so that interns can practice calling attention to changes in one another's thinking</li><li>◆ Modeling dialogue about teaching that acknowledges its complexity and values interns' voices as well as the voices of "experts"</li><li>◆ Offering opportunities for interns to practice dialogue with one another by holding back comments or questions until the interns respond to one another</li></ul>
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peers as valuable contributors to learner-centered supervision. Supervisors must make explicit their expectations for interns to recognize and call attention to one another's growth and development. Supervisors may wish to divide large seminar groups into subgroups or conduct small group activities. At the very least, supervisors can structure opportunities for interns to share concerns. By interpreting interns' concerns in the context of teaching standards, supervisors can plan activities that balance their own concerns with interns' concerns. These activities build on ideas and concerns expressed directly by interns while establishing connections between interns' ideas and teaching standards.

When introducing these activities, regardless of group size, supervisors must articulate their rationale for conducting these activities and monitor interns' reactions to ensure that they have correctly interpreted the underlying causes of many interns' concerns. One way of doing this is to evoke a mental image from previous events and offer an idea as one suggestion of how to address such concerns. Supervisors need to remain flexible enough to respond to alternate suggestions. This ensures group support and cooperation and models a caring stance.

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Conducting learner-centered activities in seminar settings requires constant vigilance on the part of supervisors. First, they must provide opportunities for interns to make their thinking public. Second, supervisors must step back and allow interns the first opportunity to provide feedback and raise questions of one another. Finally, supervisors should reinforce comments that demonstrate the kinds of caring and fidelity that are crucial to meaningful learner-centered supervision. Creating situations where prospective teachers are involved in one another's supervision may help to pave the way for these individuals to participate more effectively in learner-centered supervision of themselves and their peers once they begin their teaching careers.

## Note

<sup>1</sup> All names are pseudonyms.

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