

Carving a Space for Clinical Practice Supervisors: Perspectives From Colored Lenses

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Abstract

In this three-year longitudinal qualitative case study, the authors investigate a) the emergence of the professional supervisor identity, and b) the dynamics of evolving supervision practices by analyzing the case of two female supervisors from international backgrounds working within an early childhood education (P-3) program in a large Midwestern university. Based on an interpretive paradigm and grounded theory methodology, qualitative data consists of interviews, reflective journals, transcribed debriefing sessions, and reconstruction of personal histories. Results indicate that four concepts defined supervisor practices for the two participants: a struggle to move beyond “the evaluator,” negotiating sociocultural lenses, student teacher dispositions, and navigating triad relationships. In addition, by challenging the assumption that supervisors are an artificial addition to the student teaching experience, the study demonstrates the ways in which the subjects went beyond the limited scope of traditional student teaching supervision practices. The findings suggest that in order to fulfil more productive roles in fostering the growth of student teachers, university supervisors should be provided professional growth opportunities that highlight their professional identity.

Recent standards by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP)—formerly the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE)—suggest new directions for strengthening clinical practice experience in teacher education programs (Darling-Hammond, 2014; Heafner, McIntyre, & Spooner, 2014). Many of these recommendations include stronger partnerships with professional development schools and the use of teacher evaluation tools to increase reflection and systematic growth of teacher candidates. To this end, new policies and outcome-based measures that assess growing knowledge, skills, and dispositions are gaining momentum. However, the complex web of interactions within the student teaching triad that includes clinical practice candidates—who we refer to as student teachers in this paper—cooperating teacher, and university supervisor receives little attention as an important contributor to the growth of student teachers. Among the three, university supervisors have historically been the least examined yet the most controversial members of the triad (Koerner, Rust, & Baumgartner, 2002). This paper will examine a) the emergence of the professional supervisor identity, and b) the dynamics of evolving supervision practices by analyzing the case of two female supervisors from international backgrounds working within an early childhood education (P-3) program in a large Midwestern university.

Literature Review

The limited literature on supervision mainly explores the scope, nature, and role of university supervision (Koerner et al., 2002; Slick, 1998b) from which a debate emerges as to whether the supervisor is instrumental in preservice teacher learning, or is just a “disfranchised outsider” (Slick, 1998b). Some researchers argue that the very nature of student teacher supervision, specifically university supervisors’ traditional role in evaluation, positions the university as an outsider to the student teaching experience (Bullough, Jr., & Draper,

2004; Slick, 1998b). For instance, Bates and Burbank (2008) found that in recent years, university supervisors felt further pressure to address standards-based teaching outcomes instead of meeting the individual needs of student teachers, which resulted in an overemphasis on their evaluative role. Other researchers highlight the potential contributions of supervisors, especially their ability to act as mediators between the cooperating teacher and student teacher (Koerner et al., 2002; Yusko, 2004), and to provide pedagogical, emotional, and motivational support to student teachers (Koerner et al., 2002; Slick, 1998a; Yusko, 2004), particularly when they have issues with cooperating teachers and are in need of ideas for teacher growth (Talvitie, Peltokallio, & Mannisto, 2000). A more recent study illustrates that student teachers perceive their interactions with supervisors as collaborative and one that supports higher-order thinking skills (Wright, Grenier, & Channell, 2015). In addition, university supervisors may represent the teacher education program in the field by communicating the university's philosophy and clarifying expectations (Koerner et al., 2002).

Despite these potential contributions, university supervisors often receive inadequate training, support, and attention (Borko & Mayfield, 1995; Bullough & Draper, 2004; Koerner et al., 2002; Miller & Carney, 2009). Slick (1998b) argues that faculty members are often reluctant to take on the responsibility of supervision because of its effects on tenure or financial and academic wellbeing. Therefore, the role of university supervision often falls to retired teachers or graduate students, who may not be sufficiently prepared for the job (Yusko, 2004; Zeichner, 2010). For example, Miller and Carney (2009) found that supervisors face challenges during the implementation of teacher assessment tools due to insufficient professional development. Consequently, scholars such as Cartaut and Bertone (2008), Frykholm (1998), Rodgers and Bainer-Jenkins (2010), and Shiveler and Poetter (2002) have proposed alternative models for supervision teachers, such as mentoring and coaching that would prioritize the needs of students in an effort to strengthen their knowledge, skills, and dispositions during field experiences.

University supervisors undertake a learning process that includes the negotiation of roles and creating a productive context wherein they can support the growth of novice teachers (Andrew, 2007; Montecinos et al., 2002). Longitudinal studies chronicling the evolving roles and professional impact of supervision are scarce and highly needed in teacher education literature (Slick, 1998a; Yusko, 2004). As they negotiate their roles within the triad, the influence of social and cultural perspectives of supervisors on their practice is rarely explored (Ritter, Powell, Havley, & Blasik, 2011). Therefore, this research paper investigates the emergence of the professional supervisor identity and its development by analyzing the case of two supervisors from international backgrounds within an early childhood education (P-3) program in a large Midwestern university. By examining individual and shared stories of supervision experience through systematic reflection, especially as it pertains to negotiating supervisory roles and models and their perceived impact on student teachers, the study explores the dynamics of evolving supervision practices for these two female supervisors from international backgrounds within a particular sociocultural context.

The Context

In the M.Ed. teacher education program that the two participant supervisors worked, the supervisor numbers for each year were determined by the number of admitted student teachers in the two cohorts formed, usually consisting of 40-50 candidates. Supervisors were led by a faculty leader, a full-time faculty member who, as part of her service responsibilities, provided guidance and leadership for the early childhood teacher education program, facilitated weekly supervision meetings, and acted as a mediator when conflicts arose. This role rotated each year among different faculty in the program. Also in collaboration with the faculty leader, two retired elementary teachers with master's degrees were hired as program managers for several consecutive years for each cohort. Their roles included teaching year-long seminar courses for student

teachers, arranging field experiences and placements for student teaching, leading weekly supervision meetings, acting as the immediate supervisor and mentor for university supervisors, stepping in when issues arose in the field, and collaborating with the faculty leader when making decisions for the field experiences.

Weekly supervision meetings that included supervisors, program managers, and the faculty leader were another important context for supervisor growth. During these meetings, issues arising in the field were openly discussed, and the supervisors reported the progress of the student teachers. Each participant was required to act as a team member, brainstorm ideas for solutions, and celebrate the successes of student teachers and supervisors.

Official supervisory roles included:

- a) Conducting classroom observations of the candidates about once every 2 weeks and providing individualized feedback regarding instruction, classroom management, lesson plans and teaching,
- b) Conducting pre- and post-observation conferences, as well as debriefing candidates and classroom teachers to resolve any arising issues,
- c) Arranging periodic three-way conferences between a candidate, mentor teacher, and supervisor to assess the candidate's performance in each setting through a checklist based on Praxis III Assessment. Praxis III has four domains: a) planning-organizing, b) management, c) instruction, and d) professionalism (Educational Testing Services, 2011). Supervisors were required to provide feedback on all of the above as they conducted weekly or biweekly observations.

While they conducted weekly field visits with student teachers, supervisors used a handbook with various forms, samples and teacher standards guidelines based on Praxis III criteria and National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) standards. Student teachers were required to create weekly and daily lesson plans and submit them to the supervisor at the beginning of each week. All of these pieces encouraged reflection prior to, during, and after the planning and teaching. During the observations, supervisors used these plans and a two-column narrative observation form with spaces for observation and feedback, which were subsequently discussed during a post-conference with student teachers.

During each academic year, supervisors arranged for a total of seven three-way conferences with all members of each student teaching triad—cooperating teacher, student teacher, and supervisor. In these conferences, each member filled out a copy of a narrative form that addressed the growth of a student teacher through the four domains in the Praxis III instrument and put them together to discuss candidate growth.

Participants

Nida is a certified elementary and social studies teacher from Turkey who had been in the United States for 6 years by the end of data collection for this project. Even though her own student teaching experience provided a background for her understanding of the roles of supervisors, she did not supervise student teachers in Turkey. At the time of data collection, she was a doctoral student in the early childhood teacher education program at a large research-focused university and was employed as a supervisor for the Early Childhood (P-3) Masters of Education (M.Ed.) program. She was familiar with the context and culture of the program as she had also completed her master's degree (Master of Arts) at the same university.

During data collection, Soon-Yi was a doctoral student from Korea. She had been studying at the same university since her sophomore year, focusing on early childhood education. Upon receiving her bachelor's degree, she returned to Korea for 2 years and taught in a preschool as co-program manager before she earned her master's degree and began doctoral studies at the same institution as Nida. She was also employed by the university for 4 years as a university supervisor.

Alan, the third author of this study, served as Nida's advisor and was a member of the teacher education faculty on a different regional campus at the same university system but was not active in the supervision experiences described here. He periodically met with Nida and Soon-Yi to support their reflections, negotiations, and meaning-making processes related to supervision throughout the data collection. He did not carry a supervisory role for Nida and Soon-Yi. Rather, this position allowed Alan to be a mentor and critic for the two.

A year before their first supervision appointment, Nida and Soon-Yi followed experienced supervisors and observed them with their student teachers during supervision visits at the schools. These supervisors were selected by the program manager because of their experience and reputation as good "mentors" for student teachers through an informal situated apprenticeship that continued through their first year (Rogoff, 1990). Nida and Soon-Yi also attended weekly supervisor meetings that year. They situated themselves as learners observing supervisors' interactions and perceived these interactions as model practices.

Supervision in teacher education was a new experience for Nida and Soon-Yi. The challenge of having to supervise eight preservice teachers during each academic year of their doctoral studies was heightened by the fact that they had taught in other countries instead of the United States. While reflecting on the supervision process is encouraged, supervisors did not go through a formal training or reading list on coaching or clinical supervision as they began supervision. However, Nida and Soon-Yi felt the need to familiarize themselves with some of the literature since they were studying to become educators of early childhood teachers. For instance, inspired by her supervision experiences, Nida went through intense teacher education training in her doctoral studies and earned a specialization that included a clinical supervision course. Finally, supervisors in this study were provided with job stability over three years during the course of the study and were also provided with respect and autonomy by faculty and program managers. Over time, interactions with various local contexts of classrooms and school sites, including urban, suburban, low income, and affluent school districts, provided Nida and Soon-Yi with a wider perspective in understanding different educational and cultural practices in schools, which resulted in the descriptions below conceived through the colored lenses of their backgrounds.

Theoretical Framework

In this qualitative study, we positioned ourselves as researchers and participants. As Erickson has argued (1986), researchers never arrive in the field with a purely inductive mind; they always bring assumptions and ways of interpretation with them. In the words of Holstein and Gubrium (2005), interpretive paradigm positions researchers as subjective actors.

[Interpretive practices are] centered in both how people methodologically construct their experiences and their worlds, and in the configurations of meaning and institutional life that inform and shape their reality constituting activity. A growing attention to both the *hows* and *whats* of the social construction process echoes Karl Marx's adage that people actively construct their worlds but not completely on, or in, their own terms. (p. 484)

In examining the process of negotiating supervision roles, we drew from sociocultural learning theories that explain how learning is a socially and historically constructed act (Vygotsky, 1978). We found the concept of "apprenticeship" by Rogoff (1990) particularly useful in understanding how novice supervisors learn their roles through the social network within the university and from different school contexts with which they come in contact.

Methodology

For this study, we chose a qualitative case study design (Yin, 2003, 2006), utilizing narratives as the major data source to capture in-depth reflections and the voices of supervisors. Because this is a case study, one might expect that preservice teachers would be a part of the case, but since the focus is on understanding supervision roles from a supervisor's perspective, those being supervised were not central to the study. Therefore, we describe our case study methodology as a *single case study*, with two international supervisors as the units of study (Yin, 2003, 2006).

In interpretive epistemologies, the researcher does not test hypotheses or seek to generalize the findings to a larger group since the nature of knowledge is situative, socially constructed, and historically shaped (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Even so, the findings might still be transferable in order to provide a knowledge base for other research by explaining concepts and describing the phenomena studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). To this end, while we utilized case study as a method for research design, we benefited from a *grounded theory* approach in the analysis phase to describe our unique case without initial presumptions of its meaning (Andrade, 2009).

Data Collection

Various supervision experiences were the sites for inquiry. Each cohort of candidates was placed in a preschool field experience between September and December, and in an elementary school between January and June, with the last 6 weeks allocated to full-time student teaching. Nida and Soon-Yi visited each of their preservice teachers biweekly. Data was collected through interviews, the reconstruction of personal experiences and histories, reflective journals, and debriefing sessions over three academic years. During the course of the study, participants collaborated weekly to gather data about supervision experiences, meeting both before and after weekly supervision meetings led by the program managers and the faculty leader for the respective program.

To interrogate practices, Nida and Soon-Yi also conducted three in-depth interviews with each other lasting about 90 minutes each in addition to weekly debriefing sessions. The purpose of these interviews was twofold: to create future action in supervision practices, and to make explicit their theoretical and practical knowledge to contribute to preservice teachers' field experiences. These interviews were framed as *reflexive action interviews* since they helped them to reflect on supervision practices and effect changes (Lather, 1991). Table 1 outlines the chronology and the typology of data collection.

Data Analysis

Three interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim for each participant. Interviews and other data went through a first coding phase using *initial coding* (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and *process coding* (Charmaz, 2002) techniques. Data was further analyzed in the second coding phase to develop a conceptual organization of the initial themes that emerged in the *first coding phase* (Saldana, 2009) within and then across each data type. We examined our codes and searched for both individual and common experiences to define characterizations and categories that would satisfactorily describe the "why" and "how" questions (Yin, 2003). Some themes that disconfirmed our initial coding received additional analysis and resulted in unique findings between Soon-Yi and Nida's cases that conflicted with the common themes. The results conceptually represented the different backgrounds and cultural lenses that each supervisor brought to the study.

Table 1
Chronology and Typology of Data Collection

Data Collection	Reflexive Action Interviews	Reflective Journals	Weekly Debriefing Sessions	Reconstruction of Personal Histories
Year 1: March			X	X
Year 1: April		X	X	X
Year 1: May		X	X	
Year 1: September		X	X	X
Year 1: October		X	X	X
Year 2: January		X	X	
Year 2: February			X	
Year 2: March	X		X	
Year 2: September		X	X	X
Year 2: October	X	X	X	X
Year 3: February				X
Year 3: April	X	X		X
Year 3: June		X		X
Year 3: August		X	X	X

Findings

From the detailed accounts of the three years of supervision experience, four themes that represent patterns of analysis emerged for both cases: 1) carving a space beyond “evaluator,” 2) negotiating sociocultural lenses, 3) the impact of student teacher dispositions, and 4) navigating the triad relationships.

Carving a Space Beyond the “Evaluator”

Findings demonstrate that both participants experienced ambiguity in their first year in regard to the program expectations for supervision. For example, greater focus was placed on formative rather than summative work with preservice teachers, even though the supervisors were still charged with evaluating student teachers. Moreover, terms like “coaching and supporting” were emphasized a great deal but still remained vague. Nida reflects:

I think (in) our system...evaluator role was not emphasized, especially in the beginning. In supervision meetings, I would always hear words like *support, encouragement, feedback, communication, discussion, and collaboration*. I guess this was a definition of “coaching” that we were supposed to practice. In contrast, words like *deadline, evaluation, grade, and consequences* were not mentioned when we were talking about overall supervision process. This put a burden on me because I did not know to what extent I had the authority to take initiative for the problems student teachers faced. (Interview, year 3)

Nida thought that even though it was her responsibility to find solutions when there was an issue between preservice teachers and mentor teachers, she did not have the autonomy to make decisions or follow a particular policy. It was the philosophy of this program that everything be decided by individual conditions and situations, and as such, there were not clear policies for every given problem, such as the steps to follow when a student teacher was not successful.

Findings also indicated that participants' initial encounters with candidates reflected candidates' perceptions of a mere supervisory role, a role with which they did not feel comfortable. In their first year, both participants observed that student teachers were nervous about their presence in the classroom partly because student teachers perceived the supervisors to be evaluators rather than mentors or mediators. Nida and Soon-Yi reported that it took time and many conversations for student teachers to perceive them as supporters and mentors who would be providing them with constructive feedback and encouragement.

Nida also observed how the two different expectations—coaching and evaluating—can be hard to balance. As she tried to assure the preservice teachers that she was there to help and not judge, she could still see their nervousness as she discussed her observations. To be able to have productive meetings and conversations, Nida emphasized the role of coaching in the field.

If preservice teachers feel we grade them, they do not want to reveal their issues or pedagogical challenges to us. When I work with novice mentor teachers, this positive approach called *coaching* has been critical. I believe this helped both preservice teachers and mentor teachers to have a positive attitude toward my work. (Journal entry, year 2)

Soon-Yi negotiated her role as a coach with her student teachers by helping them view the supervision process as a collaboration for success. For instance, she incorporated preservice teachers' perspectives on their work into the feedback she gave. Instead of simply listing things from her observations, Soon-Yi reported that she would utilize open-ended questions and collaborative reflection sessions, as they both defined student teacher goals for the next round of planning and teaching (Rush & Shelden, 2011).

Negotiating Sociocultural Lenses

Data analysis highlighted the many instances where sociocultural experiences influenced how the two participants perceived the role and responsibilities of supervisors over the three years. At the beginning of their supervision experience, Nida and Soon-Yi were immersed in a situated apprenticeship for their own growth as supervisors (Rogoff, 1990). They reported that they saw their colleagues, program managers, and faculty leaders as their own mentors, who were the sources of feedback, reassurance, and approval as they constantly reflected on their own practice of supervision.

Soon-Yi thought that because she was in an American cultural context as an international student, she had to develop a new role as a supervisor based on what she had learned from her shadowing experience and she did not feel that her past experience was a valuable pedagogical source. Embracing the teacher education program's philosophy of social constructivism, she valued the perspectives and preferences of student teachers in designing their planning. At times, however, she observed that some of her student teachers were not comfortable receiving constructive criticism and suggestions from the cooperating teacher. This led her to have cognitive conflict since in her own cultural experiences, respect and reverence for elders and those more experienced were critical components of professional growth for educators.

I had to be careful not to bring my cultural understanding of hierarchy between teacher and student; so instead, I tried to understand cooperating teacher–student teacher relationships as a collegial relationship based on the United States context. When I think by myself, I sometimes think that student teachers should be more receptive of criticism from their teacher, but I don't directly talk to them about this. (Reflections after a supervisor meeting, year 2)

Soon-Yi discovered that over time, as she gained more experience and confidence, she was more comfortable drawing from Korean culture and past experiences to support student teachers. For example, with the influence of her Asian background, Soon-Yi considered politeness and positive attitude as important components of teacher professionalism, especially in candidates' interactions with colleagues in a classroom context:

I think in my first year, I did not necessarily mention how important interpersonal skills were. I was focusing more on their teaching, their pedagogies, and the actual lessons they teach. But in my second year, I began to give some suggestions to my student teachers about the ways to interact with people in school settings and give them tips for effective communication skills and interpersonal skills. (Interview, year 3)

A second example illustrates how Soon-Yi discovered the influence of an implicit social rule in her supervision practices. She observed that in Korea, teachers would not usually bring their feelings into interactions with students, as sometimes people perceived it as unprofessional. Therefore, during weekly supervisor meetings and during conversations with her program manager, she only shared facts about the process of observation and conversations with student teachers such as the problem-solving strategies utilized. By the end of her first year, however, Soon-Yi soon discovered that feelings and interpersonal exchanges were influential in candidate performance. She reported that this realization through reflection helped her relate better to her student teachers' experiences and garnered more positive responses from them.

Nida also quickly noticed the influence of her sociocultural background on her supervision practices. Coming from a cultural context that placed importance on closeness and trust, Nida focused on establishing rapport with people in her first year of supervising. When she visited her student teacher in a new field placement, she tried to learn about the dynamics of the classroom and to make a personal connection with the cooperating teacher and the student teacher. Nida always referred to each preservice teacher as "my student teacher," indicating a close ownership of the growth of the preservice teachers. She elaborated:

It often took me an hour for our first meeting with my student teacher because I asked them what they know about their classroom, about their relationship with their mentor teacher, about their course work, their experiences with the M.Ed. program, and their parents and families. I often shared where I came from, my home country, my studies, my family, so that the second time that I visited there was some personal base that we could talk about. (Interview, year 3)

In her first year of supervision, a personal relationship of "older sister and younger sister" was a metaphor that became important to Nida's work. The disposition of caring became a part of her supervisory role in the first year before this understanding was challenged:

I don't enjoy a business-type relationship because of my personality and my culture ... caring and community are important for me. But when one of my student teachers tried to take advantage of my caring by not completing her work in the field, this made me wonder if a middle ground was possible. Being more assertive, but still personable, caring, and supportive would be a better supervision frame for me. (Journal entry, year 2)

Through these reflective processes, both participants developed an awareness of their own sociocultural understanding, how it influenced their work, and whether it matched the needs of their student teachers. The development of their professional identity as supervisors included a progression from denying the value of their cultural lens, to acknowledging and actively using the funds of knowledge (González, Moll, Amanti, 2005) they brought to their work.

The Impact of Student Teaching Dispositions

Results indicate that both participants perceived their roles as dynamic within each triad based on the evolving needs of preservice teachers, as well as the dispositions they held vis-à-vis the supervisor's role. They observed that the quality of supervisor feedback was influenced by whether student teachers were open and eager to interact with the supervisors and utilize them as resources. When student teachers were proactive in their communication and conversations with supervisors, the participants reported that their ideas and feedback became more in-depth and specific. When preservice teachers were not willing to engage in reflective practice with their supervisors, Nida and Soon-Yi noticed the need to initiate conversations with different strategies, such as asking direct and specific questions, getting more personal, or encouraging them to deeply reflect on their own practices.

Soon-Yi explained how she realized that she often needed to challenge a preconceived notion about "being observed." When one of Nida's student teachers wanted to reschedule her upcoming visit because it was her first practice in teaching a certain subject area and it would not be fair for her to be observed, Nida tried to relieve her stress with this email:

As you know, the purpose of observations is to support you, guide you in learning to teach, help you reflect on your growth as a teacher, and give valuable feedback. I am hoping you observed me doing that in the Fall quarter, it was not a judgmental, or summative evaluation. So there is no need to be nervous. This is a learning process and our job with your mentor teacher is to support your learning... (Email conversation, year 2)

Nida and Soon-Yi both reflected that working with each student teacher and accommodating various needs was challenging. Both reported anxiety regarding the quality of their work and often doubted whether the time allocated to each individual was sufficient, even though they made more frequent visits than was required in their first year.

Soon-Yi doubted her efficacy when one of her student teachers constantly had problems with her cooperating teachers. In the first field placement, the solution was to move this student teacher to another classroom. Soon-Yi felt personally responsible for the problem, thinking that if she had spent more time in the classroom, she would have helped the situation, even though her program manager thought otherwise. The same student teacher was removed from the second placement because of another personality clash with the cooperating teacher. The third cooperating teacher was specifically chosen by the program manager as a good personality match. Soon-Yi realized that professionalism in teaching should be the main focus of supervision practices, as some student teachers had strong content knowledge and instructional abilities but possessed weak communication skills and carried underdeveloped teacher dispositions.

This time, whenever I did my bi-weekly visits, we had a three-way meeting with the mentor teacher (so we are on the same page). Sometimes I even visited weekly. And we had a follow-up meeting with the mentor teacher for one hour. We went over every step of lesson planning with her because she had missed

her early weeks of course work... I began thinking that I needed to be very explicit on little things with her and do more work. (It made me realize that) I needed to differentiate the amount of work, the time, and the expectations for the professionalism aspect of teaching for student teachers who are at different levels. (Interview, year 3)

Challenging situations like this encouraged and empowered both supervisors to develop diverse approaches to working with individuals instead of being procedural. For instance, Nida, who approached all of her student teachers with a warm attitude as if a sister, eventually realized that her initial “older sister and younger sister” metaphor didn’t work for everyone. Therefore, in her second year, she told her student teachers that once their collaborative goals were determined, she would hold them accountable. This way, she added more specific expectations for some when she felt they needed more structure and follow-up of the action plan.

I think I was not assertive in my first year, and one of the interns tried to take advantage of this. Her mentor teacher and I mainly focused on her pedagogical skills, but noticed that I wasn’t an effective enforcer of our expectations in professionalism. I would spend two hours with her discussing my observations and the ways she could provide quality instruction for the students. She would ask me many questions, but next time I observed her teaching, she would still be disorganized, unprepared, and not follow up with her goals. (Interview, year 2)

Nida’s perceived effectiveness increased after this realization; she felt that she could make decisions about differentiating expectations and goals with each candidate.

Navigating the Triad Relationships

Unlike short-term supervision assignments that make negotiating entrée into the student teaching triad challenging, the participants worked with the same student teachers throughout the year both during preschool and primary field experiences, which provided stability for the triad. They were able to establish a connection with student teachers in this way and supported their transition to the next cooperating teacher in the elementary placement in January.

Nida and Soon-Yi quickly discovered that to support the student teachers’ emerging pedagogical skills and professional dispositions, creating a professional partnership with the cooperative teachers was crucial. Sometimes this was difficult, however. Although most of the cooperating teachers were experienced in mentoring student teachers, Nida and Soon-Yi often found that some cooperative teachers did not engage in in-depth reflection, nor did they fully assess specific aspects of the student teachers’ progress. These short conversations often overlapped with student teachers’ sentiments about the lack of explicit feedback and modeling from their mentor teacher. Initially, both Nida and Soon-Yi hesitated to ask for more explicit feedback for student teachers from these cooperative teachers. As Soon-Yi explains:

During my first observation visits, I observed that cooperating teachers all had different styles of interactions and communication. Some cooperating teachers welcomed you warmly into the classroom, whereas some had a colder attitude and created more distance. Some cooperating teachers would debrief me and had clear ideas and examples about their student teacher’s work, but some would respond briefly like, “oh, she is doing great” and would not specify. (Interview, year 3)

Both participants noticed that they needed to ask more questions, initiate discussions about the student teachers' progress, and chat with cooperating teachers outside of school if necessary to initiate interactions. "I learned that I needed to be in closer contact with my mentor teachers. At times, this would require phone conversations in the evenings, email conversations, and briefing with them whenever possible during the observation visits," Nida recalls.

The dynamic relationship between cooperating teacher and student teacher also posed challenges for the participants, especially when they had to learn to mediate a conflict between a preservice teacher and a cooperating teacher. Nida elaborated:

There are things that my mentor teacher would tell me but wouldn't want the intern to know that I learned. So to bring up these issues or to discover them naturally in my conversations with an intern was really challenging. I needed to be careful about the delicate issues so that I wouldn't jeopardize the relationship between the mentor teacher and the intern. If there were absence issues or tardiness issues, I would start by asking the intern about her daily schedule... I would try to learn the issues by investigating it with my intern without explicitly telling her that I learned it from the mentor teacher. (Interview, year 3)

They both stated that preservice teachers often needed a professional language to express their ideas and concerns with the cooperating teacher, and when they did not have one, it set a roadblock to positive communication. These instances provided an opportunity to model positive student teacher-cooperating teacher relationships. For example, when Soon-Yi's student teacher expressed her concern that a particular cooperating teacher often engaged in side conversations with the teacher assistant in the classroom while she was teaching, she responded:

I agree that young children are distracted by small things in their surroundings. If this happens again, you might address the issue with the mentor teacher implicitly, as a way of getting feedback/suggestions from her after you complete your lesson. For example, you might ask her "How's my leading so far? Do you have any feedback or suggestions? I have one small concern. During the circle time process, sometimes the children seem to be easily losing the focus of their attention.... Do you have any ... suggestions for such situations?" I think in this way the mentor teacher will be aware that you have this concern and she might be more supportive in directing the children's attention to the circle process. (Email conversation, year 2)

In this case, Soon-Yi reported confidence that she was able to provide a safe avenue for the student teacher to learn how to use professional language in conversations with the cooperative teacher.

Discussion and Conclusions

In this three-year-long project, we investigated how both participants utilized a "colored" lens to elaborate on the process of becoming a supervisor. It is striking that through their reflections, Nida and Soon-Yi did not emphasize the traditional roles of supervisors such as acting as a liaison between the university and field placement (Koerner et al., 2002; Yusko, 2004), representing and clarifying the program's expectations, or communicating the university's philosophy in the field and in the data (Koerner et al., 2002). Instead, the findings reveal that they perceived providing pedagogical feedback and fostering the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of student teachers to be their most important role even though they both

acknowledged the challenge of balancing formative and summative feedback. Analysis provides us with a new definition of supervisor practices for these culturally diverse supervisors; Soon-Yi and Nida illustrate that university supervision is a process of identity negotiation and growth while being engaged in a complex web of interactions that support the professional transformation of student teachers. Several dynamics noted in the particular context that supports supervisors' growth were the apprenticeship model (Rogoff, 1990), consistency and frequency in working with the same pre-service teachers for a year, and long-term appointment in the same teacher education program.

Teacher educators are certainly important contributors to the professional development of preservice teachers (Zeichner, 2005). Teacher education organizations such as the Association of Teacher Education (ATE) and the American Association of the Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE) have taken steps to define quality standards for teacher educators (Kessinger, 2008). However, many doctoral students who will become teacher educators lack exposure to teacher education literature, especially in the area of supervision of preservice teachers (Zeichner, 2005, 2010). The findings imply that while it seems as though Nida and Soon-Yi struggled with vague definitions of the expectations proposed by the teacher education program within which they worked, this ambiguity also provided them with ownership and agency in constructing their views of supervision, which may not be the case in strictly defined supervision roles in some teacher education programs. The findings also illustrate that the context afforded both supervisors the means to carve out their own spaces within the triad relationships and to go above and beyond traditional expectations for a university supervisor, often perceived as a disfranchised outsider, as Slick (1998b) has so eloquently put it.

It has been long argued that student teachers need a well-defined and rich support system (Borko & Mayfield, 1995; Cuenca, 2010a; Slick, 1998b). Yet, the idea that the traditional student teaching triad is influential in growing knowledge, skills, and dispositions of teacher candidates is often treated with cynicism. Assuming its ineffectiveness, there have been many efforts to reform the structure of, and seek alternatives to, the traditional triad without considering strengthening the existing model. In this study, the participants challenged the traditional notion that supervisors are not important actors in teacher education (Borko & Mayfield, 1995; Bullough, 2004; Koerner et al., 2002; Yusko, 2004) and that they are only an artificial addition to the student teaching experience (Bullough, Jr., & Draper, 2004; Slick, 1998b). They also demonstrate that they could more effectively contribute to the growth and education of a novice teacher if they were utilized as resources (Basmadjian, 2011), considered mentors, and viewed as those concerned about the growth of preservice teachers (Cuenca, 2010b). A recent study illustrates how university supervisor-student teacher interactions may become more administrative and less pedagogical when two student teachers form a close pedagogical team with the collaborative teacher and enact peer coaching sufficiently, which makes the supervisor more of an outsider to the process of teacher growth (Katz & Isik-Ercan, 2015).

Bates, Ramirez, and Dritz (2009) highlight the importance of reflection in supervisor practices so that this process could be modeled for student teachers. To accomplish this, the professionalization of supervision work is crucial to avoid short-term appointments or a lack of commitment to supervision work (Zeichner, 2010) that reduces the supervision role to that of an evaluator. To this end, university supervisors should be provided professional growth opportunities (Bullough, Jr. & Draper, 2004). That way, as we attempt to reconceptualize the teacher education process, the historically underestimated role of supervisors can be transformed into a more active and multidimensional one (Clarke & Collins, 2007). Findings demonstrate that the supervision role also guided Nida and Soon-Yi's academic interests and added strength to their work. In this context, these supervisors transformed a mere job (Slick, 1998b) into an opportunity for scholarly and professional growth (Andrew, 2007), a transformation that Borko and Mayfield (1995) had envisioned.

In this study, two participants reflected on the negotiation processes they went through as novice supervisors with diverse teacher education experiences in international contexts. While this study has new ideas for the field, we acknowledge the limited nature of the results, as they pertain to a very specific context with only two supervisors' experiences, and we caution against overgeneralizing the outcome to other settings. Still, their insights on this process and the challenges they encountered are not just personal reflections about how they came to learn supervision, but they also potentially provide helpful data for researchers, teacher educators, and policy makers to maximize the contributions of all members of the triad to preservice teacher growth. Therefore, this study warrants future investigations into cultural, personal, and social nature of supervision practices.

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