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A Collaborative Self-Study of Supervisors in a University-Based Literacy Clinic: Exploring Tensions in Support, Feedback, and Conflict Resolution

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Abstract

This article reports on a collaborative self-study conducted by five supervisors in a university-based literacy clinic. Over two semesters of mentoring elementary teacher candidates, we met weekly and reflected biweekly. The purpose of this research was to identify the tensions that supervisors were contemplating as they mentored and supervised candidates. Our findings indicate that we were grappling with ways to 1) provide candidates with equitable support; 2) guide candidates, rather than tell them what to do; and 3) confront conflict. By detailing the ways we reflected on and explored these tensions, we include suggestions for teacher education supervision and teacher education more broadly, both from our own experiences and previous research.

Keywords

self-study; university-based literacy clinic; remote supervision

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Introduction

Quality teacher preparation programs (TPPs) are essential for preparing teachers to effectively work with K-12 students (Strieker et al., 2016). Yet, many teacher candidates leave their TPPs feeling underprepared to step into the role of elementary teacher, and particularly to teach literacy (Brindle et al., 2016; Gilbert & Graham, 2010; Hodges et al., 2019). One way to mitigate these feelings is by requiring extended and authentic teaching experiences for candidates within practicums. Practicums allow candidates to engage with real, rather than hypothetical, students, begin taking responsibility for student learning (DeGraff et al., 2015), build a bridge between theory and practice (Walton & Rusznyak, 2013), and experience some of the realities of teaching (Walton, & Rusznyak, 2013). Candidates typically collaborate with supervisors in practicums, which has been shown to improve self-directed and self-regulated learning (Strieker et al., 2016). Collaborating with a supervisor can also support candidates with understanding pedagogical content knowledge in multiple content areas (Burns et al., 2020). Because quality supervision is related to candidate performance, behavior, and confidence, supervisors must acknowledge their own dispositions and examine how and why they supervise (Pennington et al., 2012). Further, supervisors should contemplate the tensions they are experiencing to continually set goals for improving their supervision practice.

To identify some of these tensions, we engaged in a collaborative self-study in a university-based literacy clinic. We explored the following research question; *What tensions were supervisors contemplating as they mentored elementary teacher candidates?* To answer this question, we analyzed bi-weekly reflections of five university supervisors who engaged in remote supervision with candidates during a semester of tutoring. The purpose of this self-study was to reflect on, evaluate, and identify tensions in our supervision practice. Although we supervised in a clinic, the tensions faced are relevant to supervisors in all contexts. By telling the collective story of our supervisors through the lens of tensions we were contemplating, we offer insights into the types of challenges that supervisors specifically, and teacher educators, more broadly, should consider as they approach their work with candidates.

Literature Review

Supervisors work closely with candidates to provide individual support in pedagogy, curriculum, and research-based instruction and innovation (Burns & Badiali, 2016). A supervisor's primary goal is to prepare candidates during their journey to becoming teachers, which involves mentoring candidates as they unpack the "complex layers of teaching" (Scalzo Willson, 2018, p. 1). This requires supervisors to a) build rapport and relationships; b) provide meaningful and effective feedback; and 3) identify and respond to tensions within their supervisory role.

To enhance candidates' confidence and willingness to take risks in their practical experiences, supervisors need to build rapport and relationships with candidates (Snow et al., 2020). Candidates have identified that the most important attributes of their supervisor include them being friendly, positive, easy to communicate with, responsive, supportive, understanding, and caring (Caires & Almeida, 2007; Erichsen et al., 2014). Additionally, differentiating scaffolds based on candidate needs and concerns helps to strengthen relationships, as it shows supervisors care about each individual (Izadinia, 2015). Through self-evaluation and reflection, supervisors

can more deeply understand how their practice either builds or hinders relationships with candidates with different backgrounds, needs, and personality types.

Another attribute that candidates rate as highly important for supervisors to possess is the ability to provide quality feedback (Erichsen et al., 2014). However, providing effective feedback can be a challenging task, especially when working with candidates who have varying dispositions and ability levels. Supervisor feedback should be strength-based, providing candidates with ways to identify what they already bring to teaching and how they can build on those strengths (Haberlin, 2019). As Haberlin (2019) notes, supervisors should provide feedback and support that builds candidates up, not tears them down:

> Rather than play the role of the critical observer, who continuously chips away at teachers, like waves breaking down a large stone in the ocean, I see myself as a builder, reminding these future educators that they already bring much to the classroom. Now, let's see how we can build upon that. (pp. 53-43)

Additionally, feedback should not include the supervisor simply telling the candidate what to do based on their own pedagogical experiences. Rather, feedback should be a social interaction that includes conversation, debriefing, and reflection based on the candidate's experiences, personality, and purposes for teaching (Cuenca, 2010; Diacopoulos & Butler, 2020). The developmental needs of candidates should be at the forefront of our supervision work, which means feedback should be tailored to each candidate's specific needs (Diacopoulos & Butler, 2020). Identifying strategies to provide meaningful feedback can help supervisors better communicate and interact with their candidates and thus have a more significant impact on their future teaching.

When working to create the best learning environment for candidates, supervisors experience various tensions. One tension is the lack of supervisor training (Capello, 2020; Guise et al., 2020; McCormack et al., 2019; Mudavanhu, 2015; Steadman & Brown, 2011; Zeichner, 2005). Supervisors report wanting and needing training; however, training resources are often unavailable within universities and school districts (Capello, 2020). Overwhelming workloads to navigate also create tensions in supervision (McCormack et al., 2019), often preventing supervisors from operating at their highest potential. Other tensions supervisors experience include unclear roles and multi-layered expectations and responsibilities (Capello, 2020; McCormack et al., 2019), as well as the requirement to evaluate candidates. Experiencing tensions in supervision work is likely inevitable in all contexts; however, supervisors must continually explore these tensions to improve their practice.

Method

To examine the tensions, we contemplated while supervising elementary candidates, we employed a collaborative self-study. Rooted in various methodologies, self-study research marries teacher research, practitioner inquiry, action research, and reflection, and aims to have researchers critically examine their perspectives (Loughran & Brubaker, 2015). Collaborative self-study allows educators to engage in dialogue and thought work with others to reflect on and evaluate their practice (Bullock, 2012; Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009) and learn about who they are

as educators (Loughran, 2005; MacDonald et al., 2020). Our collaborative self-study was rooted in theory and research related to reflection through communities of practice (Snow et al., 2015; Snow et al., 2020; Zepeda, 2017). Per Wenger (1998), communities of practice are created by those who share a passion and want to engage in collective learning. Our community of practice came about based on our shared work and passion for supervision. Within our community of practice, we had the goals of creating a safe space of trust (Sivia et al., 2022), being open to learning and unlearning (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2004), and professionally challenging one another (Loughran & Northfield, 2005). Entering this work with close relationships established, we were able to move through the self-study as not just colleagues, but as critical friends (Samaras, 2011).

Context and Participants

This study took place in a university-based literacy clinic in the western U.S. Supervision in our clinic involves providing support to elementary candidates who are enrolled in an upper-division literacy assessment course required for a state literacy endorsement. Candidates are simultaneously learning about literacy assessment and data-driven instruction, while applying their learning in the embedded practicum. Candidates tutor a K-12 student for two one-hour sessions per week for 10 weeks. At the beginning of the semester, candidates assess their student in reading, writing, and word study, and then tutors use those assessments to create data-driven lesson plans. Students are enrolled in tutoring by their parents, and tutoring is not associated with the students' schools.

Our roles as supervisors are somewhat different from the typical supervisor in that there is no mentor teacher involved since tutoring happens in our clinic. Each supervisor is assigned 4-10 candidates per semester, and the role of the supervisor is to provide feedback on candidates' lesson plans, final assessment and tutoring reports, and tutoring. Observations are done via video recordings, and feedback is given on a Google Sheet that we called the progress monitoring (PM) spreadsheet. Supervisors also confer with candidates as needed and periodically evaluate their overall progress.

Five supervisors were part of our community of practice for this self-study - Hannah, Jade, Lauren, Pam, and Annie. Supervisors were a combination of professors, teaching assistants, and in-service teachers. It is important to note that some of the supervisors (e.g., Hannah, Jadelyn, Pam) teach the course while also serving as a supervisor, and others only supervise. All supervisors were white women with varied levels of experience in K-12 education, teacher education, and supervision. The five supervisors, each described below, doubled as authors of this manuscript.

Hannah is a tenure-track faculty member and the director of the literacy clinic. She previously taught high school for eight years, as well as worked as a supervisor in a literacy clinic at a different institution. Through this experience, she quickly realized her passion for teacher education and developed a love for researching and supporting candidates during their practicums.

Jadelyn was a graduate student and teaching assistant. Jadelyn was previously an elementary school teacher for five years. While teaching, she worked closely with a literacy coach who had an immense impact on her teaching. Through this, she realized that she would enjoy a career as a literacy teacher educator. During her doctoral program, Jadelyn worked as a clinic supervisor for six semesters.

Lauren was also a graduate student and teaching assistant, who had one year of experience teaching Kindergarten online. This taught her about being flexible and creative, while still accommodating the different needs of her students. However, she felt that she still needed more experience, specifically with ELLs and reading intervention, which led her to a graduate program in literacy.

Pam is a middle school English teacher and adjunct professor. Before becoming a supervisor, she had long been concerned about the number of students that came into her classrooms unable to comprehend what they were reading. After many years of considering ways to better support these students, she began a graduate program in literacy and started as a supervisor in the clinic when her program concluded.

Annie was a graduate student pursuing a state literacy endorsement. She previously taught writing to eighth graders, worked as a Title I elementary tutor, and served as a high-school paraprofessional in the special education department. She also spent a year teaching college freshman writing classes. With Annie's varied experiences in education, she thought that supervision work in the clinic would be both interesting and impactful.

Procedures for Engaging in Collaborative Self-Study

Levine (2011) identified that to improve supervisors' work it is imperative to a) find a regular time for collaboration, b) build trust and familiarity between supervisors, and c) agree on shared expectations and roles. Below we discuss how we used these guidelines throughout the semester to enhance our supervision practices through this collaborative self-study.

First, we established a meeting time to collaborate for one hour each week via Zoom. All meetings were recorded, and Author 1 led these meetings based on a loose agenda. She took detailed notes to document individual and collective ideas; notes were then compared to the meeting recordings. During these meetings, we discussed what went well and what did not go well that week, asked questions, and brainstormed problems of practice. If necessary, we evaluated candidates' work and brainstormed the next steps for supporting the candidate. Having weekly meetings ensured that remote supervision was not isolating and helped to build trust and familiarity between supervisors, which was essential for feeling comfortable with closely collaborating throughout the semester. Another way we built trust and familiarity was by matching a veteran supervisor with a new supervisor to act as a mentor. The veteran supervisor met with the new supervisor to discuss and model lesson plan grading and other supervision requirements. This ensured that the new supervisor had a specific person they could reach out to with questions or concerns as they were working with candidates.

Lastly, to make sure that the new supervisors were aware of the expectations, responsibilities, and procedures related to the supervisor position, they completed a remote 10-week training series. The training consisted of individual and collaborative work that began at the beginning of the semester, before tutoring, and extended through the first few weeks of tutoring. This provided supervisors with concrete supports when attempting lesson plan grading and feedback for the first time. This training also had new supervisors explore information related to procedures and grading, as well as best practices for feedback and interacting with candidates. Supervisors practiced providing feedback and reviewed assignments that included veteran supervisor feedback.

Data Collection and Analysis

We enacted self-study by engaging in individual bi-weekly reflections and weekly team meetings to discuss candidates' progress and ensure no supervisor felt "alone" on an issue or challenge. At the conclusion of the semester, we also analyzed our own and other supervisors' reflections and had multiple meetings to discuss our reflections. Table 1 details how we enacted the self-study by providing an outline and descriptions of the activities we engaged in.

We first collected pilot data to inform this study, which included two supervisors responding to weekly prompts that were researcher-created and varied each week (e.g., *What are some things you feel uncomfortable doing this week?).* Our pilot data included 16 total pages, almost 8,600 words of reflection, which led to a more nuanced understanding of what we hoped to investigate for this study. Pilot data indicated that we were primarily pondering the specific challenges we faced. This led to our conceptualization of the current study, which explored the tensions of both new and veteran supervisors in the clinic.

To begin this self-study, we completed bi-weekly reflections on our experiences working with candidates. Each reflection evaluated candidate performance (e.g., literacy assessment and instruction, pedagogy, professionalism) and explored challenges we identified as we provided support. We also evaluated our supervision practice (e.g., responding to candidates, feedback, conflict resolution, etc.), including what we did well and areas of improvement. Furthermore, we identified actionable next steps for ourselves as we reflected on our practice. Unlike the pilot data, we responded to the same prompts each week, which are provided in Appendix A. The prompts included both recommendations for what to consider from the week and specific questions to guide responses. Prompts were created based on the analysis of our pilot data to evoke reflections that were rooted in practice improvement from supervisors with varying backgrounds and experiences. By the end of the semester, we had four reflections per supervisor, resulting in 35 total pages, or nearly 24,000 words, of reflection.

Data analysis involved two rounds that were informed by self-study methods and thematic analysis. Highlighting the importance of providing multiple perspectives in self-study research (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009, p. 154), we included supervisors in our data collection and analysis processes who brought various levels of experience in education and supervision. Further, we analyzed our data with a focus on ourselves and extending beyond the self (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009) by continually evaluating our work within the larger context of our literacy clinic and beyond. Our processes for familiarization, data management, tables to identify

patterns, code collapsing, and categorization to identify themes were informed by thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Thematic analysis was used to make sense of our data set as a whole by evaluating our data for commonalities across supervisors and to provide a systematic approach to analyzing the qualitative data (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Our systematic approach to the two rounds of data analysis is described below. During both rounds, our meeting notes were used by the team to support data analysis.

Table 1
Self-Study Timeline

Activity	Description
Pilot Data Collection	● Brainstormed a relevant research topic ● Identified what to reflect on for meaningful responses related to the topic ● Reflected on specific prompts each week
Supervisor Weekly Meetings	● Met during tutoring to reflect on our supervision and the progress of candidates ● Discussed what went well, challenges, and concerns ● Provided support to each other including ideas to remediate challenges ● Collaborated to not feel "alone" on an issue or challenge
Bi-Weekly Reflections	● Reflected individually about our candidates' growth and challenges ● Reflected on our growth and challenges as supervisors ● Provided ourselves praises and pushes to consider as we continued to supervise
Phase 1 Coding	● Coded each meaningful unit of data within all our own reflections ● Coded for teacher candidate strengths and challenges ● Coded for supervisor praises, pushes/challenges ● Identified what we reflected on throughout the semester
Phase 1 Analysis Meeting	● Discussed codes from phase 1 ● Discussed how to collapse codes and create possible themes ● Identified a coding scheme ● Ensured clarity about steps for phase 2
Phase 2 Coding	● Used coding scheme discussed in coding analysis meeting 1 to code a peer's reflection ● Added quotes to a shared chart that represented each of the categories in the coding scheme ● Verified coding scheme fit data ● Ensured themes were supported by various quotes from all supervisors
Phase 2 Analysis Meeting	● Collapsed themes where needed ● Identified questions that could be answered from our reflections ● Determined findings

In round one, we each analyzed our own reflections. To do so, we first de-identified the data. We then read each reflection at the line level, taking notes in a provided table. We identified challenges, praises, and pushes in our reflections and gave each a title to make it clear what our interpretations were of each chunk of the reflections. We also noted any questions that we were

pondering or any specific improvements we mentioned. Round 1 ended with a data analysis meeting. Before this meeting, Author 1 reviewed all coding tables and created a list of topics seen across all supervisors. Examples included offering both immediate and long-term suggestions and communicating with candidates effectively. At the meeting, we discussed the list and made notes to describe each topic and provide examples. Finally, each supervisor pulled quotes from their own reflections to support each topic (i.e., we confirmed possible themes by supporting each with reflection quotes).

Round 2 of analysis involved each supervisor using the coding scheme created in round one to code another supervisor's reflections. This involved reading the reflection at the line level and taking notes in a provided table. We then met to discuss our coding. At this meeting, it was clear through our discussions that we were contemplating some specific questions in our reflections. We noted these questions and then discussed the ways that we were attempting to answer those questions. The final stage of data analysis involved looking across the coding tables to list quotes related to each question we were contemplating and then collapsing those questions (i.e., evaluating the questions to reduce them in meaningful ways).

The trustworthiness of this study was ensured in several ways. Our data collection extended over two semesters and involved five different supervisors in the clinic. Thus, we evaluated our practice over time, within the context of our own lived experiences and that of others in our community of practice (Hamilton et al., 2020) to identify if our coding scheme represented our findings accurately. To establish reliability, we met after coding to review, discuss, and collapse our coding. Meetings were recorded and reviewed to evaluate if our analysis discussions aligned with our findings. Further, the collaborative structures for supervision that were already in place in our literacy clinic coupled with the additional ways we evaluated our practice and collaborated to problematize that practice made our work together multi-layered. This layering positioned us to come to "more complex and more useful understandings" of our practice (Hamilton et al., 2020, p. 321).

Findings

The purpose of this self-study was to investigate what we, as supervisors in our literacy clinic, were contemplating, or the tensions that we were facing. More specifically, we wondered about how to provide equitable support, give balanced and guiding feedback, and confront conflict.

Providing Equitable Support to Candidates

A primary challenge we contemplated was how to provide equitable support to all candidates. We attempted to simultaneously support candidates who were severely struggling, while also allowing enough time for those students who were not struggling as severely, or at all. For instance, Pam feared that her mentoring was becoming inequitable because of the amount of time she was spending with certain candidates who required more attention than others. She reflected:

> I have one candidate who performs at a much more proficient level than the others and I tend to give her feedback last as it is not as challenging. I feel this is short-changing her as I am trying to get done and may not be as focused. In the vein of time, I have been

spending too much focus on the candidates who are not prepared, do not use feedback, and do not use the data to inform their instruction. I feel a bit like I am not providing enough valuable feedback or support.

Pam was not alone in this worry. We often discussed how to best use the time we had for meetings and written feedback, wondering about the amount and the approach, to ensure that both candidates who were excelling and struggling received what they needed from us.

Each of us pondered how to approach our work with candidates when they were severely struggling or were behind where they needed to be when they entered our course. More specifically, we tried to figure out where to begin our intervention, how to intervene early enough, and how to use our time to equitably serve all candidates. Hannah wondered, "When they are struggling at this level, where do we even start?" As the clinic director, Hannah also questioned enrollment practices. Some students were allowed in the course who had no plans of becoming practicing teachers. With this, they did not bring the same prior knowledge from their program, which can be problematic when attempting to provide equitable supervision to all candidates.

Multiple supervisors mentioned the need for a more defined "checkpoint" that would evaluate if candidates were ready to begin tutoring, as well as the need for creating an action plan for when they are not ready. With tutoring beginning only a few weeks after we meet the candidates, our timeline makes it quite challenging to use checkpoints and create action plans before tutoring starts. Also challenging for us was having to accept those times when a candidate was better suited for a path that did not include pursuing teaching. This made us wonder what separated those candidates who persevered and those who did not:

> B dropped the class this week. It was the best choice for all parties involved. I met with her at the beginning of the semester (thank goodness!) and told her she wasn't showing that she was ready. G and H were also concerns from the beginning and still are. H has really turned around. What is the difference between B, G, and H? I think it's attitude and grit.

In our self-study, we also leaned into trying out new practices in hopes of providing equitable support. A willingness to take risks in supervision work, in our view, is preliminary to being able to provide equitable support to candidates. One specific strategy we felt led to more equitable support was frequently documenting our interactions with candidates. We emailed candidates and left comments on the Google Docs that were used for lesson planning; we also followed up with documentation on the candidates' PM spreadsheets. In addition to tracking observation feedback, we included other information such as notes about individual meetings, praises for professionalism, concerns about late work, etc. This documentation provided a loose visual representation of the support each candidate was getting, from their own supervisor and from the supervisors collectively. Being able to easily see the efforts we were making with candidates allowed us to have more of a grasp on if and when our supervision appeared to be inequitable across candidates. We also felt that providing candidates feedback on their planning and teaching that they could track from week to week was powerful. These spreadsheets offered the tutors

feedback from multiple supervisors, not just their own, and allowed us to more easily identify if/how candidates were struggling.

Giving Balanced Feedback that Guides Instead of Prescribes

Evaluating our feedback practices, we also wondered if our feedback was balanced, or was too corrective and lacked positive reinforcement and tone. Jadelyn reflected, "One thing I need to do better at is giving some positive feedback. I feel as if the majority of my feedback was aimed towards what they could improve on in their reports, with little to no positive feedback." She also reflected on how giving candidates positive feedback during their initial assessment weeks (the first week of tutoring) was a good way to motivate, excite, and build their confidence for upcoming lessons. Similarly, when reflecting on the importance of positive feedback, Pam noted:

> I need to offer consistent positive comments throughout my feedback. When on a roll providing feedback that I feel is "helpful" I often do not add enough positive comments that are specific and accurate (that don't seem cliche). When a tutor is struggling, they most need positive reinforcement and I get a bit too focused on providing suggestions that I think will make their lesson plan/report better or clearer.

Along with positive praise, Pam questioned the tone of her feedback. She stated, "I need to make sure my tone is not abrupt and focus on finding authentic positives in their lesson planning and tutoring sessions to focus on." These reflections suggest that while we understood the importance of providing positive feedback and checking our tone as a way to increase candidate confidence and build relationships, we often struggled with balancing our praises and our corrective suggestions.

We also wondered how we could improve our supervision practices to better guide candidates, rather than explicitly tell them what to do. Lauren mentioned: "I think and reflect before replying because sometimes [candidates] take my advice word by word so I need to be careful with my wording." Candidates sometimes took suggestions verbatim, as opposed to translating those suggestions in ways that were most appropriate for their student. This was worrisome because it indicated that candidates were not transferring what they learned in their previous literacy methods courses into their work with an actual student. Hannah reflected, "If I have learned anything over the years, it's that even adults have trouble transferring their learning, even from one semester to the next." Because candidates often did not critically approach supervisors' suggestions, we continued to wonder how to guide candidates, not simply tell them exactly what to do.

A common area we found ourselves frequently contemplating on how to guide and not prescribe was supporting candidates with making their own data-driven decisions about their work with students. Annie reflected that she was able to support her candidates in a group meeting where she provided specific suggestions on ways to meet their students' fluency goals, such as choral reading and reader's theater. She also supported candidates by providing them with a riddle to use with their candidates that implicitly aided in their comprehension. However, she considered whether providing her candidates with these suggestions would stop them from doing the challenging thought work of identifying if the strategy was appropriate for their specific

student's needs or not. She saw that the candidates overused and generalized her suggestion of using "choral reading," even when it did not align with their goals.

When reflecting on how she supported her candidates in goal setting, Jadelyn suggested that in the future, she would like to set aside time for one-on-one meetings with candidates to create student goals *with* them. This could allow time for modeling, debriefing about the assessment data, and identifying candidates' misconceptions of the data. Jadelyn further reflected that she wanted to find a balance between giving her candidates autonomy in making decisions for their students and providing them support and scaffolds throughout the process. She hoped to equip candidates to make similar data-driven decisions independently in their future classrooms. Without this support, candidates may not know how to "continually push the [student]" once they have met their goal or differentiate their instruction based on their student's progress (Hannah). We found that this sometimes led to students spending the whole semester working toward a goal that did not match their needs.

Our primary takeaway from the self-study concerning giving balanced feedback that guides instead of prescribes was re-evaluating how we support candidates with their lesson plans. Our lesson plans have three primary sections - reading, writing, and word study - and each section has the same sub-sections for learning targets, assessments, instruction, etc. Instead of giving line-by-line feedback on the full document (i.e., approaching the plan as we would an academic paper), we began to leave just one praise and one push on each sub-section of the lesson plan template and choose one sub-section on which we provided line-by-line guidance. We felt this new approach was more equitable and helped us provide overarching feedback that guided candidates rather than prescribed (e.g., we were not giving directives on each line of their lesson plan). To ensure that all supervisors were on the same page about where and how to give feedback, we also developed a grading notes document. In this document, we included notes on how to approach grading and giving feedback on each assignment. These notes included logistical directives and important ideas from the previous week's grading. Before providing feedback on any assignment, all supervisors reviewed the grading notes document.

Confronting Conflict and Building Rapport

We realized that conflict was inevitable, but we also realized that each of us approached conflict differently. Supervisors grappled with how to confront, rather than avoid, conflict effectively. For example, Jadelyn wrote about how she felt unable to "talk real" with the candidates due to her feelings of "impostorism" and wanting students to "not be mad at her." Similarly, Lauren discussed her need to be "more direct" and "blatantly confront" candidates if they were not following directions. Both Pam and Lauren also reflected on their tendency to avoid conflict and were striving to improve over the semester. On the other hand, Hannah reflected that she did not have trouble with addressing conflict with her candidates, but she felt that she does not "always handle conflict in the best way to get the result [she is] looking for." She then reflected that eliminating unnecessary commentary was one way to address conflict more effectively with candidates, especially those who are resistant. More specifically, Hannah noted when a candidate sarcastically asked "Really?" after she was told the absence policy was going to be enforced. Hannah replied, "Yes. I'm sure every person in this room has something they could be doing right now. I know I do, but we are all choosing to be here." Hannah noted that she realized this

commentary was unneeded, however, the candidate dealt with it very professionally, and Hannah commended her for that.

While some supervisors avoided conflict and others contemplated ways to better handle their crucial conversations, all the supervisors realized the importance of being upfront with the candidates to help them realize where and how they could improve their literacy content knowledge and pedagogy. As Pam reflected, these "uncomfortable conversations are necessary to enable the [candidates] to stretch and grow." Further, Jadelyn brought a new perspective when reflecting on confronting conflict: "I am starting to look at giving 'low' grades as not producing conflict but as a way of increasing my candidates' expectations for themselves and understanding the rigor of becoming a teacher."

We also reflected on the importance of, and challenges related to building rapport by showing empathy and vulnerability. Lauren showed empathy by reflecting that she would always respond to candidates in ways that she would want a supervisor to respond to her. Likewise, Pam empathized with candidates when she missed her own reflection deadline and realized time sometimes gets away from all of us. She stated, "It benefits me to remember that we all have lapses with timing. What makes all the difference, I think, is accepting responsibility and acknowledging your part in it to ensure that the lapses are the rare exception, not the rule."

In addition to showing empathy, we reflected on the importance of showing vulnerability to our candidates. We discussed the impact of admitting when we are wrong or when we do not have answers or solutions to candidates' questions and concerns. In doing so, we showed candidates that we are also learning and growing. Jadelyn reflected on a scenario where she provided her candidate with incorrect information about purchasing a book for her student, Jadelyn then noted that admitting her mistake rather than putting the blame on the candidate was beneficial in moving forward and building a trusting supervisor-candidate relationship. Lauren also highlighted the importance of being vulnerable when she reflected on accepting that supervision, like teaching, requires continual growth:

> I feel that one of my challenges is coming to peace with the fact that I do not know everything and to just try my best to support my tutors with what I know. I feel like I have experience and useful feedback, but I know as a teacher there is always more to learn. The one thing about teaching is that students are different, so you need to adapt what you know to the particular student you are working with… There is no quick answer to most questions since students change and so do the tutors.

Being both empathic and vulnerable showed the candidates that we are human and make mistakes. It also showed them that we care about their success and understand (and remember) the hardships of being a beginning teacher. Finally, we felt that empathy and vulnerability led to something we all thought was vital - candidates' understanding that we were "invested" (Jadelyn) in them and their success.

While we understood the importance of building rapport with our students, many of us believed that supervision in the online space made this challenging. For example, Jadelyn wrote about the rapport she and other supervisors had built with the candidates back when tutoring was face-to-

face; she mentioned: "I feel like the candidates were able to better communicate with us easily and were open to coming to us for help (or voicing concerns when needed)." However, while supervising remotely, Jadelyn frequently reflected on the challenge of getting to know the candidates and building strong relationships. She stated, "Honestly, I feel like my involvement felt more surface level this semester. I feel that I have not had much to reflect on as a supervisor because I have mostly been just providing feedback over Google Docs and through observing their videos." Lauren felt similarly and longed for face-to-face meetings, which she felt would help her to better support candidates with making changes to their lesson plans before they taught and to alleviate challenging situations more easily. As a group, we agreed that due to the online nature of the course (e.g., confronting students over email), crucial conversations were easy to avoid. Annie shared these concerns when she noted, "One of the challenges over the last two weeks has been communication with the candidates. With everything being remote, we rely heavily on back-and-forth comments through Google Docs and emails."

In our clinic, we grounded our approach to alleviating conflict on guiding candidates to have a *teacher* stance, not a *student* stance. On the first day of our course, we talked with candidates about the importance of transitioning away from allowing their identity as a student to guide their decision-making. In other words, we pushed them to focus on the student they are working with, and let the student's well-being and needs guide their thinking, not simply their desire to get a certain grade. Of course, we also explained that with this shift in thinking to focus on their student, the grade they desire would also come based on the nature of our course structure. An example of exhibiting a student stance, instead of a teacher stance, involved candidates simply looking at a lesson plan grade, as opposed to contemplating the feedback to determine how future lesson plans might better serve their students. The excerpt below is a reflection from Hannah that mentions an example of what we consider a student stance:

> She makes great grades and does well with her student, but she showed some unprofessional behavior (student stance, not teacher). I talked with her and wrote it up on her PM spreadsheet. Then she wanted to meet with me to "explain herself," not talk about the student...I told her to meet with me if she wanted to talk about her student. I still think this was the right choice because hopefully she is starting to see the importance of remaining student focused and not focused on herself.

This example also showed how we leverage the notion of a teacher stance, or teacher mindset, to alleviate conflict. Additionally, we also framed having a teacher stance as part of the professionalism required for candidates as they shift into their upcoming teaching experiences. Because our course comes at the end of the candidates' program, it is less challenging for us to help candidates view our coursework through the lens of a teacher. Approaching candidates as teachers, more than students, was also a way we felt like rapport was built between candidate and supervisor. We pushed candidates to think about every aspect of their work in tutoring as a teacher whose top priority is their students. We continually reminded candidates to consider "the why" behind tutoring, and ultimately, teaching. We found that having the candidates continually circle back to the students they are serving as the focus of our work was a powerful way to both confront conflict and build rapport with candidates.

Discussion and Implications

Our self-study group explored our experiences supervising teacher candidates as they tutored children in literacy. More specifically, we investigated what tensions we were most commonly contemplating. While we contemplated both what candidates struggled with and what we struggled with, our primary wonders were related to providing equitable support, giving balanced and guiding feedback, and confronting conflict. A primary struggle we faced was ensuring that we provided candidates with equitable support. Part of wondering how to provide useful feedback included trying to find a balance between correction and praise, as well as trying to guide candidates and not simply tell them what to do. In challenging situations, we also saw the value of confronting, not avoiding conflict. Building rapport with candidates made this less challenging, and we achieved this by showing both empathy and vulnerability. When considering these findings alongside previous research on supervision, we identified three relevant connections that offer recommendations for supervisors in various contexts. Our self-study findings point to the need for supervision that is differentiated, collaborative, and relationship and strengths-based.

Our findings highlight the need for differentiated supervision practice. Our reflections shed light on the often inequitable support that we provided candidates. This was sometimes due to our inability to balance support for candidates struggling significantly, candidates who wanted more support than other candidates, and candidates who were excelling. Regardless, supervisors must provide support to all candidates that best positions each of them for success; this requires differentiation. Previous research has unveiled the power of teachers differentiating instruction for K-12 students (Meijer et al., 2019) and principals differentiating supports for early career in-service teachers (Elliot et al., 2010). Likewise, supervision should be differentiated for candidates to ensure their individual needs are met (Izadinia, 2015). Differentiating scaffolds based on candidate needs also helps to strengthen the supervisory relationship and requires supervisors to avoid assumptions about singular approaches working for all candidates, or even the same candidate in different circumstances.

A key aspect of providing differentiated supervision in any context involves minding the gap between the theory candidates may be familiar with and their ability to apply that theory to practice (Bullock, 2012). Because all candidates enter practicums with different levels of understanding related to applying theory, ensuring equitable supervision means meeting each candidate where they are when they get to us. While additional research is needed to identify effective ways to support candidates in the knowledge transfer process, frequently observing, communicating, and providing feedback is a start (Degraff et al., 2015). To track interactions and feedback, supervisors should employ systems for documentation that can help with evaluating candidate needs. To make differentiation for candidates in our clinic more attainable, we set the goal to identify issues and intervene early, as well as keep our interactions with candidates well-documented. We implemented PM spreadsheets, which allowed for systematically documenting our supervision work. These spreadsheets offered a visual representation of the support we were providing. Tracking in this way can both unveil inequities in supervision practice that require a response and make clear where differentiation is required.

Findings from this study also point to collaborative coaching as a key component of effective supervision. In our work with candidates in the clinic, we wondered about the best ways to give feedback that was balanced and that acted as a guide, not a prescription. We collectively understood the importance of praise and the acknowledgment of tone in our feedback; however, we were unsure how to guide candidates to understandings without telling them exactly what to do. This curiosity led us to revise the way we provide feedback on lesson plans to an approach we felt was more developmentally appropriate for candidates; this involved giving more targeted and minimal feedback with the hope of not overwhelming the candidates. This curiosity also led us to explore practices that were more collaborative with candidates. When employing collaborative coaching, feedback should be viewed by supervisors and candidates as a social interaction that includes open conversation about the candidate's teaching (McJunkin et al., 1998). During this conversation, the supervisor takes the role of a coach, by supporting candidates while they take on the leading role. For example, the supervisor should pose questions, clarify misconceptions, and facilitate idea generation (Lipton et al., 2017), as opposed to providing prescriptive recommendations. As part of this, supervisors support their candidates with shifting toward what we call a teacher stance, and away from making decisions based on the mindset of a university student.

A concrete way to begin collaborative coaching in any context is having the candidate record their lesson so that both the candidate and the supervisor can identify specific areas of improvement and strengths within the lesson. After viewing the recording, the supervisor and candidate can debrief about the lesson, with the candidate taking lead in the conversation. The supervisor acts as a support system in guiding the candidate to the next immediate steps and goal revision. Figure 1 shows a suggested goal-setting and feedback cycle, where the supervisor plays the supporting role to the candidate. This figure also showcases the cyclical nature that supervision should follow, with ongoing conversation, goal revision, and feedback (Karpenko & Gidycz, 2012).

Lipton et al. (2017) offer recommendations for how supervisors can progress from telling the candidates what to do (i.e., calibrating) to guiding candidates in making their own decisions (e.g., coaching). This approach allows supervisors to gradually release control to their candidates, ensuring that the supervisor and candidate are partners in teaching, rather than engaging in a typical hierarchy in which the supervisor makes the decisions. This approach also positions candidates as emerging professionals with thoughts and ideas to be fostered, allowing supervisors to provide developmentally appropriate support more easily.

Another key component of supervision that our self-study calls out is the need for strengths-based mentoring (Haberlin, 2019). In our self-study, we were struggling to confront conflict in productive ways. We found that supervising in the online space exacerbated this challenge and made building rapport with candidates even more important. In our supervision, we found that part of working toward enacting strengths-based coaching and confronting conflict was heavily relying on strong supervisor-candidate relationships. Supervisory relationships can either foster or hinder both the candidates' learning and their response to supervisor feedback (Karpenko & Gidycz, 2012). According to Bullock (2012), the relationship between supervisor and candidate highlights the importance of candidates developing relationships with their future students. Because of this, modeling how to mentor in ways that focus on the strengths should be

prioritized in all contexts. A strengths-based philosophy avoids focusing on deficits and instead brings to the forefront the "resilience, potentials, strengths, interests, abilities, knowledge, and capacities of individuals" (Fenton & McFarland-Piazza, 2014, p. 23). To enact strengths-based supervision, Haberlin (2019) offers several steps (p. 53):

- Assist candidates in identifying their strengths through various tools: arts-based, computerized tests, self-inventories, and reflections.
- Embed strengths-based practices in the supervision observation cycle (e.g., preconferences, observations, post-conferences, data collection, and feedback.
- Create a "culture" of strengths-based supervision through discussions, workshops, teachings, readings, and practice.
- Engage in dialogue about the feedback and results, reconsider goals and strengths, and adjust and refocus on strengths.

Figure 1. Goal Setting and Feedback Cycle
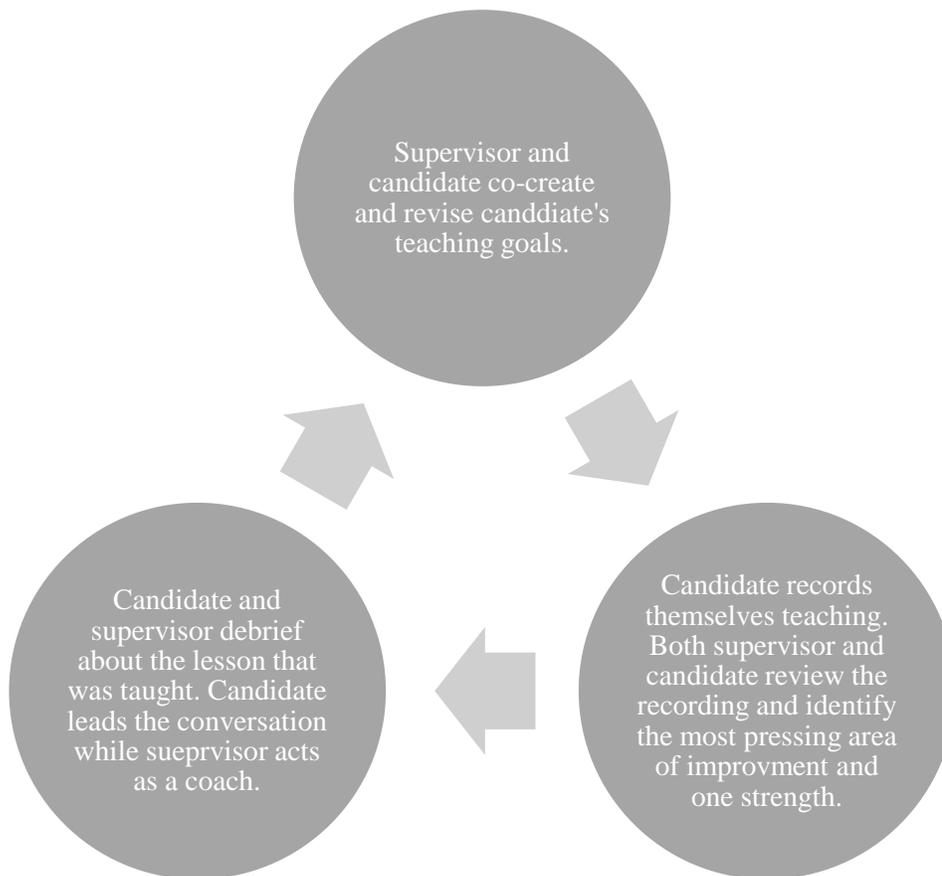
Also related to strengths-based coaching, previous research suggests that supervisors create safe spaces for their candidates (Hayden & Gratteau-Zinnel (2019). Candidates should feel comfortable enough to freely discuss the problems of practice they are seeing and experiencing (Bullock, 2012). When candidates have the authority to discuss these problems, conflict management for the supervisor is more manageable. Other aspects of creating safe spaces involve sharing the supervisors' own experiences teaching and those experiences of previous

candidates, as well as offering reassurance (Hayden & Gratteau-Zinnel, 2019). To effectively confront conflict in supervision work, we also suggest what Schilling (1998) refers to as an "invitational" approach, as candidates respond best when they feel valued. Invitational practices include frequent and engaging informal meetings, accessibility to the supervisor when needed (i.e., clear expectations for when and how to communicate), a focus on the team and not the individual, and regular celebration, of even the small victories.

Conclusion

The purpose of this self-study was to investigate what we, as supervisors in our literacy clinic, were contemplating and the tensions that we were facing. More specifically, we wondered about how to provide equitable support, give strength-based feedback that was not deeply rooted in our own pedagogical experiences (Cuenca, 2010; Haberlin, 2019), and confront conflict. To explore these inquiries, we conducted a collaborative self-study to both individually and collectively improve as supervisors (LaBoskey & Hamilton, 2010), and thus, better support and prepare our candidates for their future teaching endeavors. By telling the collective story of our supervisors through the lens of tensions we were contemplating, we described the types of challenges that supervisors specifically, and teacher educators, more broadly should consider as they approach their work with candidates.

One conclusion that can be drawn from our findings is that supervisors in all contexts can benefit from continual training and collaboration. The need for more systematic supervisor support is a tension that has been noted in various other studies (Capello, 2020; Guise et al., 2020; McCormack et al., 2019; Mudavanhu, 2015; Steadman & Brown, 2011; Zeichner, 2005); however, training resources are still often unavailable within universities (Capello, 2020). Thus, we suggest the following practical steps to remediate the issue of supervisors feeling underprepared: 1) having weekly meetings with other supervisors from various backgrounds and experience levels; 2) matching new and veteran supervisors in pods as a way to provide mentoring to new supervisors; and 3) providing supervisor training specific to best practices for the context at hand. Another conclusion that can be drawn from our study is that collaborative coaching can provide a way for supervisors to provide developmentally appropriate, strengths-based support (Haberlin, 2019) more effectively. Meeting the needs of diverse candidates who have varied goals, strengths, and purposes for teaching can best be achieved through collaborative supervision. Finally, supervisors in all contexts must implement systematic ways to track interactions with and feedback for candidates to work toward equity in their practices and to provide the required differentiation to their candidates.

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