A Scoping Review of Educational Field Supervisors: 1952-2022

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Abstract: This scoping review explored university supervisors' roles, responsibilities, challenges, and changes over 70 years. Using the PRISMA-ScR method and 90 analyzed publications, the results yielded articles from every decade and from educator preparation programs across the United States. The findings highlight historical perspectives and controversies surrounding field supervision. These include influences throughout the decades from areas outside education, including psychology and business. Finally, recommendations for preparing and elevating the role of university supervisors are shared.

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Introduction

University supervisors are essential in the development of emerging teacher candidates assigned to them during their field and student teaching experiences (Livers, et al., 2022; Vagi, et al., 2019). This supervision involves guiding and supporting the pre-service teacher during mediated fieldwork when university-assigned personnel observe the practicing of teaching and offer feedback to enhance instructional practices (Burroughs, et al., 2019). The individuals who embrace this role are not always supported or valued; some researchers have asked if supervisors are even necessary (Rutten, 2022). The importance of supervision is not always explicit or well understood by stakeholders, including those who hire and prepare supervisors for their role.

The objective of this review was to yield substantial information about the (1) historical evolution of the definitions, roles, and responsibilities of university supervisors; (2) challenges, concerns, models, and approaches to enhancing supervision; and (3) best practices and recommendations for preparing and further developing supervisory personnel.

Method

For this review, the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and MetaAnalyses (PRIMSA-ScR) method was followed. It is an evidence-based set of items for reviews and meta-analyses. The PRISMA statement consists of a 27-item checklist and a 4-phase flow diagram (Triccio, et al., 2018).

The strategy for searching included the use of an online university library search engine. The term "student teacher supervisors" was entered on January 4, 2023. Eligibility criteria were preset to include a range from 1952 through 2022, a span of 70 years. The initial search yielded 15,145 results.

Filtering for scholarly, peer-reviewed journal articles and full-text availability yielded 9,165 results. Next, the results were filtered to include academic journals, the English language, and the United States and excluded non-education disciplines, such as medical education. Final filters including catch phrases such as teacher education and training of student teachers resulted in 113 publications with full texts.

Following the reading of abstracts, items excluded were the length of field experience or student teaching requirements that did not involve university supervision. Reviewing abstracts with this lens excluded 36 articles. Therefore, the remaining 77 documents were downloaded. It is important to note that, following a formal reading of each publication, another 12 documents were sought due to their prevalence in the chosen articles and potential seminal nature. This yielded a total of 89 research articles subjected to review and analysis.

The program NoodleTools was used for organizing publications, including capturing text, annotating, tagging, and categorizing information (Campbell, 2001). This online research management platform allows the recording of sources, tagging, and notecard creation. Notecards created for this literature review included history (45 notecards), definitions (33 notecards), problems (60 notecards), findings (67 notecards), and recommendations (62 notecards) for a total of 268 notecards.

The number of articles increased by decade, from the 1950s (6), 1960s (9), 1970s (13), 1980s (21), 1990s (12), 2000s (13), 2010s (9) and as expected were fewer in 2020-2022 (6). The highest number occurred in the 1980s, coinciding with articles presenting arguments about university supervisors' futility and/or usefulness. This spike can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1
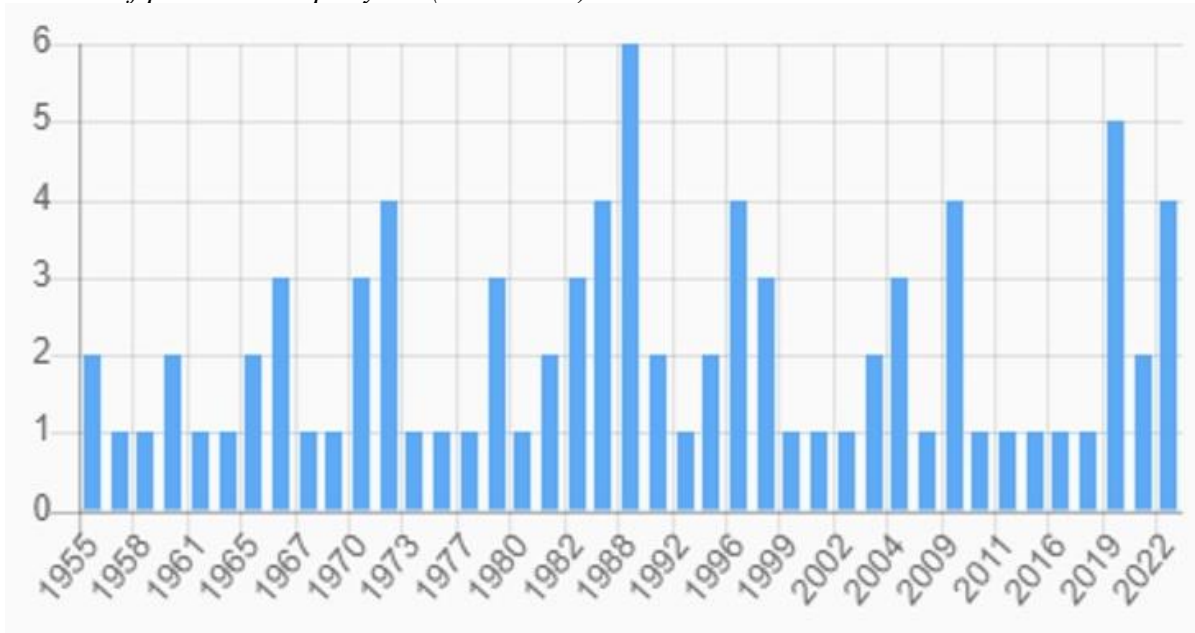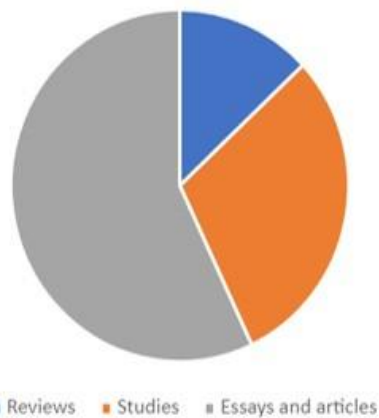*Number of publications per year (1952-2022)*

Figure 2
Location of author institute and type of publication

Representation of authors' institutional location and types of research publications can be seen in Figure 2. Most articles were from institutes located in the Midwest while the least contributed were from the northeast. Five U.S regions were represented in this collection. Most articles were essays, opinion pieces and reports sharing program initiatives while 13% were literature reviews or meta-analyses and 30% were studies.

Many of the studies were qualitative. These varied in designs, methods, and analyses of data. Almost none captured in this review reported on how the data was analyzed with few exceptions. Few studies were quantitative and some administered instruments and employed statistical methods. Instruments were mainly homemade without any factor analysis or measure of reliability. Of these, most used Likert scales (1 used Guttman scales). These findings resonate with Dunst, et al. (2019) who reported "the independent and dependent variables in most reviews have not been operationally defined, and the nature of the relationships between inputs and outputs, and practices and outcomes, have not been evaluated using an objective metric (e.g., effect sizes)." (p.29)

Historical highlights
1950s – 1960s.
These selected sources indicated that a 1950 book entitled, *Supervision for Better Schools*, by Kimball Wiles was a dominating guide throughout 1950 and into the 1970s. One poignant theme is summarized in the following quote:

> A supervisor should exhibit a belief in the worth of all individuals, respect for the wishes and feelings of others, the will to see that all live and work in harmony, plus the skills in working with individuals and groups in such a way that these ends are promoted. (p. 86)

Wiles (1950) proposed that the supervisor promote human relations by developing self-confidence, inspiring self-confidence in others, and respecting others (p. 31). This is echoed in other works of the 1960s as the acquisition of confidence and indicated an evolution of concerns emerging about the student teaching practicum (Fuller, 1964; Iannaccone & Button, 1964).

1970s – 1980s.
Goldhammer's (1969) and Cogan's (1973) versions of clinical supervision inspired much of the 1970s and 1980s literature. Gitlin (1981) described two approaches of evaluation by supervisors: vertical, which is based on more technical aspects as in competency-based evaluation of student teachers, and horizontal, which is based on the connections between theory and practice for student teachers. Gitlin as well as Sergiovanni (1982) believed competency-based aspects only measured how a teacher performed and did not address what the standards for student teaching should be.

A related controversy that emerged during this time was that of *nondirective inquiry* vs *directive* approaches between supervisors and teacher candidates. Nondirective inquiry was found to nurture student teachers' abilities to ask themselves questions about their actions, reflecting and realizing the impact on their practices. Some writers found this practice too frustrating for student teachers (Copeland & Atkinson, 1978).

The greatest controversy found in this review was whether university supervisors were necessary at all in the development of educators. This concept may have helped pave the way for *Professional Development Schools*. The original arguments stemmed from the perception that a lack of classroom visitations by the supervisor would leave the student teacher and cooperating teacher feeling doubtful that the supervisor really knew what they were talking about. Bowman (1979) claimed university supervision was ineffective and damaged one's professional career, and that keeping such representatives will cause damage to a university's reputation. Others argued the supervisor was more than an evaluator, including that the role and responsibilities included supporting, translating, and negotiating for both the

cooperating teacher and the student teacher, a critical third component (Sergiovanni, 1982). Perhaps due to the heated discussions, the late 1980s demonstrated a "rich and complex picture of preservice supervision and its role in teacher education [that was] beginning to emerge" (Rust, 1988, p.57). Newer perspectives were shared, claiming, "Supervising is not a linear activity but involves reflection, introspection, intuition and an understanding of the dialectical nature of the role (p.57)."

1990s – 2000s.
As a result of the 1980s calls for reform (the Holmes Group, the Carnegie Forum for Education and Economics), various government initiatives, including *Professional Development Schools* arose that emphasized the application of theories to practical classroom experiences and bridge the gap of shared understandings between supervisors and cooperating teachers. Melser (2004) claimed this shared supervision model assumes the person most qualified to observe and monitor the growth of a student teacher is the person they most encounter daily—the cooperating PreK -12 classroom teacher—and not the university supervisor. During this same time, McGlinn (2003) felt that experiential learning was an attribute of university supervisors and that this showed promise in improving supervision by faculty and others. One trend of the 1990s focused on the compatibility between supervisors and their students. Matching supervisors and students through perceived personality traits was trendy.

Pajak (2002, 2003) described how each of the four clinical supervision families (original clinical models, humanistic/artistic models, technical/didactic models, and developmental/reflective models) with one of Psychologist Carl Jung's paired psychological functions - Sensing-Feeling (S-F), Intuition-Feeling (N-F), Intuition-

Thinking (N-T), and Sensing-Thinking (S-T).

2000s – 2020s.
Like the findings in a literature review by Burns, et al. (2020), discussion topics of supervision from the 2000-2010s included tasks, observations and feedback, the role of technology, professional development, and building relationships. Others described attributes of field supervisors. Starratt (2004) outlined three virtues: responsibility, authenticity, and presence. Ediger (2009) listed expectations for focus on knowledge base, conveying purpose, effective communication, student engagement, and providing for individual differences in the classroom. Alger and Kopcha (2010) discussed how technology should be utilized to improve the student teaching field experience. Dunst et. al, (2019) stated, in their review of four decades of research, that the foci had shifted from program and student inputs, competencies, performances, practices, and academic achievement. Burns and Badiali (2016a, 2016b) detailed important skills such as noticing, ignoring, marking, intervening, pointing, unpacking, and processing as pedagogical skills to be supervised.

Challenges and Solutions
Challenges revealed in the literature included the availability of quality supervisors, the need for enhancing skill sets, and a lack of job satisfaction. Researchers found tenured or tenure track faculty conduct the minimum number of school visits and that they are mostly likely to be disenchanted with classroom visits (Beck & Kosnik, 2002; Bowman, 1979; Goodlad, 1965; Slick, 1998). Other concerns for the prevalence of low-performing supervisors included a lack of availability of higher quality personnel and a widespread belief that supervising student teachers is not

highly valued internally or externally (Burns & Badiali, 2016a & b).

University supervisors have expressed concerns regarding 1) the institution's lack of guidance in defining whether their role was as an evaluator, coach, or institutional representative and 2) the lack of concrete tools such as up-to-date handbooks, realistic rubrics, clear protocols, and training for the supervisory role (Rutten, 2022). This results in supervisors who feel their roles are not well-defined, leaving them unprepared for the increasingly complex demands required by the school-university partnership (Burns & Badiali,2016 a & b; Rutten, 2022).

Gordon (2022) stated that an effective university supervisor has the skills and professional ethics to successfully facilitate a teacher candidate through field experiences. The supervisor should respect the cooperating teacher, is non-judgmental, and treats the cooperating teacher as an equal. The supervisor and teacher develop a collegial relationship based on mutual trust and shared decision making. To accomplish this goal, "interrelationships among participants must be defined and understood within the context of the total experience" (Zimpher, et al., 1980, p.12). Holland and the hermeneutic perspective introduced in the 1990s recommended interpretations of human intentionality through dialogue. Professional Development Schools encourage the application of theories to practical classroom experiences, bridging the gap of shared understandings between supervisors and cooperating teachers.

Recommendations

From this review, a set of recommendations emerged that were incorporated into a 2023-2024 University Supervisor Pool Training. McCormack et al. (2019) stated that the "absence of program guidance impacts

supervisors negatively, and suggests, in contrast, that effective program guidance could engage and support clinical supervisors as teacher educators, leading them to develop and refine their practices" (p. 26). Supervisors should be trained altogether, with extensive support, and when possible, allowed to participate in teacher program development and its implications for their work with student teachers (Beck & Kosnik, 2002; Ward & Suttle, 1966). They are a smaller group whose selection, training, and retention are much more within our control than that of cooperating teachers (Gehrke & Kay, 1984, p.24). Keep in mind that the primary concerns of new supervisors are their focus on role and methods, whereas the concerns of experienced supervisors should be on furthering the development of relationships that should grow more meaningful and applicable, such as reflective promoting inquiry and coaching skills (Rust, 1988).

1. Conduct annual in-person training. *Provide the institutional and program mission, values, framework, and how field experiences play a vital role in developing educators.* Supported by the literature, supervisors need a means of building shared meanings about their work (Rutten, 2022) and this is accomplished by creating a coherent vision and curriculum (Darling-Hammond, 2014). Training should be invoked using an overarching model, a framework, and tools that connect the supervisor to the program's purpose.

Define the role, expectations, and responsibilities. Burroughs et al., (2019) suggested educator preparation programs provide the principles and practices central to teacher preparation and training as jointly defined, negotiated, and co-constructed through partnerships. Three roles identified for the supervisors were technical

instrumental (a focus on teaching techniques), personal growth (a focus on the development of the students' goals), and critical (a focus on classroom and school change) (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1982).

As a liaison, the role for a university supervisor involves shared power, negotiation, and decision-making while in the hosting classroom and school (McCormack, et al.2019). As a supervisor, the role involves fostering teacher learning about the complexity of teaching, the focus of which is broad and comprehensive and may involve risk-taking and experimentation (Burns, et al., 2020; Nolan & Hoover, 2011).

This is different than an evaluator who ensures minimal competence for teacher practice, views the role as protecting children from poor instruction, uses narrow observational perspective, views relationships as hierarchical and distanced, evaluation is standardized, and measures are based on best performance (Burns, et al., 2020; Nolan & Hoover, 2011). Hazi (1994) pointed out that while supervision is and should be different from evaluation, student teachers may still view their supervisor as an evaluator.

As a mentor, supervisors extend "far beyond traditional conceptions of observation and feedback" (Burns & Badiali, 2016, p.156a). Roles include confidant, teacher, sponsor, role model, developer of talent, opener of doors, protector, and successful leader (Gehrke & Kay, 1984, p.22). Nelson and Hutcherson (1970) recommended shifting from intuitive to more scientific approaches when working with pre-service teacher candidates (p.447).

Offer applicable, real world, just-in-time professional development, often relevant to local, state and/or national educational initiatives. Offer information about national, state, and local trends in education, including the challenges, mandates,

curricular changes, and initiatives. While many retired school administrators are likely to be familiar with the current events, others may not. For example, supervisor conversations with field educators should not miss trauma-informed practices and culturally responsive pedagogies. Supervisors need to be reminded that, "to reach the full potential of equity-minded supervision, there must be a shift from culturally blind supervisory practices toward explicit scaffolding of culturally responsive enactments as part of a freedom-minded framework of clinical supervision in teacher education" (Livers et al., 2022, p.4).

Provide soft skills training associated with mentoring and coaching. Workplace coaching has a large effect size on career commitment (Dunst, et al., 2019, p.34). According to Rust (1988), experienced supervisors examine the meanings of their own and their students' actions and are accustomed to thinking about their craft, so they engage their students through reflective dialogue, which communicates their understanding of a situation. Supervisors should be conscious and skilled about their work and the complexity of pre-service teacher mentorship (Burns, et al., 2020).

Accessing and building upon the student's theoretical and experiential learning. Use of adult learning practices, incorporating the latest technology, and providing actionable feedback are not necessarily what former K-12 teachers and administrators are accustomed to. Zepeda (2017) recommended supervisors working with teachers make learning authentic, motivational, and transformational as well as provide a supportive and participative learning environment. Supervisors should support students as adult learners and help them embrace not just equipment and software, but the logistics of lessons that use

technology (Weisner & Salkeld, 2004). Supervisors need to access prior knowledge from coursework and help the learner integrate the theories and frameworks they have been taught. Supervisors can aid their students in accessing their prior knowledge and experiences and help them set goals as they enhance their practice. Supervisors can help their students navigate relationships with cooperating teachers based on their experiences and who may or may not embrace technology and foster confidence when they take tech risk (Weisner & Salkeld, 2004).

Using inquiry, dialogue, and providing actionable feedback. According to Gordon (2022), reflecting and discussing feedback is about deepening practically significant insights into an aspect of teaching (p.9). Gordon provided models in this regard. Supervisors should be prepared for dialoguing and providing actionable feedback. Building confidence with 'nice job' is important but must be authentic for student teachers to value it and the education they are receiving. Recommendations in this area include recording of points for further discussion, including what worked, what might have been improved, and providing actionable feedback. Filling a feedback form with affirmations is nice but students want and need to know where and how they might enhance their repertoire. Feedback forms are not checklists and should not be treated as such. Therefore, supervisors should be mindful of this and use inquiry (non-directive approach) to elicit what worked and what didn't and set further goals, completed together towards improvement for future lessons. Supervisor comments show how they *theorize in action* - asking probing questions, perception checking, reinforcing, and extending (Rust, 1988). Such guidance and feedback were found to have positive effects on teaching practices,

self-efficacy beliefs, and university faculty-student interactions (Dunst, et al., 2019).

Differentiating learning for individuals and cohorts. Like Eisner's (1982) supervisory connoisseurs, supervisors should identify and find value in the "uniqueness of each student's teaching style" (Rust, 1988, p.59). Done individually or collectively, feedback approaches provide data for strengthening the student teaching experience, which has been linked to the retention of teachers in the years that follow (Vagi, et al., 2019; Zhang & Zeller, 2016). Sergiovanni (1994) believed supervisors and their teachers should become a community of learners. This resonates with Garman's (1989) clinical supervision model of collegiality, collaboration, skilled service, and ethical conduct (Gordon, 2019, p.28).

2. Model best practices during supervisor training and other opportunities.
Prepare a training that is engaging, interactive and focused on supervisors' needs. Because they appear to go through stages as do emerging educators, new supervisors should begin their practice with clearly defined guidelines and ready access to help. They need to be taught directly and practically how to do the job of supervision - how to read and respond to journals, how to conference, and what to look for in a classroom. They need to have questions asked that will facilitate their making connections between their teaching experience and their work as supervisor (Beck & Kosnik, 2002).

3. Assess the effectiveness and satisfaction of training and field program.
Informally, institutions can provide regular opportunities for supervisors to examine and discuss the dilemmas of practice they encounter by providing regular spaces for reflection and conversation about

supervision. This also allows for formative assessment of the program during duration. More summative feedback from cooperating teachers, student teachers, and the supervisors themselves should be collected and assessed for enhancing program and subsequent trainings.

4. Honor and value the role of clinical field supervisor.

Value and honor the person in the role and celebrate your supervisors. Allow for collegial opportunities through group trainings; department potlucks; opportunities to get involved with initiatives, projects or research; and come together in a community of practice that shares concerns and successes. Buy a book, give a journal or plant, and let the supervisors know they are appreciated. According to Burns, et al., (2020), supervision of teacher candidates must be "recognized, resourced, valued, and researched in the academy equivalent to the attention given to other aspects of educator preparation" (p.236).

Conclusion

University supervisors may possibly be "the most undervalued actors in the entire teacher preparation equation when one considers the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they must have" (Burns & Badiali, 2016a, p. 156). This scoping review provided history and perspective to the development of understanding of the role, responsibilities, perceptions, challenges, and solutions of university supervision. For those overseeing an educator preparation program that incorporates university supervision, consider recommendations surrounding training, expectations and support of new and seasoned supervisors to meet today's classroom teaching demands.

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