The Transformative Potential of Teacher Candidate Supervision: Reimagining Clinical Practice That Brings P-12 Students into Focus

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Abstract

This editorial introduces a special issue that reimagines supervision as a space where inequities are made visible, opportunity gaps are confronted, deficit-oriented assumptions are interrogated, and new possibilities for teaching and learning are collaboratively constructed. The three featured articles examine special education supervisors' siloed praxis through Cultural-Historical Activity Theory, a motivation-driven reconceptualization of clinical supervision, and an intentional lesson study reflection model. Together, they build on Diacopoulos et al.'s (2024) review of *Journal of Educational Supervision* scholarship to examine the relationships, structures, and practices necessary to realize the transformative potential of teacher candidate supervision. The editorial concludes that how we supervise candidates matters as much as what we supervise them towards, and calls for recognizing supervision as a collective opportunity to influence the educational experiences of P–12 students.

Keywords

teacher candidate supervision; clinical practice; opportunity gaps; culturally responsive practices; culturally responsive supervision; instructional supervision; supervision

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Introduction

What responsibilities does supervision hold in addressing the inequitable educational experiences that many P–12 students continue to encounter? This question animates the scholarship gathered in this special issue. The special issue called for supervision scholars to envision a form of teacher candidate supervision that generates and nurtures possibilities for liberatory change and transformation of the oppressive systems and structures reproduced in the P-12 schooling system. A form of supervision that serves as a place for teacher candidates and supervisors to collaboratively recognize, counter, and overcome opportunity gaps – explained by deficit mindsets towards minoritized P-12 students, colorblindness and context-neutral instructional practices, meritocracy, and positioning and power dynamics that generate cultural conflicts (Milner, 2012) – that impact P-12 students in the spaces where teacher candidates are actively learning to teach and in a critical period of deciding whether or not and to what extent they will adopt practices that reproduce the inequities they want to change.

In response to the call, the authors in this special issue reimagine supervision as a space where inequities are made visible, opportunity gaps are confronted, deficit-oriented assumptions are interrogated, and new possibilities for teaching and learning are collaboratively constructed. Orienting the field of teacher candidate supervision towards equity is crucial during a time in which teaching and teacher education have become overly prescriptive, overregulated, and deprofessionalized, while diversity, equity, and inclusion are considered threats to the classroom. Collectively, the contributions call the field to move beyond conceptions of supervision as evaluation and toward supervision as a space for teacher and student learning, inquiry, advocacy, and action (Grant & Allweiss, 2023; Soslau & Alexander, 2021; Burns et al., 2019). In doing so, they demonstrate how clinical practice can serve as a powerful site for advancing more equitable and humanizing educational experiences while bringing the needs, perspectives, and opportunities of P–12 students into sharper focus (Cuenca, 2010; Jacobs & Casciola, 2016; Lynch & Curcio, 2026).

Cases of Transformation through Teacher Candidate Supervision

In "Supervisory Praxis in Special Education Clinical Practice: A Cultural-Historical Activity Theory Perspective," Chandrashekhar examines how special education university supervisors make meaning of their work within the institutional positions they hold, reminding us that "a supervisor's daily activity, in this sense, is inseparable from praxis" (2026, p. 8). Drawing on semi-structured interviews with 15 university-based supervisors in special education, the study uses Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) to analyze supervision as mediated activity. Chandrashekhar distinguishes the institutional object of activity – evaluating candidates – from the expanded objectives supervisors pursued in practice. She found tensions and contradictions in the work of supervisors related to the role of evaluator versus mentor; centering the TC in their work versus supporting P-12 learners, curating and using institutionally provided versus teacher educator-generated practices and materials, and grappling with the siloed nature of the work. Supervisors were able to expand the object of their own practice, yet not within shared systems or collective activity, so institutional objects remained unchanged. This study highlights the contradiction between supervisors' individual praxis and efforts in more liberatory educational practices as siloed work versus collective transformational activity. In doing so, it

challenges us to address how isolating the work of university-based supervision can sometimes be, and argues instead for boundary-crossing practice, shared equity-oriented stances, communities of practice for supervisors, and structured partnerships with university-based supervisors and school-based teacher educators (e.g., mentor teachers or cooperating teachers).

"Promoting a Motivation-Driven Reconceptualization of Clinical Supervision: Advancing Equitable Support for Teacher Candidates" extends the special issue's examination of opportunity gaps by drawing attention to the motivational and relational dimensions of supervision. Drawing on self-determination theory and instructional supervision scholarship, Robinson-Wilson and Keifer (2026) advance a vision of supervision that centers autonomy, competence, and relatedness as foundations for equitable clinical practice. Importantly, they argue that these constructs must be understood through an asset-based lens that recognizes the experiences, identities, and resources teacher candidates bring to clinical settings. In doing so, the manuscript complements other contributions in this issue that challenge deficit-oriented perspectives, emphasize inquiry and reflection, and reframe supervision as a means of expanding educational opportunities. While several authors illustrate how supervisors can identify and interrupt inequitable practices in clinical contexts (Baker et al., 2022; Dismuke & Snow-Gerono, 2024; Yeigh, 2020), Robinson-Wilson and Keifer provide a conceptual framework for understanding how such work can be enacted through everyday supervisory interactions. By positioning supervision as inherently relational, responsive, and equity-oriented, the authors demonstrate how supervisors can support teacher candidates' professional growth while expanding opportunities for the P–12 students whose experiences remain at the center of this special issue.

"Intentional Lesson Study Using a Reflection Model for Preservice Teacher Preparation: Observation, Reflection, Creation, and Application (ORCA)" offers a practice-based perspective on addressing opportunity gaps in teacher preparation. Through an intentional lesson study process grounded in Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, Jagielo-Manion and Loose (2026) examine how collaborative reflection and feedback can strengthen teacher candidates' confidence, professional judgment, and responsiveness to diverse learners. Through the ORCA model and participation in teacher learning communities, candidates engaged in structured opportunities for observation, dialogue, feedback, and instructional planning. Four themes emerged from the findings: critical conversations, peer collaboration and collegiality, triadic and peer feedback, and intentional instructional planning. Together, these findings highlight the value of creating clinical spaces in which candidates can collectively examine practice and refine their instructional decision-making. Importantly, the study illustrates how these structures can support candidates in exercising professional judgment rather than simply complying with prescribed or scripted approaches to instruction. In this way, the manuscript complements other contributions in the issue that challenge evaluative and compliance-oriented conceptions of supervision and instead position clinical experiences as opportunities for inquiry, growth, and responsiveness to learners. Through the ORCA model, Jagielo-Manion and Loose illustrate how purposeful reflection and collaborative inquiry can prepare teacher candidates to make more intentional instructional choices and thoughtfully respond to the learners and contexts they encounter in their developing practice.

Conclusion

Together, these articles expand the findings from Diacopoulos et al.'s (2024) configurative literature review of the *Journal of Educational Supervision* corpus from 2018–2023 (Volumes 1–6), which found that only 15% of published articles explicitly addressed P–12 opportunity gaps (Milner, 2012) within teacher candidate supervision. Building on this work, the scholarship presented in this special issue shifts the conversation from identifying the transformative potential of supervision to examining the relationships, structures, and practices necessary to realize that potential. The manuscripts in this special issue highlight the possibilities in clinical spaces for supervisors to disrupt the social reproduction of teaching and support teacher candidates in recognizing and not adopting inequitable practices they may have experienced in their previous educational experience or may have witnessed in their clinical placements.

Across these articles, a central message emerges; we cannot expect teacher candidates to create humanizing learning environments for P–12 students if we do not first consider how we humanize the experiences of teacher candidates themselves. The ways supervisors engage with candidates, recognize their strengths, honor their perspectives, and create opportunities for meaningful reflection and professional agency are not separate from the pursuit of educational equity; they are fundamental to it. Supervision is not simply about preparing candidates to become effective teachers in the future. It is also about modeling the relational, reflective, and responsive practices we hope candidates will bring into their classrooms today. In this sense, how we supervise matters as much as what we supervise. The value of this special issue lies not only in the frameworks and practices presented, but also in the conversations they invite. If supervision is to fulfill its transformative potential, we must continue to critically examine whose voices are centered in clinical experiences, whose knowledge and experiences are valued, and how supervisory relationships can either reproduce or challenge existing inequities. This requires moving beyond viewing supervision as an individual responsibility for teacher candidate development and recognizing it as a collective opportunity to influence the educational experiences of P–12 students. As a field, our challenge is not simply to prepare teachers who recognize inequity, but to cultivate supervisory practices that empower supervisors and teachers to take action.

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Mark Diacopoulos, PhD, is the Assistant Provost and Associate Professor at Pittsburg State University in Kansas. His scholarship centers on teacher education supervision and self-study research. His work examines how teacher educators learn to supervise, develop professional identities, and improve practice through reflection, critical friendship, and collaborative inquiry. He is co-author of *Beginning Self-Study Research: A Practical Guide* and has published widely on clinical practice, teacher candidate development, and self-study methodology, connecting disciplined practitioner inquiry with meaningful improvements in educator preparation programs.