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Agency in University Supervision and Mentoring

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Context for Presentation

- Agency for university supervisors enables programs to make concrete commitments to empower novices and supervisors to both enact and support continued change in school settings.

- Supervisors play a crucial role in the development of teachers as change agents within school settings.

- Incorporating the habits, skill, and knowledge to live teaching as an act of change begins in teacher preparation and encourages teachers to see themselves as empowered and capable of growth – changing themselves, their practice, the lives of their students, schools, and districts.

Key Roles of Supervisors

- Preservice supervisors witness the connections and mismatches between university theory and school practice for novice teachers as they work through tensions with fidelity to the instruction and learning opportunities they want to provide to students.

- Supervisors provide candidates with the opportunity to reflect on the apparent and less apparent, attend to areas for growth, justify the choices made with reflection, and encourage continued advocacy for each teacher's practical commitments and philosophical values.

Supervisors as Change Agents

- Like their students, supervisors also need to be agents of change – empowered through their own agency to bring supports to teachers when learning to reflect and grow their practice.

- "The process of facilitating change […] is in itself a form of discovery learning whereby new understandings are shaped by the interchange of inside and outside, and by old and new experiences and habits of mind" (Rust & Freidus, 2001, p. 11).

- Agency for supervisors requires that structures and systems are in place to encourage this type of complex practice.

Critical Roles of Change Agents (Rust & Freidus, 2001)

- Negotiators
- Nurturers
- Teachers and learners
- Curriculum developers

Supervisors with agency possess:

- voice

- a sense of empowerment

- connectedness in educational spheres

- an action-oriented approach

- a reflective stance

- knowledge of best practices and educational contexts (Bates & Burbank, 2019).

A supervisor with agency:

- possesses a strong understanding of their individual supervisory stance and is able to enact this stance to inform work with novice educators;

- facilitates professional systems and models that encourage ongoing reflection about practice;

- utilizes advanced communication, collaboration, and relationship skills to encourage agency in teachers;

- supports innovation and best practices with novice educators; and

- pursues continual learning to improve supervisory practice (Bates & Burbank, 2019).

Strategies for Supporting Supervisors' Practice: Assessing Readiness

- Determine the readiness and receptivity of mentees to grow in ways that support skill development through prompts that challenge whether they are truly meant for the profession.

- Does the preservice teacher possess the aptitude for teaching? Do they understand teachers' work? Do they recognize and value the students in their care?

- To what extent is the timing right for mentees as they consider a teacher education program? That is, do they have the time, resources, and support network to engage in the work of a licensure or professional training experience?

- To what extent is the candidate open to and able to learn the skills necessary for effective teaching (e.g., instruction, classroom management, curriculum development, assessment)?

- Is the teacher with whom the supervisor is working self-reflective and able to evaluate and judge her strengths and areas in need of development?

Strategies for Supporting Supervisors' Practice: Building Connections

- To enact agency with novices, supervisors must move beyond one-on-one or small communities and expand circles both in and outside of schools.

  - Building communities of supervisors

  - Investing in face-to-face and virtual communities

  - Creating ongoing communication and opportunities for conversation

  - Unearthing and make explicit individual stances

Strategies for Supporting Supervisors' Practice: Perspective

- In order to understand the vantage points and the merits of perspective taking, mentors share: 1) views and intentions as mentors; and 2) explore how beliefs impact practices.

- Issues designed to inform conversations in professional communities that promote supervisors' critical thinking include:

  - Understanding perspectives on the purpose of school.

  - Examining views of learners in today's classrooms and schools.

  - Exploring beliefs regarding leaner diversity and its role in their work.

  - Identifying fundamental goals of educators, as a group, and delineating the actions they will take to meet these goals within the context of daily teaching.

Strategies for Supporting Supervisors' Practice: Mentoring in Context

- Understanding context to provide support and encourage agency. Reflective questions include:
  - What are the demographics of the community where my student teacher(s) are placed?
  - What are the priorities and initiatives of the district where my student teacher(s) are working? For example, if technology integration is a goal for the district, how might that play out in the type of evaluation and observational support provided to teachers?
  - How do factors such as community goals and engagement impact the mission and agenda of the school and classrooms? How do stakeholder groups inform teachers' work? Knowing about the roles and responsibilities of Parent-Teacher Associations, School Boards, community councils, etc. sheds light on the community where educators reside.

Strategies for Supporting Supervisors' Thinking: Self-Study

- Both informal and formal structures challenge mentors to consider how they will gather data on practice and disseminate their findings, building agency through practice. Topics mentors might consider as part of an action research or self-study include but are not limited to:

  - Effectiveness of mentoring strategies using survey and interview data.

  - Examinations of electronic feedback to identify teaching episodes for analysis and review.

  - Analyses of language when providing feedback to preservice and in-service teachers.

  - Identification of effective strategies for community building among preservice and in-service teachers.

Strategies for Supporting Supervisors' Thinking: Providing Feedback

- Mentors capture video or audio recordings of feedback session(s) with a preservice or inservice teachers. Key areas for a post-video reviews between supervisors and their mentors include types of support, the nature of feedback, and general interactions including but not limited to:

  - Effective communication (e.g., appropriate eye contact; active listening).

  - Specificity of feedback, versus broad generalizations, that may be difficult to define or identify.

  - References within the feedback shared during supervisory sessions that include linkages to evaluation or program criteria.

  - The use of reflective prompts that require teachers to consider broad-based issues, in addition to skill development.

Conclusion

Supervisors and mentors are in a unique position as teacher educators. As change agents they take on distinct roles including but not limited to:

- Challenging thinking regarding teachers' work with specific attention to the goals of contemporary K-16 education.

- Engaging in critical examinations of how teacher mentors effectively enact their work within the context of teacher preparation and teacher professional development.

- Teaching the skills for effective supervision and mentoring.

- Understanding the context of contemporary teacher evaluation systems and their impact on mentoring and supervision.

References

- Bates, A. J., & Burbank, M. D. (2019). *Agency in Teacher Supervision and Mentoring: Reinvigorating the Practice.* New York, NY: Routledge Research in Teacher Education Series.

- Rust, F. O., & Freidus, H. (Eds.). (2001). *Guiding school change: The role of work of change agents.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.