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Coach and Evaluator: Exploring How to Negotiate Both Functions in the Role of Supervisor

Abstract

The tensions of engaging in both coaching and evaluation have driven this inquiry examining my practice as a university supervisor. I explored the ways I define the tasks that allow me to supervise in ways that align with my beliefs, while at the same time perform my duty as an evaluator. In order to examine my practice and the ways that I engage in evaluation and coaching as a supervisor, I considered those tasks in which I enacted such practices. Further, I envisioned a “hybrid” practice where both roles have a place and function while improving pre-service teaching practice.

Currently, as a university supervisor for eight final interns at a large southeastern university, I find myself struggling with being both a coach and evaluator. I cannot simply choose to engage in coaching alone as graded assignments and summative evaluation measures are required as part of the fieldwork course. Internship requires interns or preservice teachers (PSTs) to be in a K-5 classroom and complete observation cycles involving a pre-conference, observation, and post-conference, as well as mandatory assignments supplementing final internship. The tensions of engaging in both coaching and evaluation have driven this inquiry examining my beliefs and practice.

In aligning with Sergiovanni and Starrat (2007), and Nolan and Hoover (2010), my definitive role as university supervisor is to improve pre-service teaching practice through facilitation of the unpacking of complex layers of teaching. When considering the function of supervision, particularly, in what ways it is defined, what it should look like and, who should fulfill the roles of evaluator and coach there is a lack of coherency. Not only are there contrasting terms and definitions for supervision, but there are contradicting views of who fulfills these roles and for what reasons. In teacher education, the function of supervision includes both roles of evaluator and coach. This inquiry explored the challenges that I faced while balancing the competing tasks for each role and seeks to uncover the ways in which I blend the roles in my practice as a supervisor.

Nolan and Hoover (2010) describe evaluation as “an organizational function designed to make comprehensible judgments concerning teacher performance” (p. 5). For this inquiry, I define evaluation in part with Nolan and Hoover (2010); however, in the capacity as a university supervisor working with PSTs, I will extend the definition to include graded assignments/tasks and

summative evaluation tools. Further, evaluation consists of those situations where one “judges”, assigns grades, or rates the practice and performance of another. In this one-way exchange, the supervisor assesses and draws conclusions about the ability of a PST based on perceptions.

I recognize the key tasks of coaching to include developing relationships, working collaboratively, and promoting teacher growth as expressed by Nolan and Hoover (2010), Burns and Badiali (2015) and Bullock (2012). Additionally, based on Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran’s (2011) ideas, coaching fosters learning and development, through “non-judgmental awareness” (p. 13) while respecting teacher strengths and encouraging self-reflective practices. Coaching, for me, is grounded in conversations, discussions and feedback which play a role in improving practice and performance of PSTs. Additionally, coaching involves a two-way exchange between supervisor and PST allowing for reflection and response for deeper understanding of what it means to teach and be a teacher. Coaching values contributions from both participants where exchanging ideas is a learning process and one informs the practice of the other.

Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran (2011) express their belief that coaching and evaluating could be executed by the same person as long as these roles remain “separate but complimentary” (p. 14). Although they argued a strong and believable case presenting five important items for excellence, Burns and Badiali (2015) learned through their study that a novice university supervisor struggled to build and maintain relationships with pre-service teachers when combining the roles of coach and evaluator.

Nolan (McGreal and Nolan, 1997) states, an evaluative mindset causes a power differential between supervisor and intern which does not allow for effective coaching. In my experience as a university supervisor, I have thought about and struggled with whether this role should include evaluation. Let me begin by saying that I pride myself on my responsibility to develop and maintain caring relationships with PSTs. Making connections with PSTs allows them to feel comfortable around me thus providing the opportunity for them to reflect meaningfully, take risks freely in the classroom, and ask for guidance and support. If this is executed correctly, then high expectations for professional growth are present. When supervisors are asked to “judge” their students, it causes a boundary between them and their interns which inhibits the real capacity of coaching and “true professional growth runs the risk of becoming extinct” (Burns and Badiali, 2015, p. 434). I believe that “in theory” one person could carry out the roles of both; however, it comes with sacrificing critical components of evaluation and professional development.

Having experience as an elementary teacher, a coach for in-service teachers, and currently, a university supervisor of PSTs as part of a teacher education program, my ideas concerning whether or not the function of supervision includes evaluation ~~are distinct and~~ are influenced by my prior experiences.

Prior Experiences in Evaluation and Coaching

As an elementary teacher, even after many years in the classroom, the daunting task of being evaluated was a heavy burden, however, one that I carried in order to stay in the profession. When speaking with my evaluator, I was anxious knowing that I was being judged every time we spoke. Also during my teaching career, my 3rd grade teaching team engaged in peer coaching opportunities as part of district professional development. There was far less anxiety and pressure without administrators looming nearby while we worked collaboratively on student needs, taking risks, and building relationships.

Years later, as a district math leader, my main job was to provide professional development for teachers. I was in a situation where I could work with my colleagues in a judgement free zone. Teachers were able to take instructional risks without the fear of failure counting against them. After all, if believing that teaching is a reflective practice then, allowing teachers the space to try new ideas and reflect on them is important for improving instructional practice. As Nolan (McGreal and Nolan, 1997) wrote “often supervision is used to enable teachers to try out new behaviors and techniques in a safe, supportive environment” (p. 106).

These prior experiences with coaching and evaluation opened my eyes to the difference each of these has on improving teacher practice. Those times in my career where evaluative measures were not being used became the most influential in improving my teaching practice. It became very clear to me that the person doing the evaluating held a certain power that could be detrimental to teacher professional development.

Context for Inquiry

In my current position as a university supervisor, PSTs are in final internship during their second semester of their senior year working in a K-5 classroom five days a week. They will complete three observation cycles involving a pre-conference, observation, and post-conference as well as mandatory assignments supplementing final internship.

Accompanying the clinical requirements for this course are 24 graded assignments including inquiry blogs, pre-conference questions, lesson plans, observation reflections, and state educator accomplished practice portfolio checkpoints.

The tensions of engaging in both coaching and evaluation have driven this inquiry examining my practice. Further, I hope to consider a “hybrid” practice where both roles have a place and function while improving pre-service teaching practice. Therefore, I wonder in what ways I can further define the tasks that allow me to supervise in ways that align with my beliefs, while at the same time perform my duty as an evaluator?

Procedures for Inquiry

In order to examine my practice, and the ways that I engage in evaluation and coaching as a supervisor, I consider those tasks in which I enact such practices. The observation pre- and post- conferences embody the methods in which I consider coaching opportunities. Videoing conferences facilitated the ways I carry out this role as it requires a conversation in which students can receive and reflect on feedback of their own practice. Keeping a reflective journal while grading assignments defines the way I engage in evaluation. Additionally, receiving feedback from my interns was important, as it allowed for their voices to be heard about the ways I implemented the role of supervisor. Finally, receiving feedback from fellow supervisors added another layer in which I considered the roles of coaching and evaluating in supervision. Comparing the ways I engage in these roles to their voices provided me with a critical friend’s perspective to my inquiry.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

Video-recorded conferences. Throughout the semester, interns completed three observation cycles consisting of a 30 minute pre-conference, 30 minute observation, and 30 minute post conference. I recorded three post conferences with different PSTs, as I felt these occurrences captured the essence of my coaching practice. The post conference is critical to improving the PST’s practice, while concurrently being a challenge while guiding through “levels of support” (Nolan and Hoover, 2010, p. 224). Using Nolan and Hoover’s (2010) active listening moves during conferences, I planned to have interns explain thought processes, seek clarification, and get confirmation regarding observations. As I watched each video, I took notes documenting methods of coaching and dialogue between myself and the PST. I took an organic approach to taking notes in order

to capture my practice as supervisor. I documented the ways I interacted, probed, and responded to the PSTs during our meetings together in.

Reflective journal. Keeping a reflective journal allowed me to capture the ways that I perform my role of supervisor by espousing my thinking during this process and reflecting on the methods of evaluation and coaching. Throughout my inquiry, when engaging in tasks that were evaluative in nature, I would keep track of my reflective thoughts in the journal. I chose six entries that were completed during the time I conducted during my inquiry. During these six times, I engaged in evaluation of all eight of my PSTs work on various required assignments.

PST and supervisor feedback. When creating questions (Appendices) for feedback, I intended for the PST (Appendix A) to consider the ways that I engaged in evaluation and coaching methods and whether they provided opportunity for them to improve their teaching practice. Both the PST and supervisor feedback forms were anonymous and voluntary which allowed both groups the freedom to express their ideas in a risk-free space. This was purposeful because I had been these PSTs' supervisor for the past three semesters. They were accustomed to my supervisor practice and their feedback was important for me to address the ways that I navigate the indistinct line between evaluator and coach.

Further, I used similar questions (Appendix B) for feedback from my fellow supervisors. Using similar questions, allowed for me to compare the ways that my interns and supervisor peers consider evaluation and coaching.

Data analysis. After reading and re-reading the collected data, I started to notice themes concerning how I navigate the roles of evaluator and coach. Using constant comparative methods of coding, I identified similar ideas across the multiple data pieces (Lichtman, 2013). The findings below describe the themes derived from the data.

Findings

The ways that I engage in both roles of coach and evaluator is time consuming. Early on in my reflective journal, I started to document how long it took to grade assignments and complete certain tasks pertaining to supervision. After several journal entries, I began to sort the tasks into categories of evaluation, coaching, and other, and quickly noticed how much time I devoted to each of these tasks. In Table 1, *Time Spent in Supervisor Roles*, the structures of tasks and timelines emphasize the amount of time dedicated to each role. Table 1 does not take into consideration several other tasks that supervisors engage in

including; establishing and maintaining relationships and partnerships with PSTs, collaborating with teachers and administration at K-5 partnership schools, correspondence with students, course instructors, collaborating teachers and administration, and attending supervisor collaboration meetings.

I have documented in Table 1, *Time Spent in Supervisor Roles*, graded assignments were completed in an average of ten minutes. While engaging in methods of coaching and evaluation, I provide students with prompt and meaningful feedback which includes comments and questions the PSTs should include for reflection. When reflecting after transcribing scripted notes on observation tool, “I find myself writing more in the comment boxes than the evidence boxes, I also encourage the PSTs to consider my questions when reflecting on their lessons” (Reflective Journal, March 31, 2017). Providing this prompt, in-depth feedback to support self-reflection, takes a large amount of time and often grading assignments get pushed off for another time. However, when engaging in grading assignments, such as blog posts and reflections, I did not simply give a numerical grade. It was clear that I took time to give feedback here as well. In five out of six journal entries, I ran out of time and had to sacrifice giving in-depth or prompt feedback on graded assignments. Additionally, those graded assignments that used rubrics were completed more efficiently. Note this thought from my reflective journal,

I am grateful for a rubric when grading blogs as it takes less time to grade assignments. I find myself grading blogs by first using rubric. Then in my feedback, start off by providing a strong detail from their blogs and then ask questions as to any missing pieces or lacking in reference to their blogs. I use same language as rubric and accompany the rubric with the grades. (Reflective Journal, April 4, 2017).

I place great value on and provide consistent written and verbal feedback. In one particular journal entry, I contemplated the ways that I struggled with using an observation tool while also attending to my collaborative coaching practice. Those times that accomplished teacher practice was not witnessed in observations by the PSTs I was unable to document them on the form. However, knowing that observations are moments in time, I wanted to engage the PSTs in reflective practice and used the comment box to provide questions and further feedback.

Being final interns, there are different ability levels of each of my students. Some Observation tools are easier to fill out because there is a lot of evidence that I am able to use. While others, there is little evidence

from their lesson in which to write in the domain boxes. Here is where I write more in the comment box asking questions and having student to come up with evidence (Reflective Journal, March 31, 2017).

According to the PST Evaluation Feedback Form (in appendix), five out of seven PSTs thought that the most meaningful part of the observation cycle is receiving observation notes and feedback. All seven PSTs indicated that getting feedback helped “help me think differently about what I did and why I did it that way” (PST Evaluation Feedback Form, April 14, 2014). A PST wrote feedback is meaningful when it “allows me to hear another person's thoughts and perspective, other than my own. I feel, like this information helps give me ideas as to how I could improve my instruction” (PST Evaluation Feedback Form, April 14, 2017). Another wrote:

I personally appreciate that my supervisor serves in the capacity of a mentor and is available to provide me with advice, her notes on my observations allow me to view my lessons through another lens which is always insightful. I also appreciate the questions I receive on my evaluations, they guide me into thinking how I can improve my practices. Overall, feedback and constructive criticism are vital for growth. I personally don't look at the domains in the Observation rubric, I look for notes and observations my supervisor has made that I may not have even considered (PST Evaluation Feedback Form, April 14, 2017).

I take time to build trusting relationships and allow for collaborative approach to coaching. Based on Glickman, Gordon and Ross-Gordon's (2013) views, supervision can be directive, collaborative or nondirective. At one end of the continuum there is the directive informational approach in which the supervisor “acts as the information source for the goal and activities” for the improvement of teacher practice (p. 122). Contrary to that view, on the opposite end of the continuum is nondirective supervision which is structured on the teacher's knowledge and need for improvement of their own teaching practice (Glickman, Gordon and Ross-Gordon, 2013). Somewhere in the middle, lie collaborative behaviors in which both supervisor and teacher work equally together for shared problem solving. Collaborative approach is illustrated “by having a discussion using notes, video and written reflection the intern and I can have a deeper discussion on what they have accomplished and what goals they still need to work on” (Supervisor Evaluation Feedback Form, April 12, 2017).

Building and maintaining relationships was another strong theme I noticed throughout my data. In my one reflective journal I articulated my belief stating,

I pride myself on my responsibility to develop and maintain caring relationships with my pre-service students. I believe that building relationships is the backbone to the role of supervision (Reflective Journal, March 28, 2017).

This belief originates from my previous experiences working with teachers and that having a caring relationship with another person allows for conversations and risk taking for improvement of teaching practice. I consistently continue to work on building relationships, throughout the semester at all times which results in a time consuming practice. Burns and Badiali (2015) and Nolan and Hoover (2010) support key tasks of supervision to include building relationships, which inherently allows the improvement of pre-service teaching practice. Additionally, Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran (2011) state that “high-trust connections can inspire greatness. Such connections free up teachers to take on new challenges by virtue of the safety net they create” (p. 13). The relationships I build with my students will never have neutral power as I still occupy the role of evaluator.

While watching videos of post-conferences, I noticed I started each with genuine specific conversation pertaining to every PST. Conversations included asking how they were doing in and out of the classroom and asking about specific struggles or celebrations they shared during last conversation. Often these conversations took up to ten minutes and set the mood for the subsequent conversation where the PST shared meaningful reflection on their teaching practice. The following is an excerpt from one of the recorded post-conferences:

Supervisor: Good afternoon! I noticed you have a substitute today, how are you doing?

PST: I am doing okay. The students are a little hyper. I am exhausted.

Supervisor: Is there anything I can do? I am free from 12:30-1:30, I can come in and co-teach with you if you'd like. You can eat your lunch now if you are missing your lunch.

PST: I am starved! I would love if you could stop in at 1, I'll be teaching math about decomposing numbers up to 20 and would appreciate if you could work with Mica, Isiah, and Sammy (pseudonyms), the aide that usually pushes in to help them isn't here today either.

Supervisor: Okay! I can do that! How is your mom doing?

PST: She is doing much better, she's moving to the rehab facility to start rehab on Tuesday and should be home by Saturday

Supervisor: That's wonderful.

PST: Yes I am relieved

Supervisor: Okay! Tell me how you think your lesson went yesterday.

In all three of the post-observation videos I began asking the PSTs to share perceptions of their observations. I gave ample wait time, even if this meant allowing moments of silence. The PSTs were given time to elaborate while at times, allowing them to reflect on successes and struggles in the observation without interruption. Allowing natural collaborative conversation, instead of interview type question and answer dialogue, happens when students feel comfortable to share their ideas. As in the recorded post-conference dialogue above, the PST is prompted to begin discussing her lesson with a statement asking her to tell me about her lesson. I am not asking for any specific information as an interview question would, but am asking her to explain her perspective which allows for an organic flow of conversation. Equal stake in conversations allows students to take ownership and interactions become more meaningful. One PST wrote,

That's the information that stays with me, it's personalized and meaningful. Conversations allow me the opportunity to celebrate moments of success and to think of ways to improve my teaching practices without pressure. (PST Evaluation Feedback Form, April 14, 2017).

Another PST wrote that "I feel that I am always heard and am given a chance to explain my thinking and actions when we [supervisor and PST] meet" (PST Evaluation Feedback Form, April 14, 2017).

Further, seven out of eight of my fellow university supervisors indicated that they felt the most meaningful part of the observation cycle is the post-conference. The reasons specified by supervisors focused on both holding conversations and engaging in dissemination of observation through a collaborative approach. One fellow supervisor wrote,

It is truly though the conversation and relationships I build with my interns where I see the most meaning emerge. The interns often come with reflection points, but it's how we expand upon what we both bring to the

table that allows us to go deeper into reflection on their practice (and mine) (Supervisor Evaluation Feedback Form, April 12, 2017)

Implications

Incorporating evaluative and coaching measures effectively throughout my practice is important for PST's growth and pivots on building caring relationships. I am still navigating a hybrid approach for supervision that aligns with my beliefs to promote self-reflection and improving PST practice. Tasks pertaining to coaching and evaluation, such as providing oral and written feedback are time consuming. It is essential that tasks chosen to accompany clinical field experiences are meaningful and purposeful for unpacking the layers of teaching. What this means is that we, as stakeholders, in teacher education programs need to be choosy about tasks that require grading and feedback. Supervisors are concerned with PST's performance in the classroom and making critical theory to practice connections to coursework. Our work should focus on these responsibilities and not on tasks and other duties which syphon time away from helping PSTs build important knowledge needed to meet the demands of teaching. My findings suggest that both PSTs and supervisors value feedback more than grades because of its usefulness in improving teaching practice. We must ask ourselves, what tasks achieve this focus and is it necessary that all tasks require a grade? What value does assigning grades to tasks have on improving PST practice?

Perhaps use of the observation cycle as the main vehicle for supervisors to evaluate and coach can support PSTs' unpacking the foundational knowledge needed to be self-directed learners. The observation cycle, focused on PST performance in the classroom, can present ample opportunity to establish caring relationships, provide oral and written feedback, engage collaboratively with PSTs, and assess PST growth. Based on my findings, the observation cycle offered a prime catalyst for building relationships, making personal connections with PSTs, and providing both oral and written feedback. In addition, conferencing individually with PSTs allowed me to encourage collaborative conversations, expand on their reflections, and push PST thinking about their teaching practice.

Additionally, relying on the observation cycle places emphasis on the ways that coaching can be used to engage in collaborative work surrounding PSTs practice and performance. Using a blend of coaching methods including the Cognitive Coaching model (Costa and Garmston, 2002) can allow PSTs to "engage in cause and effect thinking, spend energy on tasks, set challenging

goals, persevere in the face of barriers and occasional failure, and accurately forecast future performances” (p. 18). While Cognitive Coaching places the sole responsibilities of these tasks on the PST, Nolan and Hoover’s (2010) more collaborative model takes on a more gradual shift towards self-direction. This supports the view that PSTs are still learning to navigate the underpinnings of teaching. Glanz and Sullivan’s (2000) Clinical Supervision model places reflective practice at the center which allows for collaborative reflection and goal setting. In support of these models, preparing apriori questions and expected conversational goals can guide a semi-organic collaborative meeting for planning, debrief and reassessing learning trajectories.

Whether in the role of coach or evaluator, it is important to conclude that recognizing the key function of supervision as promoting growth of PSTs, building relationships and providing oral and written feedback is extremely valuable. While I struggled to perform both these roles, it is the ways I engage with PSTs and provide feedback that encourage building relationships, a collaborative approach in coaching, and self-reflection that matter most. Further research on what constitutes as effective feedback and the ways to establish and maintain trusting relationships with PSTs is suggested.

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Table 1: Time Spent in Supervisor Roles

Table 1
Time Spent in Supervisor Roles

Role	Quantity	Quantity of tasks	Task	Time in minutes for each task (average)	Total hours
Evaluator	8 Students	24	Graded assignments	10	36
	8 Students	2	Final and mid-term evaluation forms	15	4
Total					40
Coach	8 Students	6	Observation Conferences (pre-and post-)	30	24
	8 Students	2	Conference (Mid-term and final)	30	8
Total					32
Other Duties	8 Students	3	Transcribing observation notes to observation tool	30	12
	6 Seminars		Planning	30	3
	6 Seminars		Teaching	70	7
	8 Students	3	Observations	30	12
Total					34

Appendix A: Pre-Service Teacher Evaluation Feedback Form

Pre-Service Teacher Evaluation Feedback Form

I am looking at the ways evaluation influences my practice as a supervisor. Your feedback is greatly appreciated!

Currently you do not receive a grade for your observations. Do you think that being given a grade using a rubric with values of 1-5 (1 being requires action and 5 being exemplary) would be beneficial to improving your teaching practice?

Yes

No

Maybe

This semester the College of Education began using the Danielson Evaluation Tool. How do you feel the tool, as I used it, has helped you improve your teaching practice?

It has not helped me at all to improve my teaching practice

It has somewhat helped me to improve my teaching practice

It has helped me greatly to improve my teaching practice

Has the Danielson Tool, as I have used it, helped you to be reflective of your teaching practice?

More reflective

Less reflective

The same

Compared to level 1, 2 and 3, do you feel the Danielson Tool, as I have used it, helped you improve your practice?

Yes

No

Maybe

Other

What is the most meaningful part of the observation cycle for you?

Pre-Conference

Observational Notes/Feedback

Reflection

Post-Conference

Why?

Short answer text

Please provide any other comments that you would like me to know about the ways I use evaluation.

Long answer text

Appendix B: Supervisor Evaluation Feedback Form

QUESTIONS RESPONSES 8

Supervisor Evaluation Feedback Form

I am looking at the ways evaluation influences my practice as a supervisor. Your feedback is greatly appreciated!

Currently, you do not give a grade for performance during observations. Do you think that giving a grade using a rubric with values of 1-5 (1 being requires action and 5 being exemplary) would be beneficial to improving your pre-service teachers' teaching practice?

Yes

No

Maybe

This semester the College of Education began using the Danielson Evaluation Tool. In what capacity have you introduced it into your supervision practice?

Short answer text

How do you feel the DanielsonTool, as you have used it, has given the ability to improve your pre-service teachers' teaching practice?

It has not helped me at all with ability to improve my pre-service teachers' teaching practice

It has somewhat helped me with the ability to improve my pre-service teachers' teaching practice

I has helped me greatly with the ability to improve my pre-service teachers' teaching practice

I have not used it

Has the Danielson Tool, as you have used it, helped your pre-service teachers engage in meaningful reflection of their teaching practice?

More reflective

less reflective

the same

I have not used it

Which part of the observation cycle do you feel gives the best opportunity for you to engage in meaningful supervision?

Pre-Conference

Observational Notes/Feedback

Reflection

Post Conference

Why?

Short answer text

Please provide any other comments that you would like me to know about the ways you engage in evaluative practices while supervising.

Long answer text