Improving Supervisor Written Feedback:

Exploring the **What** and **Why** of Feedback Provided to Pre-Service Teachers

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Abstract

This study examines the content (i.e., pedagogical skill) and purpose (i.e., praise or suggestion for growth) of university supervisor written feedback in order to improve the quality of observational evaluation provided to elementary and secondary pre-service teachers. Interview data reveal key factors influence the content of supervisor feedback, including the pre-service teacher's instructional context and learning needs, as well as the supervisor's content knowledge and teaching beliefs. Findings reveal supervisors provided significantly more praise versus suggestions for growth, and commented much less frequently on key practices, including supporting emergent bilinguals. Implications highlight the importance of supporting supervisors with targeted professional development opportunities which allow for critical examination of their feedback.

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Introduction

The latest National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education's (NCATE) report, the *Blue Ribbon Panel on Clinical Preparation and Partnerships* (2010), asserted that clinical practice should become primary to teacher preparation. In this shift from curricula centered on knowledge acquired in coursework to curricula organized around clinical practice, teacher preparation is emphasizing the development of teaching skills in the process of learning to practice (Ball, Sleep, Boerst & Bass, 2009; Grossman, Hammerness, & McDonald, 2009; Grossman & McDonald, 2008; Hollins, 2015). Commensurate with this recommendation, teacher preparation programs have enhanced the clinical practice component of teacher preparation, with some researchers and teacher educators positing that "less coursework may lead to more learning for [pre-service teachers]" (Grossman et al., 2009). This increased focus on practice means that teacher preparation programs must support pre-service teacher (PST) learning and evaluation in the field, in the same ways and at the same levels that they do in their teacher preparation coursework.

As PSTs spend more time in K-12 classrooms, quality feedback becomes even more critical to teacher preparation (Darling-Hammond, 2014; Ericsson, 2002; Grossman et al., 2009) because it encourages PSTs to improve their practice and become better teachers (Van den Hurk, Houtveen, & Van de Grift, 2016). The challenge for teacher preparation programs, therefore, is to develop the capacity and coaching skills of their university supervisors (Dangel & Tanguay, 2014; Grossman et al., 2009; Levine, 2011), such that they are able to provide this type of support. To better gauge how we can prepare supervisors to meet this need, we explore the content (i.e., pedagogical skill) and the purpose (i.e., identifying an area of strength [praise] or area of improvement [growth] in observed teaching) of supervisors' written feedback. Additionally, in order to better support supervisors in providing the type of quality feedback that enhances PST development and growth within clinical practice, we further identify and examine what influences the feedback process.

Theoretical Framework

In the clinical supervision model, PSTs spend more time working in the field with cooperating teachers and supervisors than they do in coursework (NCATE, 2010). This means teacher preparation programs should have robust field experiences that align with preparation coursework. Historically, however, the relationship between the university and the field has been disarticulated, with each member of the clinical triad—supervisor, PST, cooperating teacher—operating in a silo, often

unaware of the content taught in teacher preparation coursework. Given the current focus on clinical practice, as well as the importance of collaboration across classrooms and disciplines (Ball et al., 2009; NCATE, 2010), we hypothesize that the more connected teacher preparation coursework and clinical practice, the better prepared PSTs will be to enter the profession.

One means of enhancing this connection is via the provision of supervisor feedback. As a dynamic and developmental discourse, the supervisor-PST exchange provides a powerful opportunity for identifying, defining, and developing measurable objectives of good teaching. High quality supervisor feedback reflects the objectives and goals of the teacher preparation program and has the potential to strengthen the relationship between the university and the field, thereby increasing PST learning (Ericsson, 2002; Grossman, et al., 2009; Vasquez, 2004).

PSTs are well served when presented with thoughtful observations and constructive criticism on their practice in the classroom (Van den Hurk, Houtveen, & Van de Grift, 2014). Feedback about PST efforts in the field illuminates successful strategies, as well as highlighting strategies to omit or change in subsequent instructional efforts. In clinical practice, even as PSTs receive a great deal of informal oral feedback when they are working in the classroom (be it from the cooperating teacher, students, family members, or school staff), it is important that they also receive formal, clear, and developmentally focused *written* feedback. Not only does the provision of written feedback assure permanent records of performance for accountability, it also provides commentary in a variety of modalities responsive to individual learning needs, and thus reflects best practices in teacher education.

Our research is also driven by the understanding that PSTs benefit from receiving feedback with particular research-based qualities. In order to be most effective, feedback should (a) include particular content items, (b) be differentiated based on the needs of the learner (Akcan & Tatar, 2010; Holland, 2005), (c) be specific and evidence-based, and (d) be balanced in terms of identifying areas of strength (i.e., praise) and areas of improvement (i.e., growth) (Rathel, Drasgow, & Christle, 2008; Scheeler, Ruhl, & McAfee, 2004). In this study, we focus on two dimensions of feedback quality: content and purpose (the balance of praise with suggestions for growth). Given that prospective teachers need proficiency across a variety of skills that span activities as diverse as management, lesson planning, instruction, assessment, and reflection, it follows that they should receive both formative and summative written feedback on *all* of these skills. The provision of written feedback assures PSTs are presented with a record of their progress, as well as a means to measure

and reflect upon that progress throughout the clinical experience, and into the profession.

Literature Review

Previous research reveals that supervisors struggle to provide specific, evidence-based feedback that focuses on a breadth of teaching practices while also emphasizing areas for strength and growth (i.e., criticism). One reason for this challenge has been the changing role of the supervisor. Previously, supervisors were generally understood to be evaluators of practice, observing a lesson, meeting to discuss the lesson, and providing an overall judgment on whether program expectations were met (Tang & Chow, 2007; Tsui, Lopez-Real, Law, Tang, & Shum, 2001). But currently, with the greater emphasis on clinical practice, the supervisor role has been reconceptualized to one of a clinical educator or coach. The evaluation of teacher practice is still crucial, but it needs to be grounded in evidence-based, constructive feedback, with the PST actively engaged in reflection under the guidance of supervisor coaching (Lipton & Wellman, 2013; Vasquez, 2004). Research has shown, however, that some supervisors feel uncomfortable with this new role, unsure of how to balance the role of evaluator and coach (Ibrahim, 2013). Indeed, the roles at times may seem to be at cross purposes; supervisors are compelled to simultaneously take a more friendly, subjective stance as coach and a more judgmental, objective stance as evaluator.

In addition, research on feedback has concluded that supervisor discussions of content focus primarily on low-level skills related to classroom management and procedures, not higher-level skills such as questioning or using assessment to drive instruction. Supervisors explain this phenomenon as one derived from PSTs' need to focus on these basic practices (Lindahl & Baecher, 2016; Range, Duncan, & Hvidston, 2013; Valencia, Martin, Place, & Grossman, 2009). The few exceptions to this general tendency to focus on low-level skills were found in supervisor evaluations that highlight student engagement and teacher flexibility (Akcan & Tartar, 2010; Bunton, 2001).

Finally, research investigating influences on supervisor feedback identify supervisor beliefs and content knowledge, as well as the structure of the observation tool, as crucial components in the feedback process. For example, previous research found that when supervisors lacked knowledge about how to support diverse learners, they provided limited to no feedback on this topic (Bates & Burbank, 2008; Lindhal & Baecher, 2016). Similarly, a standardized observation tool may constrain how supervisors focus their lens in the classroom; they may feel they

can (or should) only comment upon content listed on the observation tool (Strong & Baron, 2004; Tang & Chow, 2007; Valencia et al., 2009).

Our Study

Rationale for Studying Written Feedback

We focus exclusively on the written feedback supervisors provide to PSTs for several reasons. First, evidence-based, written feedback provides an opportunity for PSTs and supervisors to make data-driven decisions to improve practice (Hurk et al., 2016). Second, research in teacher education and other disciplines (e.g., coaching in sports) asserts that both oral and written feedback are of value. For example, researchers working with a small sample of classroom teachers implementing a behavior management approach found that when they provided both written and verbal performance-based feedback, although teachers responded more immediately and maintained progress with verbal feedback, both written and oral feedback were effective (Kaufman, Codding, Markus, Tryon, & Kyse, 2013). Third, teacher education programs can use written records of observation with program improvement in mind; identifying areas of PST need can inform curriculum revisions and professional development for both the clinical practice triad and across the teacher education program as a whole. Finally, capturing oral communication is challenging and time-intensive. With an observation protocol in place, written feedback can be submitted by all supervisors across all PSTs, thereby creating a database with which to inform program decision-making.

Our study addresses the lack of research around supervisor written feedback and investigates the value of using written feedback data for both PST instruction and teacher education program improvement.

Analyzing Written Feedback Using a Standardized Tool

Although our teacher education program has moved to a standardized observation tool which requires supervisors to provide a score for each prioritized skill, it also includes space for open-ended, qualitative comments, not restricted by the listed skill set (see Appendix A). Acknowledging that the tool itself may impact the content provided, the provision of qualitative information alongside the quantitative measures expands our capacity to capture the nuanced nature of university supervisor feedback. The skills included in the observation tool were embedded in teacher preparation coursework and aligned with California Teacher Performance Expectations (TPEs).

Definition of Quality Written Feedback

For the purpose of this study, we define quality written feedback as:

- Evidence-based
  - Grounded in observable, measurable data, specific to the individual observation
- Representative of a variety of learning-focused supervision stances (Akcan & Tatar, 2010; Holland, 2005; Lipton & Wellman, 2013)
  - Including calibrating (narrative recall of what occurred), consulting (proposing goals and steps for improvement; grounded in suggestions), and collaborative coaching (building PST capacity for self-coaching and self-reflection; grounded in questions)
- Balanced in suggestions for praise and growth (Rathel et al., 2008; Scheeler et al., 2004)
  - Identifying areas of strength and for growth, including criticism to identify and facilitate improvement in identified areas, and coaching to scaffold development
- Representative of a breadth of prioritized skills (Akcan & Tatar, 2010)
  - Aligned with the learning objectives for the program and contextualized within the standards of the field

In addition to these criteria, feedback should (a) be differentiated, based on the needs of individual PSTs (Holland, 2005), (b) consist of multiple measures, with an emphasis on formative versus summative evaluation (Holland, 2005), and (c) provide opportunities for PSTs to actively analyze their own practice, encouraging collaborative reflection (Tang & Chow, 2007). In order to better understand how well university supervisor feedback in our programs aligns with this definition, we proposed the following research questions:

1. What is the focus of supervisor written feedback, and how consistent is it with research-based definitions of quality written feedback?

2. Which factors influence a supervisor's ability to provide quality feedback?

Method

Participants & Supervision Observation Tool

This study occurred in a yearlong post-baccalaureate teacher education program and involved elementary and secondary supervisors working with PSTs who were in the part- and full-time quarters of the

clinical experience. Four elementary and four secondary supervisors (for a total of eight) were conveniently sampled (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996) from the university pool of supervisors. We chose participants who had been supervising for at least one year and had an established track record of online report submission. All eight were former K-12 teachers and/or administrators, and two were current lecturers in our teacher education program (all names used throughout this study are pseudonyms).

To evaluate PSTs in clinical practice, the supervisors used a common observation tool and protocol that aligns skills with program coursework (see Appendix A). Supervisors attended quarterly workshops to receive guidance on the use of the observation tool, including tool norming. Focusing on four domains (planning, classroom environment, instruction, and reflection) and 17 prioritized skills (e.g., communicating with students), the observational tool also included space for noting evidence, as well as for identifying two or three areas of strength and growth (lesson plans were reviewed and evaluated prior to observations). Supervisor observations occurred four times during the ten-week quarter, and typically lasted 50 minutes in length (including a debriefing in which the PST reflected on the lesson). Within 24 hours of the observation, completed observation tools were emailed to the PST and cooperating teacher.

Data

Observation reports. We coded a sample of observation reports for each supervisor that were representative of between two and five PSTs. To ensure that patterns we saw in the type of written feedback provided were not PST dependent, we coded multiple PST observation reports per individual supervisor. In all, a total of eight observations were coded for each supervisor.

Semi-structured interviews. We additionally selected four of the eight supervisors for semi-structured interviews (two elementary and two secondary). Data analysis informed our selection of interviewees; we wanted to meet with those who varied in the type of feedback provided. Individual, 30-minute interviews occurred at the conclusion of the academic year (for interview protocol, see Appendix B).

Interviews were designed to obtain a more contextualized understanding of each supervisor's approach, to capture their thoughts on what constitutes quality feedback, and to have them elaborate on their feedback process. All four supervisors interviewed provided comments about their beliefs relative to teaching and supervision, understanding of quality feedback, and approaches to supporting PSTs in clinical practice. Member checking occurred during interviews (Athanases &

Heath, 1995; Carspecken, 1996; Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Spradley, 1979), as participants were asked to reflect and comment upon quantified representations of their coded data.

Coding and Interpretation

As in most interpretive and qualitative research, analysis was ongoing and iterative (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For the coding of observation reports and interview data, we separated data into episodes, or "a series of turns that all relate to the same topic or theme" (Lewis & Ketter, 2004, p. 123). After episode demarcation, we conducted first and second cycle coding, using analytic memoing to inform additional analysis (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). We double coded twenty percent of data and achieved 85% inter-rater reliability. Then, we inputted agreed-upon codes for the data set into Excel for additional analysis, including basic descriptive statistics (e.g., totals for categories and averages, and ranges of data within and across programs and individual supervisors).

We approached the first cycle of coding to form our definition of quality written feedback deductively, based on *a priori* codes that were generated from the literature and baseline research conducted the previous year. Each episode of feedback was coded for content and purpose. The content included the identification of the prioritized skill, while the purpose sought to identify whether the comment was praise (i.e., area of strength) or growth (i.e., area of improvement).

For example, the analysis of one supervisor observation report resulted in eight coded episodes. One episode included the following comment: "Great job establishing a positive classroom environment! Greeting all students at the door and asking Tabetha about her soccer game helped to create this positive classroom environment." This episode was coded as *respect and rapport* (content) since the feedback referenced the PST building rapport by asking about the student's soccer game and *praise* (purpose) through the use of language such as "great job." Some episodes had more than one purpose and mentioned more than one skill and, in those rare instances, were double-coded accordingly.

The research team then engaged in a second coding cycle, looking for patterns within codes and across participants, and identifying emerging themes. This second cycle revealed patterns, commonalities, and distinctions in the feedback.

A distinct set of codes were identified in our analysis of the interview data. These included (a) factors that influenced written feedback, (b) references to support and resources from the university, and (c) emotions associated with supervisors reflecting on their written data. For example,

Martha's explanation for why she commented on supporting emergent bilinguals so infrequently: "And I honestly think that the reason there isn't more for supporting the emergent bilinguals, because what I basically have to go from is the rubric…We need more training" was coded as *factors that influence written feedback* with a sub-code of *university supervisor limited background knowledge*.

Findings

What is the Nature of Supervisor Written Feedback When Using a Standard Tool for Observation?

Sixty-four observation reports from the eight supervisors were coded, for a total of 1309 units of feedback. Of these units, the majority were evaluative in nature (n=935), functioning as suggestions for growth or praise. Table 1 shows the distribution across the four domains of the observation tool.

Table 1:
Distribution of Feedback Units

Domains	*Number of Units and Percentages*	*Prioritized Skills*
Instruction	607 (46%)	Engaging Students in Learning = 258 (43%) Communicating with Students = 145 (24%) Using Assessments = 109 (18%) Questioning = 57 (9%) Supporting Emergent Bilinguals = 20 (3%) General Instruction = 18 (3%)
Classroom Environment	302 (23%)	Managing Student Behavior =109 (36%) Classroom Procedures = 94 (31%) Respect & Rapport = 93 (31%) General Classroom Environment = 6 (2%)
Planning and Preparation	242 (18%)	Designing Coherent Instruction = 72 (30%) Demonstrating Knowledge of Students = 41 (17%) Setting Instructional Outcomes = 39 (16%) General Planning and Preparation = 34 (14%) Supporting Emergent Bilinguals = 32 (13%) Designing Student Assessment = 24 (10%)
Professional Responsibilities	158 (12%)	Professionalism = 90 (57%) Reflection = 67 (42%) General Professional Responsibilities = 1 (1%)
Total	1309 (100%)	

The data in aggregate emphasized *instruction* (46%) more so than any other domain. Within this domain, however, certain skills were commented on more than others. For example, prioritized skills, such as *engaging students in learning* (43%), received substantially more feedback than *questioning* (9%) and *supporting emergent bilinguals* (3%). When evaluating PSTs' abilities to engage students in learning, supervisors wrote comments such as "Students were given the opportunity to engage with the content through multiple means of action" or "Nice use of differentiated groups to tailor math instruction." When *questioning* and *supporting emergent bilinguals* did appear, they tended to be grounded in evidence from the observation. For example, "More than 50% of the questions were low-level. In several instances, students were asked to justify their responses, such as 'WHY is Flip glad?'" or "Emergent bilinguals had an opportunity to demonstrate understanding orally (key details of text) and in writing (sentence mechanics)."

Moderate emphasis was given to the *classroom environment* (23%), less to *planning and preparation* (18%), and even less still to *professional responsibilities* (12%). *Classroom environment* data focused on *managing behavior* (36%), *creating an environment of respect and rapport* (31%), and *managing procedures* (31%). Some examples include "The teacher kept talking and giving further directions when students had not responded" and "Warmth and respect toward students was demonstrated with smiles, eye contact, and courteous phrases." These data reveal that supervisors provided a close to equal amount of feedback on the three prioritized skills in the *classroom environment* domain.

Planning and preparation focused on the PSTs' abilities to *design coherent instruction* (30%), *demonstrate knowledge of students* (17%), *set instructional outcomes* (16%), *design instruction that supports emergent bilinguals* (13%), and *design assessments* (10%). For example, "Instruction is developmentally appropriate and pacing appears reasonable for the activities" and "The criteria are clear and formative assessments are described throughout the lesson." In general, feedback on prioritized skills within *planning and preparation* were evaluative in nature and less often grounded in evidence from the lesson plans themselves.

Professional responsibilities focused on PSTs' abilities to engage in a professional manner and be reflective. Examples include, "Teacher is consistently professional in attitude, attire, and prompt responses to emails and assignments" and "He provided specific reasons for the strengths of his lesson, and specific things he will try going forward."

In contrast with the prevalence of praise, PSTs received disproportionately less written feedback suggesting areas for improvement.

Seventy-five percent of all the data (n=701) were coded as praiseworthy; only 25% (n=234) were coded as suggestions for growth.

The aggregate data described above revealed differences in the quantity of feedback across the four domains, as well as emphasis on the prioritized skills within those domains. For example, as stated above, supervisors infrequently made observations regarding *supporting emergent bilinguals*. Furthermore, PSTs received disproportionately less written feedback identifying areas of growth. There was slight variation at the program level regarding the prioritized skills that received the most emphasis (e.g., secondary supervisors provided a higher number of feedback units for *reflection* than elementary supervisors).

In examining data at the individual level, only one elementary supervisor differed in the amount of units provided and prioritized skills emphasized. This particular supervisor provided fewer units of feedback while achieving a more even distribution across the pedagogical practices, and a balance of 50% praise and 50% suggestion for growth. This individual's data, however, were consistent with others in that *supporting emergent bilinguals* in the *instruction* domain was the lowest commented-upon prioritized skill.

What Factors Influence the Written Feedback Supervisors Provide to Pre-Service Teachers?

In order to better understand the variation in data and the approach supervisors take when providing written feedback, we interviewed four participants and asked them to reflect on their data (represented and shared with each in graph form). The coding of interview data revealed several key factors that influenced the feedback content provided to PSTs.

Pre-service teacher context. All four supervisors mentioned that the teaching context—both in terms of the K-12 students in the classroom and where the PST was in the yearlong credential program—influenced their feedback content. For example, they explained that limited commentary on *supporting emergent bilinguals* was often a result of a PST stating that there were no emergent bilinguals in the classroom. Indeed, all four supervisors individually mentioned that their PSTs said something similar to "Well, we don't have any language learners here" (George, Interview). The result of this reported absence was that supervisors felt it was then difficult to provide targeted support for the teaching of emergent bilingual students. Two of the supervisors, Jacob and George, further complicated this finding by questioning whether PSTs accurately assessed the presence of language learners in their classrooms. Regardless of whether students with diverse needs (including

emergent bilinguals) were in the classrooms under observation, however, supervisors can (and must) address differentiation.

All four supervisors also explained how feedback content might differ depending on whether the PST was beginning or finishing the credential program. For example, all the supervisors asserted that during the first quarter of the program they focused on *classroom environment* (e.g., *respect and rapport*) since PSTs were establishing themselves in the classroom: "They're [first quarter PSTs] all having trouble with classroom management. They're just all trying to be nice and be the children's friend and the kids are stepping on them….So it's kind of different from a CP1 [quarter one] to a CP3 [quarter three] where now they got the classroom management down, and now it's so much on the instruction" (Jacob, Interview).

Pre-service teacher needs. Interview data also revealed that individual PST needs influenced the content of supervisor feedback. According to all four participants, previous observations and PST reflections motivated the selection of subsequent foci. For example, Jacob stated in an interview that the supervisor focused an observation on skills that the PST "is really working on." Similarly, Martha and George described how PSTs were involved in the selection of observational foci (e.g., via pre-observation conversation). Supervisors then reminded the PSTs of the agreed-upon focus: "Okay, this is what I'm going to be looking for in this particular rubric today. Let's focus on these areas for strengths and growths" (George, Interview).

Beliefs about teaching. Interview data revealed that supervisors had beliefs about essential practices for novice teachers and these beliefs shaped the content provided in their feedback. In the feedback data reflection exercise conducted during the supervisor interviews, three supervisors (Jacob, Charles, and George) first discussed the content of the feedback they typically provided. Then, when presented with the feedback content they actually focused on, they made observations about the discrepancies between their beliefs and their practice. For example, Jacob shared that *questioning* and *reflection* were two teaching skills that he valued and wanted to emphasize in his feedback. He expressed surprise, therefore, that the coded data on *questioning* did not support his value of this teaching skill (it was one of his lowest commented-upon skills). In contrast, what Charles believed to be of importance did appear frequently in his written feedback: "I mean it's interesting that reflection is also high….I really value—I think it's important if we want our candidates to be reflective and self-reflective that they are looking at their instruction correctly or accurately."

Content knowledge and confidence level. Finally, supervisors recognized that their content knowledge and confidence levels with particular prioritized skills influenced their ability to provide quality feedback. Martha explained that she provided a lot of feedback on teaching skills that she knew a lot about, and fewer comments on those skills in which she was not as knowledgeable. For example, Martha identified her limited knowledge when it came to teaching emergent bilinguals: "We need more training. I'm not going to assume I understand something about supporting emergent bilinguals that I don't.…I don't feel adequately qualified to make a lot of comments about emergent [bilinguals]."

Supervisors also mentioned that the content knowledge and practices the cooperating teacher was or was not modeling informed the written content of their observations. For example, George explained that if the cooperating teacher was not familiar with the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), he was more likely to provide feedback in this area. Similarly, Jacob felt obligated to comment on certain teaching skills if the cooperating teacher was not modeling these effective practices, asking, "Where are they [PSTs] gonna get this?"

Discussion

Even though the supervisors were asked to numerically evaluate the PSTs on all prioritized skills identified in the observation tool, qualitative comments still privileged particular content, with some prioritized skills receiving greater emphasis than others. Interviews revealed that the development level of the PST also influenced which prioritized skills were emphasized in feedback, as supervisors felt PSTs needed more feedback on *classroom management* at the beginning of their clinical experience and less later on in the program when they were more adept at *managing student behavior*.

Similarly, interview data revealed that the confidence level of supervisors regarding their content knowledge might cause them to over- or de-emphasize certain prioritized skills. This supports findings from Borko and Mayfield (1995) and Lindahl and Baecher (2016) who identify the feelings of "unpreparedness" supervisors attest to when providing evaluative observations on certain content. Interview data further revealed that this is often because of evolving or unfamiliar pedagogical practices that have come to the forefront in recent years. For example, many supervisors felt that their preparation and experience did not adequately prepare them to provide suggestions for effective practice supporting emergent bilingual students, corroborating similar findings by other researchers (Bates & Burbank, 2008; Lindhal & Baecher, 2016).

In order to build supervisor content knowledge, teacher preparation programs would do well to provide a professional development series on supporting diverse learners, in addition to providing supervisors access to teacher preparation coursework.

Our findings also revealed that the eight supervisors provided significantly more praise than suggestions for growth in their feedback. This is not entirely surprising given research that speaks to the difficulties supervisors have providing comments that might be perceived as critical (Haggerty, 1995; Stanulis & Russell, 2000). Ironically, however, research shows that PSTs do want to grow and improve by hearing constructive suggestions for growth to assure they are well prepared and informed (Chaffin & Manfredo, 2009; Chesley & Jordan, 2012; Ibrahim, 2013; Yildirim, 2013). We posit, moreover, that an essential component of being better prepared and informed is receiving feedback on areas for growth in a positive and safe environment. Thus, an essential part in training to provide quality feedback should be an emphasis on constructive suggestions and how to leverage learning-focused supervisory stances (Lipton & Wells, 2013).

The above findings demonstrate the importance of providing professional development to supervisors on the scope and quality of written feedback. The supervisors interviewed appreciated the opportunity to critically examine their data, identify misalignments between their feedback and quality feedback, and determine next steps for their practice. Teacher educators have long espoused the value in closely examining discourse used in teaching and learning scenarios (Cazden, 1988), and examining written feedback is another way for teacher educators to study discourse that shapes teaching and learning. Furthermore, clearly communicating programmatic expectations could potentially make the written observations more helpful, instructive, and developmentally sound (Ediger, 2009; Levine, 2011; Slick 1998). An essential part of this process is the creation of a research-based definition of quality written feedback and explicit training on what constitutes such feedback. Illustrating how observations align with a definition of high-quality feedback can provide an opportunity for supervisors to set goals for improving not only their feedback, but their support of PSTs as well.

Implications

Our findings suggest that supervisors need scaffolded support in defining quality feedback, increased buy-in on the importance of written feedback, and targeted workshops on key content (e.g., supporting emergent bilinguals). The provision of effective feedback training activi-

ties—as defined above by key researchers—has the potential to improve the content and quality of the feedback provided to PSTs.

Our research shows further, that supervisor examination of the feedback process is an essential first step in improving the quality of written observations provided to PSTs. We posit, moreover, that the observation tool itself can effectively communicate a definition of what constitutes quality, as well as influencing the content of feedback provided, if thoughtfully designed. For example, in our research we recognized that the way the tool was formatted encouraged supervisors to make overall claims about strengths and growth without explicitly tying those claims to observational evidence. Our program thus decided to convert this portion of the tool into a t-chart: the first column identifies an area of strength/growth and the second column summarizes evidence (see Appendix A). We believe that a simple change like this can lead to the provision of more effective feedback.

Additionally, reflecting on data may encourage supervisors to modify their behaviors. Professional development could include an exercise where supervisors self-assess their own written data against the program's definition of quality and identify their own strengths and areas for growth in meeting program goals. Supervisors could also be guided to code the prioritized skills contained within their written feedback, helping them to identify areas of emphasis and de-emphasis. Finally, programs could provide targeted coaching to help supervisors improve their feedback, utilizing supervisor leaders to facilitate analysis, self-assessment, and goal setting. Through professional development (e.g., video norming and exemplars), teacher educators can help supervisors to understand and provide quality written feedback to better support PST preparation.

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Appendix A

Teacher Candidate OBSERVATION TOOL and Feedback Form

Teacher Candidate: University Supervisor: Date:
Cooperating Teacher: Grade Level: CP I CP II CP III
Observation #: School: Lesson Topic:

Key to Ratings: 1 = Did not Demonstrate; 2 = Partially Demonstrated; 3 = Demonstrated; 4 = Demonstrated with Distinction

A. PLANNING AND PREPARATION	Rating	Evidence
Knowledge of Students - TC acquires knowledge of how all Ss learn—ways of learning, knowledge & skills, special needs, interests, & cultural identities —and plans lesson accordingly; TC understands that Ss learn through developmentally-appropriate & active engagement. TPE 1, UDL	1 2 3 4	
Setting Instructional Outcomes - Most outcomes represent high expectations/rigor & are clear, measurable, aligned w/ standards, & suitable for most Ss. TPE 3, 4, UDL	1 2 3 4	
Designing Coherent Instruction - Most learning activities align with learning outcomes & follow an organized progression; Ss engage in cognitive activities with evidence of UDL; groupings & time allocations appropriate. TPE 1, 3, 4, UDL	1 2 3 4	
Designing Student Assessment - Assessments match instructional outcomes; clear criteria provided & appropriately designed assessments implemented. TPE 5	1 2 3 4	
Supporting Emergent Bilinguals - ELD standards align w/ & support lesson outcomes, assessments, & instructional activities; whole-class scaffolds support academic language production & content engagement. TPE 1	1 2 3 4 NA	

Supporting Students w/ Disabilities – Evidence-based instructional methods included that support individualized needs of Ss w/ disabilities & fully address IEP/504 accommodations & modifications & provide access to grade-aligned instruction. TPE 1	1 2 3 4 NA	
B. CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT	Rating	Evidence
Creating an Environment of Respect & Rapport - Interactions (TC:Ss & Ss:Ss) friendly & respectful; appropriate for all ages, cultures, developmental levels; & provide opportunity for some intellectual risk taking. TPE 2	1 2 3 4	
Managing Classroom Procedures - Little loss of instructional time due to effective routines & procedures; effective TC management of transitions and materials; Ss need minimal guidance/prompting to follow established routines. TPE 2	1 2 3 4	
Managing Student Behavior - Standards of conduct established w/ consistent implementation & effective monitoring of S behavior; response to misbehavior consistent and respectful. TPE 2	1 2 3 4	
C. INSTRUCTION	Rating	Evidence
Communicating With Students - TC communicates clear instructional purpose, directions/procedures, & accurately represents content; appropriate teacher modeling & use of academic language. TPE 1, 3, UDL	1 2 3 4	
Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques - Some questions promote S thinking & TC consistently challenges Ss to explain their thinking; Ss formulate questions & most Ss engaged/involved in discussions. TPE 5	1 2 3 4	
Engaging Students in Learning - Tasks & materials fully aligned with outcomes; TC challenges S thinking with an opportunity for Ss to demonstrate thinking; recognizable & suitable structure (e.g., groupings & pacing); multiple options for engagement. TPE 1, UDL	1 2 3 4	
Using Assessment in Instruction - Ss aware of assessment criteria & some engage in self-assessment; TC monitors learning of the whole class & small groups & feedback to Ss is accurate & specific; multiple means of expression provided.	1 2 3 4	

TPE 5, UDL

Supporting Emergent Bilinguals - Multiple opportunities for EBs to use academic language or demonstrate understanding orally or in writing; some attempt to draw on home language, culture, and/or prior knowledge; TC implements some whole class \ language supports to engage EBs. TPE 1	1 2 3 4	
Supporting Students w / Disabilities - Use of evidence-based instructional methods that support individualized needs of Ss w/ disabilities & fully address IEP/504 accommodations/modifications and provide access to grade-aligned instruction. TPE 1	1 2 3 4 N/A	
D. PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES - REFLECTION	Rating	Evidence
Reflecting on Teaching - TC accurately assesses the effectiveness of lesson & identifies specific ways to improve the lesson. TPE 6	1 2 3 4	
Professionalism - TC demonstrates professionalism through appropriate dress, confidence, & actively serving all Ss to ensure S success. TPE 6	1 2 3 4	

Observation Evidence to Include:
2-3 Strengths with Evidence to Support Strengths
2-3 Areas for Growth withEvidence to Support Areas for Growth

Appendix B

Supervisor Interview Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this 30-minute interview. You were chosen because you are a university supervisor, and we are interested in better understanding written feedback given to teacher candidates. You may choose not to answer any questions or stop the interview at any time. Is it okay if I record this interview?

1. Tell me about your process for providing written feedback for a candidate observation.

2. How do you think your observation process might impact the content of the written feedback you provide?

3. This chart shows the percentage of times that you provided feedback on each prioritized skill for a sampling of your observation reports. Take a moment to look at this chart/data. What do you notice?

Possible Probes:

a. Does anything about the data surprise you?

b. Why do you think you gave the most feedback in this particular prioritized skill?

c. Why do you think you gave the least feedback in this particular prioritized skill?

d. How does the SOE Observation Tool impact the prioritized skills you decide to comment on in your written feedback?

e. What do you think an optimal pie chart on written feedback for prioritized skills would look like?

f. Upon reflection, do you feel like you have next steps for yourself as a supervisor providing written feedback around these prioritized skills?

g. How do you think the university could support you in your professional growth?

4. Do you find the data presented like this useful to you and potentially other supervisors? Explain.