

Summer 2020

Interpersonal Dynamics of the Supervisory Triad of Pre-Service Teacher Education: Lessons Learned from 15 Years of Research

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Recommended Citation

Hart, Anna (2020) "Interpersonal Dynamics of the Supervisory Triad of Pre-Service Teacher Education: Lessons Learned from 15 Years of Research," *Georgia Educational Researcher*. Vol. 17 : Iss. 2 , Article 3.
DOI: 10.20429/ger.2020.170203

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/gerjournal/vol17/iss2/3>

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Interpersonal Dynamics of the Supervisory Triad of Pre-Service Teacher Education: Lessons Learned from 15 Years of Research

Abstract

Clinical field experience is recognized by many as the most influential and beneficial component of pre-service teacher education. The present article represents part of a larger qualitative meta-synthesis, the purpose of which was to explore the influence of the interpersonal dynamics of the supervisory triad—comprised of the pre-service teacher candidate, the mentor teacher, and the university supervisor—on pre-service candidates' clinical experiences. Positioning theory was chosen to frame this investigation, as it employs distinct definitions for *role* and *position*, the delineation of which is of critical importance in the context of pre-service clinical relationships. Findings of the larger study reveal three primary factors of influence, four primary patterns of communication, and many modes of positioning of self and others as influential to pre-service teachers' clinical experiences. This article addresses those findings regarding factors of influence and modes of positioning, the implications of which are discussed through the lens of positioning theory and in connection to practice in the field.

Keywords

clinical supervision, pre-service teacher education, interpersonal dynamics, meta-synthesis, positioning theory

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Introduction

Richard Ingersoll (2012) reports that between 40% and 50% of new teachers leave the teaching profession by the end of their fifth year, including 9.5% who leave before the end of their first year on the job (Riggs, 2013). This attrition comes at a high cost—as much as \$2.2 billion across the United States annually (Haynes, 2014), but more importantly, the “greening” of the American teaching force (Ingersoll, 2012), resulting in “replacing experienced, effective teachers with [...] a stream of inexperienced, first-year teachers” (Zhang & Zeller, 2016, p. 74). While there are many factors that contribute to a teacher’s decision to leave the profession, a primary contributor is novice teachers’ level of preparation upon entering the field. Research has shown that the effects of pre-service teachers’ experiences in preparation programs stay with them long after graduation and initial entry into professional practice. Jorissen, for example, (2002, as cited by Zhang & Zeller, 2016) notes that the quality and level of preparation provided a pre-service teacher directly influences his or her level of job satisfaction and largely determines whether or not a teacher will remain in the field long-term.

An ongoing problem with the preparation of PK-12 educators is the lack of consistency with which educator preparation programs (EPPs) produce practitioners immediately ready to perform in the field (e.g. Darling-Hammond, 2006, 2010; Goodlad, 1999; NCATE, 2010). This disparity has been fueled by ever-shifting requirements and expectations of pre-service teacher preparation programs. Since the mid-1990s, Linda Darling-Hammond has written of the need for intensive, specialized training for future educators, particularly in how to effectively teach students from diverse racial and economic backgrounds (1995; 2005; 2006; 2007). Darling-Hammond identifies ineffective, often disparate legislative policies; a push toward lessening the pedagogical components of teacher preparation programs, such as methods courses and field experiences; and a general public perception that teaching simply requires an individual to be a content expert who “transmits information from the teacher to the child” (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007, p. 112; Darling-Hammond, 2005; 2011; 2016) as critical shortcomings in producing teachers who are prepared to teach effectively immediately upon entry into the field.

One facet particularly rife with inconsistency across the field is the clinical portion of pre-service teacher education. More specifically, the frequency, content, and quality of the interpersonal connections made through implementation of the supervisory triad model of supervision during the clinical experience is quite fluid. This fluidity extends to a number of facets of triadic relationships—the role expectations held by each member (Bullough & Draper, 2004; Slick, 1997, 1998);

their sometimes hierarchical nature (Bullough & Draper, 2004); and the coherence, or lack thereof, between clinical experience and university coursework (Beck & Kosnik, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Zeichner, 2010; Campbell & Dunleavy, 2016), among others. These issues have the potential to negatively impact the pre-service teacher most immediately, as his or her preparation for teaching may be slowed or halted if effective triadic relationships do not exist. This study was conducted as an attempt to identify how the interpersonal dynamics of the supervisory triad impact pre-service teachers' clinical experiences, done so via the synthesis of existing literature.

Theoretical Framework: Foundations of Positioning Theory

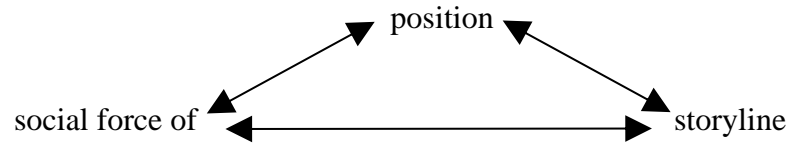
Positioning theory is defined as the “study of local moral orders as ever-shifting patterns of mutual and contestable rights and obligations of speaking and acting” (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999, p. 1). It is rooted in social constructionism, a hallmark of which is the “epistemological challenging of the traditional way of doing psychological research” (p. 3) that has come to be known as a “second cognitive revolution” (p. 3). This revolution asserts that discourse is not simply a manifestation of thought as previously assumed, but rather that discourse must be recognized as a phenomenon in itself, an act connected to but also independent from thought. In this vein, positioning theory is founded on the notion that “not only what we do but also what we *can* do is restricted by the rights, duties, and obligations we acquire, assume or which are imposed upon us in the concrete social contexts of everyday life” (p. 4, emphasis added) through discursive practice.

Mutually Determining Triad of Positioning Theory

Van Langenhove and Harré (1999) have determined the structure of conversation to be tri-polar, consisting of “positions, storylines, and relatively determinate speech-acts” (p. 18), as shown in Figure 1 below. The authors have termed this tri-polar cycle the “mutually determining triad” (p. 18). In the context of this triad, one's position is determined by the social force of the storyline in which it is included; a storyline is composed and acted out according to the positions members assume and/or are assigned through speech acts; and speech acts are made intelligible as others assess them against the backdrop of the individual's known position as well as the context of the overarching storyline in which members of the conversation are participating.

Figure 1

Mutually Determining Triad of Positioning Theory (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999, p. 18)



Position

Within the confines of positioning theory, a position is defined by Harré and van Langenhove (1999) as:

a complex cluster of generic personal attributes, structured in various ways, which impinges on the possibilities of interpersonal, intergroup and even intrapersonal action through some assignment of such rights, duties and obligations to an individual as are sustained by the cluster. (p. 1)

One's position—seen as dynamic and fluid in nature, as opposed to role, viewed as static and fixed—is manifested through discourse. Positioning of self and others occurs as an extension of one's understanding of the moral order of the storyline in which one is operating. It always occurs within the context of a specific moral order of discourse, and is founded on the “rights, duties and obligations within the moral order in which the discursive process occurs” (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999, p. 23).

Storyline

Positioning theory defines an episode as “any sequence of happenings in which human beings engage which has some principle of unity” (Harré & Secord, 1972, p. 10, as cited by Harré & van Langenhove, 1999, p. 4). Episodes include individuals' behaviors, but also move beyond the external to include the “thoughts, feelings, intentions, plans and so on of all those who participate” (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999, p. 5). A storyline is the broad plot of a unified sequence of one or more episodes. It is the “narrative which is being acted out in the metaphorical drama” (Barnes, 2004), in which all members of the supervisory triad, in this case, play a part.

Speech Acts

Van Langenhove and Harré note that because people are often viewed as objects easily located in the Newtonian/Euclidian space/time grid, it is assumed that peoples' social interactions should be located on that grid as well. However, the authors refute this assumption as inadequate, offering instead the alternative "persons/conversations referential grid" as the location of human social interaction (1999, p. 15). On this alternate grid, "social acts, including speech-acts, are taken as the 'matter' of social reality" (p. 15). The most basic unit of social capital in this setting then is conversation, as "it is within conversations that the social world is created" (p. 15). The illocutionary force of speech acts, including nonverbal contributions to conversation, influence the positioning and repositioning of those involved in the discourse to the extent that the speech act in question is "taken up" by all parties (p. 34).

Connections to Culture

Positioning and culture are inextricably linked to one another. Carbaugh (1999) identified positioning as a means for reinforcing, furthering, and potentially assisting in the creation of "cultural meaning systems" (p. 176) that are themselves often variable both within and across cultures. Tan and Moghaddam (1995) go so far as to say that a discussion of positioning in any capacity is incomplete and therefore ineffective if culture is not included as a point of consideration. Indeed, all social interactions are firmly grounded in the cultural-moral framework employed by the individuals involved in a given situation. The culture to which one ascribes could be defined in broad terms (e.g. American culture) or in a more focused manner (e.g. the culture of my 4th grade classroom), with more than one cultural network simultaneously influencing a single storyline and its participants.

Additionally, there is no set of factors that act upon individuals, either internally or externally, that are most responsible for the differences in positioning among cultures, as the "particular attributes or other dimensions that are taken to be most salient and relevant in positioning oneself and others [will vary] widely with culture and cultural ideals" (Tan & Moghaddam, 1995, p. 396). For example, Carbaugh (1999) defines a set of values that exemplify personhood in American culture on an ontological level, called a "code of dignity" (p. 169), as follows:

- The *intrinsic* worth of each person, the ability to recognize and support individuals as holding some socially redeemable value, even if this is difficult at first to notice.
- *Self-consciousness*, or self-awareness, or personal reflectiveness, the ability to ascertain who one is and is not, what one can and cannot do, to know

one's necessities, abilities, capacities, and limits, independent of, as well as within, one's typical roles.

- *Uniqueness*, to know how one's necessities, abilities, and capacities differ from others.
- *Sincerity*, or authenticity, or honesty, to be forthcoming and expressive about one's self, to coalesce one's outer actions with one's inner thoughts and feelings. (Carbaugh, 1999, p. 169)

As an added layer of complexity, Carbaugh asserts that within American culture there is an additional "code of honor [...] based not upon personal uniqueness, but upon institutional and historical precedence" (p. 170). This code of honor ascribes value to those positioned as honorable (or conversely, dishonorable) by American culture at large, based on factors such as gender, military service, or race. The author notes that "from the vantage point of a code of dignity, the positions of honor are often [viewed] as relationally constrained or stereotypically obliged" (p. 170).

In addition to positioning that occurs interpersonally among individuals and groups, positioning also happens intrapersonally within individuals. This intrapersonal positioning is known as reflexive positioning (Tan & Moghaddam, 1995). Just as there are cultural influences on interpersonal positioning, so too do cultural influences act on the reflexive positioning of individuals. Central to reflexive positioning is the defining of "self," the boundaries of which shift to meet the context of the culture in which an individual is situated. For example, Western cultures extol the notion of an "unbounded self" with emphasis on individualism, while non-Western cultures value more highly a collectivist orientation in which the needs of the whole "is the primary unit of concern and no sharp boundary is drawn between the self and others" (p. 397). When individuals of differing cultures come in contact with one another, including within the context of supervision, the potential for conflict and/or miscommunication is abundant, as the familiar roles and positions to one member of the triad may be oppositional to those familiar to the others.

Positioning of Supervisory Triad Members

In the supervisory triad, each member's position is at least partially dependent on his or her *role*, defined by Davies and Harré define as "static, formal and ritualistic" (1999, p. 32) in nature, and inherently inclusive of a great deal of assumption regarding the intentions and motivations behind the actions and speech acts of others. For example, if a mentor teacher were to give a pre-service teacher a directive regarding how a particular episode of instruction should be carried out, that could be seen as helpful or at least acceptable, given the positions of the individuals involved in the conversation. If the conversation were reversed,

however, and the pre-service teacher gave a directive to the mentor teacher, that could potentially be seen as presumptuous, disrespectful, or inappropriate, depending on the relationship between the two. These positions are, of course, dependent on the context and content of the storyline these individuals are playing out. Because roles within the triad are poorly defined across the field, positioning of members within the triad is often problematic and leads to miscommunication and discord (Bullough & Draper, 2004; Graham, 1993, 1997; Slick, 1997, 1998). Bullough and Draper (2004) called on positioning theory to assist them in describing the complicated inner workings of the supervisory triad as “a tale of power negotiation and of positioning and being positioned to influence learning, preserve one’s sense of self, and achieve or maintain a measure of control over one’s situation” (p. 418). In the current study, both the framework and conceptual language of positioning theory were used as tools for exploring the influence of the interpersonal dynamics of the supervisory triad on pre-service teachers’ clinical experiences.

Relevant Literature: Roles and Responsibilities within the Triad

On a cursory level, the roles of each member appear straightforward: mentor teachers provide a stable, educative environment in which good practices are modeled for the student teacher; student teachers plan, implement, and reflect on teaching under the mentor’s constant guidance; and supervisors serve as liaisons between the university and the goings on of the practicum, providing student teachers with feedback on observed performance. On a deeper level, however, the minute details and intricacies of these roles are much more complex. The roles of each member of the supervisory triad are “ill-defined” (Slick, 1998), as there is no consensus in the literature as to the defined tasks and responsibilities of any member of the triad. Bullough and Draper (2004) contend that “roles and role expectations held by the three parties [of the supervisory triad] often are unclear and shifting” (p. 407), often leading to confusion and miscommunication.

Yee (1968) asserted decades ago that a pre-service teacher’s clinical experience is an opportunity to “perform, evaluate, act, react, and adapt in relationship with and in response to others involved in the [supervisory] setting” (p. 97), a basic description of the clinical experience that holds true today. The mentor teacher’s role in the supervisory triad remains largely defined in context, often as either as the “go-between” for the pre-service teacher and the university supervisor (Graham, 1993, 1997; Veal & Rikard, 1998; Yuan, 2016) or as staunch opposition to the handing-down of criticism from the university “ivory tower,” seen as separate from the “real world” of teaching (Graham, 1997; Tan, 2013; Veal & Rikard, 1998). Finally, the university supervisor’s role is seen largely as one of detached

administrator, responsible for “providing superficial conciliation and facilitation of the relationships between cooperating teacher and student teacher” (Yee, 1968, p. 108), and as “gatekeeper” to the profession (Slick, 1997, 1998), one who must balance duties of both assessment and assistance (Basmadjian, 2011; Meegan et al., 2013; Slick, 1997; Yee, 1968). As noted by Slick (1998), there is clearly a “need to define roles and responsibilities of the triad members” (p. 823) in an effort to clarify both the goals and intentions of the student teaching process (Beck & Kosnik, 2002; Gelfuso et al., 2015; Lunenberg, Korthagen, & Swennen, 2007; Veal & Rikard, 1998).

Tension and Conflict

A lack of clear expectations and responsibilities within the triad has often led to instances of conflict among its members. For example, Sim’s (2011) examination of a “story of interpersonal tensions and contradictions” (p. 146) highlights the role confusions caused by the lack of communication between the university and the school in which pre-service teachers engage in field placement. In response, Sim asserts that “it is critical that the interpersonal demands of supervision become an important focus of the partnership between universities and schools if practicums are to be beneficial to all stakeholders” (p. 139). Additionally, Han and Damjanovic (2014) found that pre-service teachers sometimes conform their teaching practices to match those of their mentor teachers. In instances when this conformity did not occur, pre-service teachers exhibited high levels of resiliency and positivity in their commitment to practices they deemed more developmentally appropriate for students than the pre-established curriculum and assessment practices implemented by their mentor teachers. The researchers acknowledge that in instances such as these, “preservice teachers are trying to balance the tension between fitting in to the teaching environment and experimenting concepts and strategies learned in their coursework” (p. 298).

In other settings, however, the issues of balancing the tension between university and field were not present. Strieker et al. (2017) examined the relationships and practices between co-teaching pairs comprised of a mentor teacher and a pre-service teacher and found that year-long, co-taught clinical experiences resulted in “a sharing of power and responsibilities between the mentor teacher and the [teacher] candidate, which empowered the candidates’ professional development” (p. 52). In this case, instead of conforming to their mentor teachers’ practices as found by Han and Damjanovic (2014), pre-service teachers developed a stronger sense of professional efficacy and the beginnings of their own pedagogical voice.

Methodology: Study Design and Research Questions

Meta-synthesis methodology developed as an outgrowth of the seminal qualitative synthesis methodology, meta-ethnography, and was conceived as a response to a parallel quantitative methodology, meta-analysis (e.g. Glass, 1976). Specifically, meta-synthesis is defined as “a form of systematic review or integration of qualitative research findings in a target domain that are themselves interpretive syntheses of data” (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2003, p. 227).

As an emerging field of study, a relatively small body of literature regarding the interpersonal dynamics of the supervisory triad exists and includes no studies that explicitly employ the qualitative meta-synthesis methodology. By using qualitative meta-synthesis (e.g. Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007), I sought to examine the inner workings of the supervisory triad in a novel way. My intention with this work was not to compose a summary of existing qualitative research regarding the supervision of pre-service teachers. Instead, my intent was to “bring together findings from primary studies and to use these as data in a ‘third level’ interpretation” (Aspfors & Fransson, 2015, p. 78), with an ultimate goal of improved practice in the field by As such, the research question and subquestions guiding this study are as follows:

How do the interpersonal dynamics of the supervisory triad influence pre-service teachers’ clinical experiences?

- a. What factors influence the interpersonal dynamics of the supervisory triad?
- b. How does the positioning of self and/or others by members of the supervisory triad influence pre-service teachers’ clinical experiences?

Data Collection

Data for this qualitative meta-synthesis were derived from secondary qualitative data sources. The sampling bounds for this study include three of the four parameters originally put forth by Sandelowski and Barroso (2007)—topical, deemed “conceptual” for the purpose of the current study; population; and temporal—and an additional fourth parameter established by myself, that of access. Each of the four included parameters are defined as follows:

- *Conceptual parameters*—Bounds defining the topic(s) to be studied
- *Population parameters*—The people (individuals and/or groups) observed in the primary studies to be included in the current synthesis

- *Temporal parameters*—Defined time frame from which data may be collected
- *Access parameters*—Bounds detailing point(s) of access for studies to be included in the synthesis (e.g. full-text online, full-text in print, etc.) as well as language accessibility (i.e. published in English or another language)

Further explanation of and justification for each of these criteria in relation to the current study is detailed in Table 1.

A systematic approach to data collection was employed for this study (Booth et al., 2016; Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2016). The instruments utilized for data collection included both electronic and manual retrieval methods. For this work, five techniques were employed: keyword and concept searches in electronic databases; citation tracking, including forward and backward chaining; journal browsing; snowballing; and pearl growing.

Table 1

Explanation of and Justification for Sampling Parameters (modified from Erwin et al., 2011)

Parameter Explanation	Justification
Conceptual	
<i>Examines the interpersonal dynamics of the supervisory triad of teacher education</i>	Examining the interpersonal dynamics of the supervisory triad was required as a central aim of each included study. This first criteria is critical, as a great deal of quality research exists on supervision that does not center on the interpersonal dynamics of the triad, and was therefore excluded from this synthesis.
Population	
<i>Examines supervisory triads that exist in the context of American schools</i>	Due to the inherent links recognized by positioning theory between culture and positioning, as well as the current author's lack of extensive knowledge regarding cultures aside from American culture, only studies examining supervisory triads in American schools were included for synthesis.
Temporal	
<i>Published between 2002 and 2017</i>	In an effort to glean data regarding current supervisory practices in the field, only studies published within 15 years of commencement of the data collection period were included.
Access	
<i>Published primary research</i>	Only published studies were considered in an effort to streamline and simplify the data procurement process.
<i>Published in the English language</i>	Due to limited availability of resources, studies published in languages other than English were unable to be translated and were therefore not included in the synthesis.

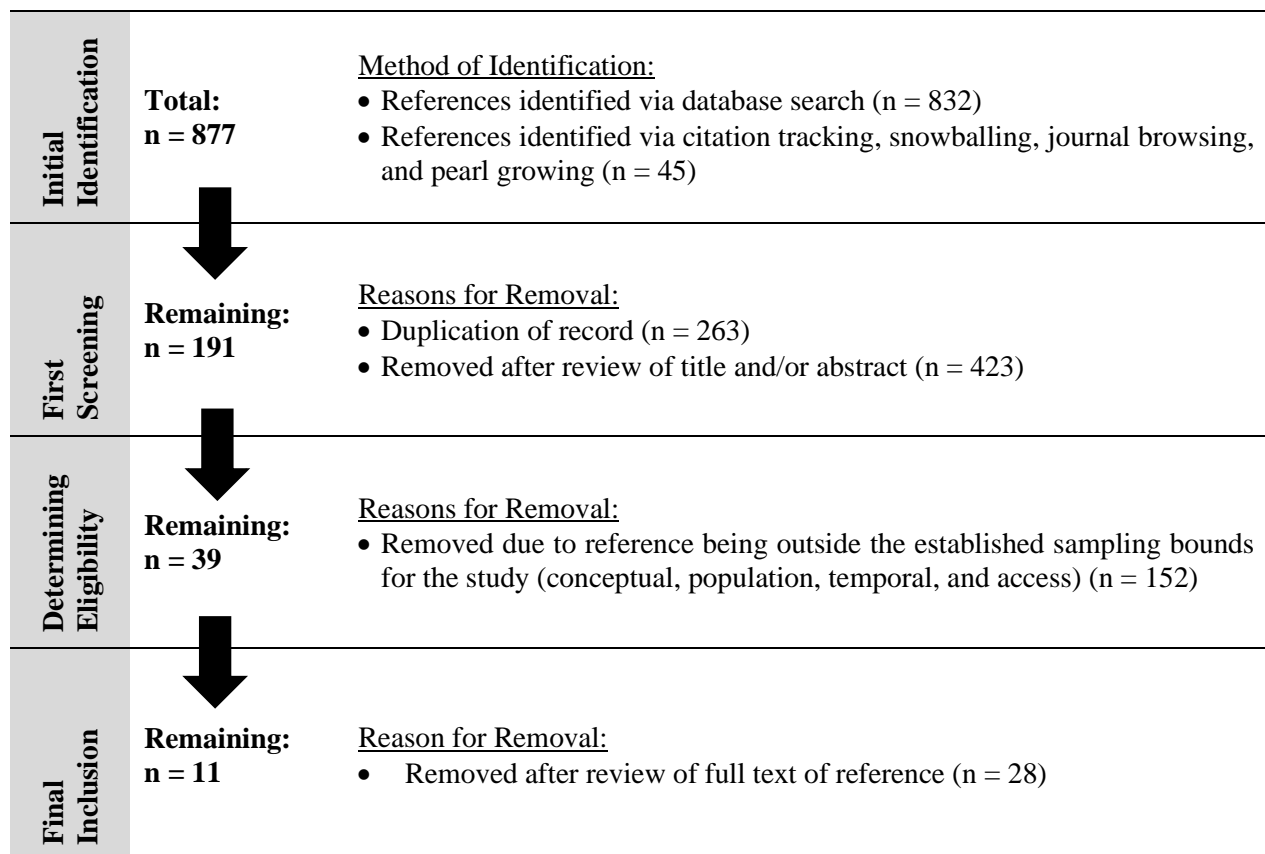
Figure 2
Steps in the Data Collection Process



The collection of data for this synthesis followed a process shown graphically in Figure 2. After the scoping search was conducted and the initial list of search terms was established, a systematic search for literature was conducted, utilizing the five techniques discussed in this section. Once the search was complete, the collected studies were evaluated for inclusion in the current synthesis based on the parameters established previously.

Conducting the search using the process described above ultimately yielded eleven studies deemed worthy for inclusion in the current synthesis. The full search, shown graphically in Figure 3, initially identified a total of 877 references potentially relevant to the current study. Of these 877 references, 263 were removed due to duplication and an additional 423 were removed after their titles and/or abstracts were reviewed, leaving a total of 191 remaining references. Of these, 152 were removed due to the reference being outside the established sampling bounds for the study (conceptual, population, temporal, and access), leaving a total of 39 remaining references. The full text of each of these 39 studies were carefully examined and as a result, eleven references were selected for final inclusion in the current qualitative meta-synthesis.

Figure 3
Data Collection and Selection Process



Data Analysis

Directed qualitative content analysis, a deductive approach for analyzing qualitative data, was used in determining relationships among the eleven references included in this study. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) assert this method of analysis to be appropriate for use when “existing theory or prior research exists about a phenomenon that is incomplete or would benefit from further description” (p. 1281). The method of directed qualitative content analysis employed for this project followed three steps, outlined by Hsieh and Shannon (2005) and modified by myself to fit the needs of the current study:

1. Key concepts were identified as initial coding categories.
2. Operational definitions for each category were determined using positioning theory and existing literature.
3. Coding began immediately using the predetermined codes listed in the codebook. After data were coded using the initially established codes, coding categories were expanded and redefined as necessary to meet the needs of the collected data.

Initially, I established only two primary themes, a direct reflection of the sub-questions guiding the study as well as its key concepts and supporting theoretical framework: “factors,” meaning identified factors of influence on the supervisory triad; and “positioning,” meaning the positioning of self and others within the supervisory triad. After initial coding was complete using these two codes, additional subcodes were established and the data were reorganized as needed. The final codebook utilized is shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Codebook for Data Analysis

Initial Code	Subcodes^a
Factors	Background and Responsibilities of Triad Members
	Expectations
	Role Clarification
Positioning	General of MT
	of TC
	of US

^aMT = Mentor Teacher; US = University Supervisor; TC = Teacher Candidate

Data for this study are comprised of eleven empirical, peer-reviewed studies that were published between 2002 and 2017, within 15 years of the data collection phase. These studies, described in greater detail in Table 3, focus on the interpersonal dynamics of the full supervisory triad as opposed to being limited to the study of dyads within the supervisory triad. Additionally, each of the triads represented in the included studies were set in American schools, relevant to the current study due to the inherent links recognized by positioning theory between culture and positioning.

Findings: Factors of Influence

Role Clarification

Triad members' roles and members' perceptions of roles vary from triad to triad and also within a single triad over the course of time (Bullough & Draper, 2004; Campbell & Lott, 2010; Fernandez & Erbilgin, 2009; Goh & Hannon, 2012; Johnson & Napper-Owen, 2011; Katz & Isik-Ercan, 2015; Koerner, Rust, & Baumgartner, 2002; Murphy, 2010; Nguyen, 2009; Silva, 2003; Valencia, Martin, Place, and Grossman, 2009). As such, there remains a need to define the roles of each member of each unique supervisory triad; however, in general, the roles of triad members are explicitly clarified neither by members within individual supervisory triads nor universally across the field (Bullough & Draper, 2004; Campbell & Lott, 2010; Goh & Hannon, 2012; Johnson & Napper-Owen, 2011; Koerner, Rust, & Baumgartner, 2002; Murphy, 2010; Valencia et al., 2009). In the absence of clarity, individuals within the triad often construct their own definitions of each member's role. These individual conceptions are often not shared with others. Johnson and Napper-Owen (2011) recount the experience of a member of one of the supervisory triads they examined as follows:

Early in her student teaching experience, [teacher candidate] Maria defined her role in the triad and attempted to construct meaning and guidelines regarding the role of the cooperating teacher through her own set of expectations. She firmly believed these guidelines were essential for her to grow and develop into a better teacher. However, Maria kept these expectations to herself and assumed that the other members of the triad held the same beliefs. (p. 48)

Table 3
Descriptions of Studies Included in the Current Synthesis

Author (Year of Publication)	Aim	Sample Population	Methodology	Conceptual/Theoretical Framework
Bullough and Draper (2004)	To explore the experiential level of mentoring and of managing mentors over the course of an academic year in a triad composed of a senior high school mathematics intern, her assigned mentor teacher, and a university supervisor	One student teacher, one mentor teacher, and one university supervisor	Qualitative (Unspecified)	Positioning Theory
Campbell and Lott (2010)	To explore the relationships between university supervisors, in-service teachers, and pre-service teachers (triads) participating in a joint pre-service and in-service professional development project	Two student teachers, two mentor teachers, and one university supervisor	Phenomenology	Positioning Theory
Fernandez and Erbilgin (2009)	To compare aspects of post-lesson conferences led by cooperating teachers and by a university supervisor working with two mathematics student teachers	Two mathematics student teachers, their mentor teachers, and one university supervisor	Qualitative (Unspecified)	Sociocultural Theory
Goh and Hannon (2012)	To provide an account of one of the authors' experiences as a neophyte university supervisor providing supervision to a student teacher	One novice university supervisor	Autoethnography	Metzler's (1990) description of the Noble Triad and Devil's Triad within the supervisory triad
Johnson and Napper-Owen (2011)	To examine the roles and role perceptions held by members of physical education student teaching triads while engaged in a seven-week elementary student teaching experience	Two student teachers, two mentor teachers, and one university supervisor	Case Study	Social Constructivist Theory

Author (Year of Publication)	Aim	Sample Informants	of	Methodology Utilized	Conceptual/Theoretical Framework
Katz and Isik-Ercan (2015)	To explore how cultural differences between a field-based team and the university supervisor led to unanticipated challenges and points of conflict in an early childhood teacher education program in Midwestern United States	Two student teachers, one mentor teacher, and one university supervisor		Ethnography	Ethnographic logic of inquiry utilizing the concept of languaculture
Koerner et al. (2002)	To determine if there is tacit agreement among the various participants in student teaching about what a good student teaching experience looks like and about the roles that each participant should play	Seven university supervisors, and twenty-one student teachers and their mentor teachers		Qualitative (Unspecified)	Grounded Theory
Murphy (2010)	To examine the perceptions of relationships formed among members of the student teaching triad and to examine the perceptions of supervision of student teachers given by cooperating teachers and college supervisors	A convenience sample of eight distinct student teaching triads		Qualitative (Unspecified)	(None stated)
Nguyen (2009)	To examine an inquiry-based teaching/learning model involving diverse members of learning communities in the contexts of teacher–learner (expert–novice) reciprocity, school culture and social relations	Four student teachers, four mentor teachers, and one university supervisor		Case Study	Socially-constructed, culturally-framed conceptions of teaching and learning and critical inquiry as a philosophical and pedagogical stance
Silva (2003)	To explore the use of triad journaling as a collaborative tool for enhancing teaching and learning in a professional development school context	Ten student teaching triads from two cohorts within a single professional development school		Case Study	(None stated)
Valencia et al. (2009)	To explore how interactions between members of a student teaching triad in specific contexts shaped opportunities for student teachers to learn to teach language arts	One student teacher, one mentor teacher, and one university supervisor		Case Study	Activity Theory

As noted previously, lack of role clarification often leads to “an ongoing process of negotiating who would do what, when, and where, with whom” (Katz & Isik-Ercan, 2015, p. 63). Goh and Hannon (2012) note that, in a study with one author acting as university supervisor, the supervisor and mentor teacher “did not have prior opportunity to clarify [their] roles within the practicum, and this may have compounded the hierarchical issues which surfaced” (p. 73). Additionally, Katz and Isik-Ercan (2015) found “frame clashes” brought about by the differences between the “languaculture” represented by the field-based setting versus that of the university. The authors assert that these clashes “made visible differences in cultural expectations of the institutionally based actors, clashes that were often bidirectional; that is, the clash had consequences for how actors viewed their work, met their responsibilities, and took up, or not, what others proposed” (p. 66). In these examples, members of the triad internalized their own conceptions of the roles of triad members, but these conceptions were not shared nor agreed upon by the remaining members of the triad, leading to confusion and “lost opportunities for learning to teach” (Valencia et al., 2009, p. 318).

Expectations of Triad Members

Much like the roles of triad members, member expectations in terms of the intricacies of one another’s performance and/or positioning within the triad are often unclear or unarticulated (Campbell & Lott, 2010; Goh & Hannon, 2012; Johnson & Napper-Owen, 2011; Katz & Isik-Ercan, 2015; Murphy, 2010; Nguyen, 2009; Valencia et al., 2009). Campbell and Lott (2010) found that “uncertainty in expectations can also act as a social force capable of forging roles and a storyline misaligned with those thought most advantageous or sought by a university supervisor” (p. 364). Even when they are articulated, expectations for field experiences are often misaligned among the members of the supervisory triad (Campbell & Lott, 2010; Goh & Hannon, 2012; Johnson & Napper-Owen, 2011; Katz & Isik-Ercan, 2015; Koerner, Rust, & Baumgartner, 2002; Murphy, 2010; Valencia et al., 2009). For example, in a triad studied by Valencia et al. (2009), the authors found that “although each person acted in good faith, according to perceptions of his or her roles, there were significant tensions among the multiple settings in which everyone participated. Chief among these were multiple views of the goal of field experiences, mentoring, and effective [content] instruction” (p. 318).

Background and Responsibilities of Triad Members

A third finding of this study regarding factors of influence is that supervisors tend to view their roles through the lens of theory and in connection to the academic work of the university, while mentor teachers tend to view their roles through the lens of practicality (Fernandez & Erbilgin, 2009; Goh & Hannon, 2012;

Johnson & Napper-Owen, 2011; Katz & Isik-Ercan, 2015; Murphy, 2010). As stated by Goh and Hannon (2012), “oftentimes, supervision expectations of the university supervisors are based on theory, having spent more time in the academia setting, whereas supervision expectations of cooperating teachers are based on pragmatism, having spent more time in a practical physical education classroom” (p. 74). Additionally, Fernandez and Erbilgin (2009) contend that

university supervisors might be the only people who specifically aim to connect university programs with schools. Thus, the backgrounds of the university supervisors seem vitally important if we want student teaching to be an experience where prospective mathematics teachers continue to learn about teaching aligned with recent reforms and theory. (p. 107)

The setting in which a member of the supervisory triad is primarily immersed (university or P-12 school) deeply impacts his or her view of the purpose of field experience and, more specifically, the expectations of triad members, particularly that of the teacher candidate.

Although a great deal of data from the current study exist regarding the background and responsibilities of the university supervisor and mentor teacher, only one of the studies included in the current synthesis specifically addressed the background and responsibilities of the teacher candidate. Johnson and Napper-Owen (2011) recognize that “student teachers have a variety of responsibilities in their role as student teacher. Student teachers typically plan lessons, practice a variety of teaching methods, and develop a realistic understanding of school life” (p. 52). Clearly teacher candidates have their own unique responsibilities and personal backgrounds that influence their student teaching experiences; however, they are positioned through representation in existing research as secondary to the backgrounds of those responsible for imparting their wisdom and knowledge to the teacher candidates, namely the mentor teacher and the university supervisor.

Positioning of Self and Others

The authors of two studies included in the current synthesis employed positioning theory as the theoretical framework for their research: Bullough and Draper (2004) and Campbell and Lott (2010). Bullough and Draper (2004) report a triad rife with misaligned positioning of self and others, which ultimately led to an explosive struggle for power and authority. Conversely, Campbell and Lott (2010) recount the experiences of much more harmonious triads, although not without concerns. While their findings were antithetical, the common use of

positioning theory provided both pairs with the ability to illustrate the impact of the relationships developed within the triads they examined.

The authors of the remaining nine studies included in the current synthesis did not utilize positioning theory in their research; however, positioning of triad members was clearly evident throughout the findings of those studies. In general, the member of the triad perceived to be the most knowledgeable about teaching is positioned as most powerful, most frequently the university supervisor (Goh & Hannon, 2012; Valencia et al., 2009). In this context, the triad member deemed most knowledgeable is often determined as an extension of years of experience. In other words, the triad members with the most years of experience in teaching is often seen as the most knowledgeable by the remaining members of the triad, particularly the teacher candidate. This sometimes leads to power struggles between the mentor teacher and the university supervisor (Bullough & Draper, 2004; Goh & Hannon, 2012; Katz & Isik-Ercan, 2015). In no triad was the teacher candidate found to be positioned in a role of dominance. Additionally, triad members position and reposition themselves and each other fluidly as the storyline of the practicum was played out (Bullough & Draper, 2004; Campbell & Lott, 2010; Katz & Isik-Ercan, 2015; Silva, 2003).

Findings of the current synthesis serve as evidence that mentor teachers are often positioned as ones who understand the “real” work of teaching (Fernandez & Erbilgin, 2009; Johnson & Napper-Owen, 2011; Katz & Isik-Ercan, 2015; Valencia et al., 2009). They are seen primarily as educators of their P-12 students, not teacher educators (Koerner, Rust, & Baumgartner, 2002; Valencia et al., 2009), who look to the university to define their role in the supervisory triad (Johnson & Napper-Owen, 2011). When that role is not clearly defined by the university, mentor teachers often take on the task of defining their role within the triad themselves, heavily relying on their own student teaching and other professional experiences to do so (Fernandez & Erbilgin, 2009; Johnson & Napper-Owen, 2011; Murphy, 2010; Valencia et al., 2009).

Unlike mentor teachers, who are positioned as having insider knowledge regarding current classroom practices, data from this study show that university supervisors are often viewed by both mentor teachers and teacher candidates as outsiders to the classroom (Johnson & Napper-Owen, 2011; Katz & Isik-Ercan, 2015; Koerner, Rust, & Baumgartner, 2002). The primary roles of the supervisor identified by the current synthesis are service as resource to the teacher candidate and mentor teacher and as the liaison between the university and the field (Johnson & Napper-Owen, 2011; Katz & Isik-Ercan, 2015; Koerner, Rust, & Baumgartner, 2002). Because supervisors take on the position of liaison, they are often concerned

with the teacher candidate upholding the requirements of the university teacher preparation program as well as upholding their own university-related duties (Goh & Hannon, 2012; Johnson & Napper-Owen, 2011; Katz & Isik-Ercan, 2015; Koerner, Rust, & Baumgartner, 2002; Valencia et al., 2009), perhaps bolstering their aforementioned position as one who is removed from the day-to-day realities of the actual classroom.

Teacher candidates are routinely positioned as “learner[s] learning to teach” (Campbell and Lott, 2010, p. 359; Koerner, Rust, & Baumgartner, 2002). As such, they often take on the role of conforming to their mentor teachers’ image of a “good” teacher candidate in an effort to successfully complete the student teaching experience (Bullough & Draper, 2004; Koerner, Rust, & Baumgartner, 2002; Valencia et al., 2009). They are positioned as the least powerful member of the supervisory triad, in spite of the fact that the triad exists primarily as a tool for furthering their skill and knowledge. Although frequently positioned as collaborators alongside their mentor teacher and university supervisors (Campbell & Lott, 2010; Goh & Hannon, 2012; Nguyen, 2009; Silva, 2003), they also sometimes seen as “guests who [are] ‘renting space’” from their host mentor teachers (Valencia et al., 2009, p. 311; Bullough & Draper, 2004; Johnson & Napper-Owen, 2011; Katz & Isik-Ercan, 2015).

Discussion: Factors of Influence

The success or failure of a given triad cannot be attributed to a single factor. The findings of this study support the long-held contention that roles within the triad are ill defined and shifting (Slick, 1998), specifically finding a lack of clarity in defining not only the roles but also the expectations of triad members. Gee (2001) notes that “when any human being acts and interacts in a given context, others recognize that person as acting and interacting as a certain ‘kind of person’ or even as several different ‘kinds’ at once” (p. 99). In much the same way, in the absence of role clarification, triad members define the roles of self and others themselves. These self-conceptions of role are not always shared with the remaining members of the triad, leading to confusion for all and diminished learning for the teacher candidate. Similarly, when triad members’ expectations are unclear or unarticulated, that lack of clarity can overtake the trajectory and tone of the field experience, “act[ing] as a social force capable of forging roles and a storyline misaligned with those thought most advantageous” (Campbell & Lott, 2010, p. 364) by those within the triad. Even in cases when expectations are articulated, incongruence of those expectations among triad members often leads to frustration (Isik-Ercan, Kang, & Rodgers, 2017; Martin, Snow, & Franklin Torrez, 2011).

All triad members have duties and responsibilities outside of those related to the work of the triad. Additionally, each member comes to the triad with his or her own unique set of life experiences that contribute, either directly or indirectly, to the work of the triad. As such, triad members also bring to the clinical experience their own positioning of self in terms of professional responsibility. Mentor teachers largely position themselves first as teachers of their K-12 students (Bullough, 2005; Jaspers, Meijer, Prins, & Wubbels, 2014), while university supervisors often see the more traditional obligations to the university (e.g. research and teaching) as their primary duties (Rodgers & Keil, 2007; Slick, 1998). As such, the clinical education of the pre-service teacher becomes a secondary responsibility for both the mentor teacher and the university supervisor. This situation is particularly evident when the university supervisor is in a full-time faculty role at an institution of higher education. This finding highlights a critical gap in the education of pre-service teachers—if neither the mentor teacher nor the university supervisor consistently view preparing teacher candidates for practice as their primary responsibility, the candidate's potential growth and professional nurturing is inevitably diminished. Some have suggested that mentor teachers engage in professional development similar to that sometimes provided to many university supervisors, specifically aimed at guiding mentor teachers in becoming more intentional in their role as mentor to pre-service teachers; however, the implementation of this suggested professional development happens infrequently at best (Valencia et al., 2009). The dearth of clarity and direction afforded to university supervisors and especially to mentor teachers—through professional development or any other means—is a pervasive weakness in the practice of pre-service teacher supervision across the field of education.

Positioning of Self and Others

Because positioning is embedded in discourse, triad members position and reposition themselves fluidly and frequently as communication happens over time. All members of the triad position themselves and the remaining members of the triad, and that positioning has an influence on the teacher candidate's clinical experience. Triads in which members' positioning of self and others was largely aligned resulted in generally harmonious, well-performing triads. Conversely, underperforming or dysfunctional triads and/or those fraught with discord are those in which members' positioning of self and others was dissimilar. This dissimilarity often led to a struggle for power and authority within the triad, particularly between the mentor teacher and the university supervisor. In the triad detailed by Bullough and Draper (2004), the mentor teacher positioned herself as a strong teacher who was well-respected by her colleagues. However, the university supervisor positioned the mentor teacher as one who was not forward-thinking and, eventually,

as a threat to the education of not only the teacher candidate but also the K-12 students for whom the mentor teacher was responsible. Similarly, the university supervisor positioned himself as an expert in the teaching of mathematics based on his work at the university level, while the mentor teacher positioned him as arrogant and too far removed from the classroom to understand the “real” work of teaching. It is clear that effective communication is an essential ingredient in aligned positioning of self and others, and subsequently, the positive functioning of the triad towards the ultimate goal of pre-service teachers’ preparation for professional practice (Tan, 2013; Traister, 2005).

The notion of identity is closely related to that of position. Multiple definitions have been ascribed to identity, including that of a “collection of stories about persons, or more specifically, those narratives about individuals that are reifying, endorsable, and significant” (Sfard & Prusak, 2005, p. 16), and, more simply, “to be recognized as a certain kind of person by others” (Gee, 2001, p. 99). Bucholtz and Hall (2005) even go so far as to define identity as “social positioning of self and other” (p. 586), inextricably linked to one’s position. Yamakawa, Forman, and Ansell (2005) found positioning to be integral to the formation of identity, relative to the storyline being played out by those involved. They observed that two students’ identities as “math thinkers” (p. 19) were directly linked to the internal and external positioning of themselves in relation to their conformity (or lack of conformity) to the teacher-directed storyline of “reform mathematics” (p. 19). In the current study, defining triad members’ identities relative to the enacted storyline of supervision is essentially impossible, as doing so would require access to more raw data than are provided in the studies synthesized. However, it can be asserted that the construction of one’s identity within the triad is a “process in motion” (Henry, 2016, p. 291), anchored in dialogue and fluidly shifting over time.

Conclusion

At present, too many aspects of clinical education are essentially left to chance—selection of mentor teachers, appropriate matching of triad members, defining roles and expectations within the triad, and the construction of interpersonal relationships, to name a few—when many of these aspects can and should be enacted with a larger measure of intentionality. The ways in which the traditional method of pre-service teacher supervision is implemented should be examined and possibly redesigned across the field to include greater structure in defining roles and expectations within the triad. Institutions of higher education implementing pre-service teacher clinical experiences could benefit greatly from making these shifts—as teacher candidates’ learning increases, it is likely that their

overall knowledge and level of skill will increase as well, potentially leading to higher achievement on professional licensure assessments required for certification and eventual employment. However, more importantly, making these changes will lead to the production of teachers well prepared to take on the task of educating students immediately upon entry into the field, the current lack of which served as the impetus for this qualitative meta-synthesis. Because of the importance of the clinical component of pre-service teacher education, this avenue of study not only deserves but requires the continued attention of researchers and practitioners alike.

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