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Supervision of fieldwork in teacher education programs provides a site for professional learning not only for student teachers but also teachers who take on supervisory responsibilities. Yet accounts of the learning of teachers who supervise fieldwork pre-service teachers are largely absent from the research literature on teacher education. This chapter analyses the professional learning reported by several groups of teachers who met to discuss their experiences of supervising student teachers, and seeks to better understand the conditions and nature of that professional learning within the current Australian policy context. Our aim is to reach a more refined understanding of professional learning within a theoretical framework deriving from cultural-historical activity theory (Engeström, 1987, 1994). By reconceptualising the fieldwork experiences of supervising teachers within this framework we resist falling back upon accepted understandings of professional learning that continue to frame both teachers’ supervisory practices and our own as teacher educators and attempt to conceptualise fieldwork differently. We thereby lay the groundwork for developing more nuanced programs and practices on the part of teachers and teacher educators when supervising fieldwork.

Classroom teachers who work with beginning teachers in fieldwork settings play a critical role in pre-service teacher education (Haigh & Ward, 2004; Hastings & Squires, 2002; Glickman & Bey, 1990; Sanders, Dowson, & Sinclair, 2005). Yet, as Wideen, Mayer-Smith and Moon (1998) observe, “supervising teachers are frequently missing in the research” on teacher education, and it is timely to focus on how such players “affect the landscape and process of learning to teach” (p. 169). Moreover, the professional learning that comes from being a supervisor, and the formal and informal ways that this learning might be recognised and given currency, have not been considered in any detailed way, either in the research literature on professional learning or in practice.

During 2005, we conducted a large-scale survey and then a series of group interviews that focused on teachers’ preparation for the role of supervising teacher, the learning they experience through this role, and the incentives and recognition associated with being a supervising teacher. We begin this chapter by returning to
the design phase of the initial survey, when we, as practising teacher educators, attempted to crystallise our views on the variables we felt were important in the professional learning of supervising teachers, in order to develop the survey instrument we administered.

Analysis of the resulting survey data, as well as critical reflection on the survey instrument itself, provided us with both a stepping-off point and a set of challenges for the conduct of a series of focus group conversations with supervising teachers drawn from early childhood, primary, and secondary school settings. The bulk of this chapter will analyse what the teachers who participated in these focus group discussions said about their experiences of supervision, paying particular attention to the tensions and complexities that are bound up with their work as supervisors. We argue that these partly derive from the managerial discourses that are so much a feature of contemporary educational settings in Australia and elsewhere, although we also identify dimensions of professional learning that point beyond our current policy setting. We conclude the chapter by raising questions about the potential for developing alternative relationships and conversations, between campus-based and in-school teacher educators, in order to redefine our respective professional roles.

Our data analysis is located within a theoretical framework deriving from cultural-historical activity theory (Engeström, 1987). Such an analysis allows us to identify and make sense of the contrasts between teacher education as enacted within universities, and teacher education as it is understood and experienced within schools and early childhood settings. Supervising teachers, almost as much as teacher education students, must negotiate the inevitable contrasts and contradictions that occur when these complex activity systems meet during fieldwork. Vygotsky's original articulation of Soviet activity theory (1978) has been reframed by subsequent theorists and is now in its 'third generation' (Engeström, 1987, 1994). In activity theory, the aims (or object) of an individual or social group (the subject) are explained in terms of the cultural practices in which they engage and the community in which they are embedded. These explanations attend to the rules that guide the group's shared activity, the division of labour the group employs to achieve the activity, and the tools (both artefacts and ideas) used to implement the activity. This understanding of the socially mediated character of all human activity enables us to develop a better understanding of the complexities of the working relationships between campus-based and in-school teacher educators, as well as the possibilities for changing existing arrangements.

In the case of schools and early childhood centres, tools include statements of philosophy, school charters, curriculum and program plans, government policies, formats for reporting to parents, theories of learning and development, and methods of observing how children or adolescents learn and grow (e.g. the learning continua that have recently been developed by governments at both a federal and state level in Australia). These, in turn, support and are sustained by particular rules and divisions of labour within these educational settings. Within teacher education institutions, by contrast, important tools include methods of assessing and reporting pre-service teacher learning (both within course work and during fieldwork), manuals advising supervising teachers about aspects of fieldwork.
supervision, and modes of maintaining contact with supervising teachers during fieldwork blocks. Teacher education faculties are also increasingly subjected to managerial tools imposed by (and on) the university sector, including graduate outcomes statements and other types of accountability, such as professional standards for entry to the profession which have recently been developed by state authorities around Australia (see, for example, those specified by the Victorian Institute of Teaching, www.vit.vic.edu.au). Through systematic identification of these aspects of cultural practice, research within an activity theoretical framework aims to both explore and explain the possibility of transforming the way that groups operate within institutional settings and wider community networks.

The challenge is one of understanding the interrelationships between the two distinct activity systems that constitute teacher education. Although early childhood settings, schools, and universities might be said to share a common goal with respect to fieldwork, namely to educate a new generation of teachers, they achieve this common goal in different ways. Indeed, the goal is ‘common’ only at the most general level of renewing the teaching profession. Teachers and teacher educators do not necessarily understand this goal in the same way, because their professional knowledge and practice are each the product of distinct activity systems, including rules, tools, and divisions of labour that are not necessarily transparent to each other.

Indeed, it could be argued that the policy agendas driving schools and universities have diverged in significant ways over the last two decades in response to neo-liberal managerial imperatives. As Smith (2000) notes, University agendas are increasingly dominated by commercialisation, research and resource cut-backs; and the school sector is increasingly sceptical of the relevance of research and theories embedded within the content of teacher education programs. The supervisory practices that are part of fieldwork components of teacher education programs represent one clear site in which such diverging agendas have become manifest. Supervision of fieldwork represents a significant cost for education. As part of industrial awards created in the 1980s teachers in Australia are paid for their role as supervisors of pre-service teachers. While the payment for individual teachers is relatively small, the overall costs to faculties can be large and over the years, and in line with concerns for cost-efficiency, many faculties have reduced the amount of supervision provided by university staff and devolved more responsibility for supervision to teachers in schools. Thus, using the concepts derived from activity theory, the rules and division of labour in relation to supervision have changed. Yet how those rule changes have been communicated and understood by those within and across the school and university sectors remains open for question.

Much is at stake in any attempt to reconceptualise the relationship between educational settings (such as early childhood centres and schools) and teacher education faculties within such a theoretical framework, including the way universities have traditionally been positioned as the sites of knowledge and research. For all the work that has been done under the banners of ‘reflective practice’ and ‘action research’ (Schön, 1983), teacher education is still fractured by
a binary between 'theory' (as the province of the university and specifically teacher education faculties) and 'practice'. We shall see how this binary continues to frame the views and practices of the supervising teachers who participated in this study. We shall also acknowledge the ways in which this binary continues to frame the work of teacher educators. Activity theory provides a basis on which to rethink the nature of professional knowledge and practice, including the complex mix of teachers' values, beliefs and life experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988), formal theories they have acquired during teacher training (Edwards, 2003), the micro-politics of their workplaces (Kelchtermans, 2004), government policy imperatives, and reflection on experience (Korthagen, 2003). It also provides a framework for teacher educators to reflexively consider their role in relation to fieldwork.

**MAPPING TEACHER EDUCATORS' ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING OF SUPERVISION TEACHERS**

In mid-2005, 1,192 supervising teachers on Monash University's data base of supervising schools and early childhood centres responded to a survey asking them about their experiences as supervisors. Analysis of the survey results have been reported elsewhere (Clarke, Mitchell & Nuttall, 2006). In this chapter we focus on the way our assumptions as teacher educators shaped this survey, and what these assumptions reveal about how we are ourselves located within the activity system of university-based teacher education. The tertiary world that we occupy contrasts with the professional contexts of teachers as they subsequently described them to us in follow-up group discussions, when they evoked the complex (and often contradictory) activity systems they must negotiate in their day-to-day practice.

The survey began with a series of demographic questions: respondent age (the largest single group were aged 50-54 years); gender (70% of respondents were female); school or centre location (65% worked in suburban Melbourne); the age group of the children taught (just over 700 respondents worked with 12 to 18-year-olds); years of teaching (fairly evenly spread from less than five years to more than 25 years); their date of graduation (over one-third graduated from their teacher education program in the 1970s); where they graduated from (82% studied in Melbourne and only 4% graduated overseas); how long they had been supervising student teachers (one-third had done so for less than five years and only 60 had done so for more than 25 years); the number of students they had supervised (the single largest category had supervised five or fewer students); and whether they would be supervising a student this year (only 16% were a definite 'No').

As with all survey designs, these questions reflected preconceptions held by the research team regarding the likely nature of survey respondents and, in particular, important demographic variables with respect to supervising teachers as a group. These included the assumption that supervising teachers would reflect the aging cohort of Australian teachers generally (true) and would be mainly female (also true). Some of our assumptions were, however, clearly inaccurate, at least in the case of these respondents. We assumed, for example, that there would be a positive correlation between length of service and commitment to student supervision.
Instead, respondents were most likely to have been teaching for between six and ten years, supervising students for less than five years, and to have supported less than five students.

A further series of questions explored the supervising teachers’ motivations for taking on student supervision and the sources of their understandings about the role of student supervision:

![Bar chart showing reasons why teachers took on the supervisory role]

**Figure 3.1. Reasons why teachers took on the supervisory role**

Whilst some respondents selected more than one category, the four most likely responses were: ‘I want to give something back to the profession’, ‘I want to keep up with the latest ideas’, ‘I enjoy the contact with students’, and ‘The satisfaction of seeing student teachers develop’. Teachers were least likely to identify ‘For promotion purposes’, ‘Easing my classroom workload’, or ‘I’m required to supervise students’. These responses, and qualitative responses to questions that invited survey respondents to expand on their selected motivating factors, signalled to the research team that many supervising teachers subscribe to a professional
ethic that involves responsibility for inducting new members into their professional community. This contrasted with the prominence that we had given to other factors the research team had discussed at length when preparing the survey. In hindsight, the selection of variables for the survey is also remarkably silent with respect to the potential for professional learning for the teachers, which was, after all, the focus of the study. Why did we not include response options such as ‘I learn more about my own thinking and practices’ or ‘I value learning from students and university colleagues’?

The obvious answer to this is that the survey reflects teacher educators’ assumptions about the rules, tools, and divisions of labour that frame the practicum from our perspective. This is unremarkable given the absence of literature on the perspectives of supervising teachers, but it does seem to be an interesting oversight. Because of this absence of an empirical base, we largely relied on anecdotal evidence from our own experience, the reported experiences of students, and our regular contact with supervising teachers. One finding that highlighted the gap in the survey design between anecdote and actual practices in schools was the response to the survey question: ‘How often do you meet with student teachers during fieldwork blocks?’ Anecdotal evidence from students suggested that meetings are often infrequent; by contrast, 91% of respondent to this question answered ‘Daily’. Although both perceptions might in fact be false, this response suggested that supervising teachers had their own views about desirable supervisory practice that were not necessarily congruent with our sense of the way they perceived their role.

One of the most important questions in the survey (from our perspective) asked the supervising teachers where they got information and advice about the role. Just over one-third relied on the fieldwork handbooks supplied by the various universities whose students they supervised; five percent of respondents reported they had no advice or information at all; and only three percent had attended some type of in-service course related to the role. Rather than seeking information about supervising students from these sources, almost twenty percent of respondents indicated that they actively sought advice and feedback from colleagues in the school, usually more experienced supervisors and sometimes senior staff. The professional learning implications of this response struck us immediately. Our survey had presupposed that supervising teachers were dependent on the university when it came to understanding their role – a traditional model of professional development that is open to critique (as something that is ‘delivered’ to teachers by outsiders who are supposedly more knowledgeable). By contrast, the supervising teachers implicitly affirmed the value of professional learning that was situated within their workplaces, involving relationships with other colleagues (i.e. a model of professional knowledge that is constructed in schools).

LISTENING TO SUPERVISING TEACHERS TALK ABOUT FIELDWORK

Both the volume and nature of the survey responses made us more self conscious
when planning the follow-up focus group discussions. We were, after all, taken
aback by the supervising teachers’ preparedness to respond to the survey (we had
anticipated a much smaller number of respondents). This, combined with the actual
survey results, suggested that teachers were taking their roles as supervisors far
more seriously and reflectively than we had imagined. They were raising questions
about their roles, and – as the focus group discussions revealed – they clearly
valued the opportunity to get together to share their experiences and construct
professional knowledge about supervision (cf. Mercer, 1996; Clarke, 2001). The
focus group discussions gave us the opportunity to go to the heart of issues of
professional learning within fieldwork supervision, as they were understood by
groups of teachers who self-selected to speak with us in these forums. Over four
hundred returned an additional survey response, in envelopes provided exclusively
for this purpose, indicating their willingness to participate, even though we initially
required only 24 teachers to take part.

We decided to engage the teachers in conversations that both coalesced around
the following questions and offered opportunities for supervising teachers to
identify important factors we might not have considered:

- How do you establish and maintain a working relationship with student
teachers?
- What range of practices do you use in working with student teachers?
- Why do you do what you do?
- How did you learn to do this?
- Does a good teacher also make a good supervisor?
- What sort of preparation have you had for your role as supervisor?
- Tell us about what you have learnt about your teaching as a result of supervising
  student teachers.
- Why is that important to your professional learning as a teacher?
- How is the role of supervisor recognised in your school/more broadly amongst
  profession?

**MAPPING THE ACTIVITY SYSTEMS OF SUPERVISING TEACHERS**

The following analysis of the focus groups concentrates on three tensions within
their professional practice with implications for the supervision of student teachers,
as described to us by supervising teachers who contributed to these discussions.
These tensions are symptomatic of the way teachers simultaneously engage with
the managerialist discourses of contemporary educational policy and the highly
situated nature of their experiences as members of particular school communities.
From an activity-theoretical point of view, these teachers are grappling with a
fundamental contradiction within the broad activity system of contemporary
educational provision: the local and particular needs of learners (children, families,
student teachers, professional colleagues) versus the unitary representations of
learning in schools, centres, and teacher education that are currently circulating as
educational policy. We explore these tensions through three sets of questions that
have been prompted by an analysis of the focus group conversations. These
questions relate to the communities of interest served by teacher education, the rules that guide knowledge production in fieldwork settings, and the division of labour in conceptualising alternative models of fieldwork supervision.

1. What communities of interest does teacher education serve? More specifically, how do we simultaneously prepare student teachers to operate within a local policy environment whilst also equipping them to take their place in a globalised teacher workforce?

Tensions with respect to the communities that teacher education serves emerged in the focus group discussions when the primary school teachers invoked the Victorian Early Years program. This system-wide initiative that the Victorian government maintains is grounded in quality research. Although this claim has been challenged by a number of researchers and classroom teachers (Davidson & Perkins, 2000), the teachers involved in the discussions repeated it several times. For them, the apparent lack of knowledge about Early Years shown by pre-service teachers was a sign of the distance between their university studies and the professional demands they face in schools:

I ask [students on fieldwork] about the Early Years Program, third and fourth year students ... [but] ... no, it's not being taught in universities. And I get frustrated because I feel that this is an important component of a teaching classroom, you know, practice. And our students, our graduates ... are coming to us and they know very little about something that is really the substance of our classroom teaching at this particular time, even in the junior schools. And I think it's really important they get that instruction in university and come out with it and feel that – oh yes, I know what she's talking about ... [Teacher A, Primary focus group #2].

This teacher is positioning policy-makers alongside teachers as key players in the education community. By implication, teacher educators are outside this community, something that was made explicit when another primary school teacher shared this anecdote:

I had a student that told me – because I actually said the same thing, 'Do you know about Early Years? – and this particular student said that they went to a lecturer here at Monash and said, 'Why aren’t you teaching us about Early Years?' and his response was, 'It'll be out in a couple of years, I don’t need to'. So it's supposed to be latest practice but the lecturers don't appear to be up with what the latest practice is [Teacher B, Primary focus group #2].

Subsequent comments introduced another layer of complexity into the discussion of Early Years and other government initiatives:

I was told that they weren’t implementing it because it was an Australia-wide teaching practice [that] you learn at university and Early Years is Victorian. So they haven’t implemented it because teachers, once they’re trained, should
be able to teach anywhere in Australia and the Early Years is specific to Victoria [Teacher C, Primary focus group #2].

Potentially, teacher education serves communities at local, national and international levels. So the alleged lecturer’s comment related by one of the teachers (that teacher education should enable pre-service teachers to do more than implement Early Years) should not be read simply as a refusal to engage with policy issues at a local level. There is a much higher proportion of international students in faculties of education than when these teachers completed their initial teacher education. Increasing mobility amongst young professionals generally since the 1970s also means that many young teachers spend the early years of their careers off-shore. Teacher preparation must respond both to these demographic pressures, with their inherent pedagogical implications, as well as to the local conditions that frame the majority of fieldwork settings. This means that teacher education faculties need to work alongside schools and supervising teachers in order to understand the internationalisation of teacher education (including the best ways to work with international students in fieldwork settings), and how issues of internationalisation and globalisation can be addressed within local settings.

Yet these supervising teachers’ frustration about the lack of knowledge shown by pre-service teachers with respect to Early Years also reflects a situation where teacher educators are arguably failing to grasp the pressures that teachers have been under to implement such policies. Whether the university lecturer’s reportedly cynical view of the likely life-span of Early Years makes this lecturer out-of-date, as claimed, or highly up-to-date, the comment exposes a significant disjunction between the professional world of teachers and that of university lecturers. The research underpinning Early Years is largely vindicated by the fact that it has been translated into a system-wide policy initiative, even though the knowledge claims made by the research have never been subjected to rigorous scrutiny of scholarly debate. However, the government’s claim that Early Years is research-based was repeated several times by these teachers in the course of their discussions. What should we make of this?

To simply dismiss Early Years, as some of our university colleagues are reported to have done, is to turn a blind eye to developments in recent years which have produced a changing relationship between research, policy, and professional practice of the very kind that we have been discussing. Wave after wave of top-down reforms have resulted in a radical restructuring of teaching and learning in schools and other educational settings. There is evidence that, while teachers continue to believe in the value of practitioner research and the situated nature of their professional knowledge (as we shall see in the next section), they are increasingly obliged to meet the demands for accountability embedded in such reforms (Early Years, for example, is linked to improved performance on standardised literacy tests). They are increasingly obliged to accept ‘knowledge’ that is arriving from elsewhere, via the conduit of policy reform (cf. Connelly & Clandinin, 1995).

With respect to the question of internationalisation or globalisation, this produces a tangle of conflicting perceptions and practices, both on the part of
supervising teachers and teacher educators. On the one hand, Early Years might indeed be judged to be a parochial matter in the face of the changing demographic of student teachers and their increasing mobility. On the other hand, as a significant example of managerial control and accountability, Early Years is hardly parochial at all, but takes its place alongside similar forms of managerialism that are currently being implemented by neo-liberal governments across the globe (cf. Mahony & Hextall, 2000). Teachers themselves are the focus of such reforms, and those reforms cannot simply be dismissed because they fail to meet what teacher educators deem to be rigorous research standards. Teachers are obliged to operate within an increasingly complex policy environment, and teacher educators should be trying to understand that environment better, tracing the network of relationships that constitute this activity system, and the forms of subjectivity that such an environment produces.

2. What are the rules that frame knowledge production within teacher education? Can such (largely generic) knowledge about teaching and learning productively engage with the knowledge and practice of teachers within their local settings? What is the status of locally-generated professional knowledge in relation to the policies and programs that constitute teacher education?

The teachers’ descriptions of the specific demands posed by their workplace conditions revealed a further, related tension with respect to their role as supervising teachers. For these teachers, their concrete, everyday experiences in their educational setting were a key source of professional insight, influencing the way they think about the supervision of students:

Teacher A: [Pre-service students] need to also have exposure to different types of schools. They come to our school and they’ve been in similar schools and they think teaching’s easy.

Teacher B: Where are you?

Teacher A: [Names a primary school in a wealthy bay-side suburb of Melbourne].

Teacher B: Teacher heaven.

Teacher A: It is; it’s teacher heaven. But it’s not ...

Teacher B: I mean, when we all came out we did the [names two schools in low socio-economic status areas of Melbourne] and all of those, which was fantastic as a young teacher but it [the school in the wealthy area] is lovely-land.

Teacher A: Yeah.

Teacher B: And it’s not real because they need to have a contrast…not only in grade levels, but, you know, this is what happens in other schools too.
Like, do the nice schools, because they have issues too, they have lots of issues [Primary focus group #2].

These teachers have experienced the contrasts between schools located in different socio-economic communities, and they know that each type of setting offers significantly different opportunities for professional learning for pre-service teachers, not to mention teachers who are at other stages of their careers. In their conversations, they repeatedly affirmed the situated nature of any professional learning, and the fact that 'knowledge' constructed in one location cannot automatically be transferred to another setting. This perspective contrasts with their insistence on the value of a system-wide reform like Early Years, providing a small window on the types of contradictions and complexities that these teachers must negotiate in the course of their professional lives. Yet there is no doubt that the professional knowledge of these teachers, as it is represented through key artefacts, rules, and practices in specific educational settings, provides a rich resource for pre-service teachers, if it can be made explicit to them in ways that have meaning for them.

The supervising teachers described the ways in which they attempted to make these local complexities explicit to students, outlining how they established their relationship with a student new to the school or early childhood centre:

Initially ... you know, where's the toilet, where's the coffee, where do you put your bag, that sort of thing. We'll clarify their hours, what I expect from them in their dress, what they need to bring like lunches and sunhats, that sort of basic stuff. Any paperwork I need to sign to get it started, I'll get that all organised. A bit of a run through of what's happening in the room at the moment, what activities we're doing, what theme we might be working on, any [particular] children that might be coming in the door today ... [Teacher A, Early childhood focus group].

Although this teacher describes these practices as 'basic stuff,' she is clearly articulating to the student the rules, tools, and divisions of labour that frame professional practice in her preschool. The factors which she mentions cannot be treated simply as elements of the context in which she is operating, as though her professional practice can somehow be conceptualised apart from the social relationships and physical spaces in which it occurs. Her day-to-day professional practice should, rather, be understood as a function of these relationships and conditions, an action that forms an integral part of the activity of early childhood education as it is enacted within this setting (cf. Leont'ev, quoted in Engestrom, 1999/2003, p.4).

Many of the teachers in the focus groups also indicated how they attempted to find out about the student teachers' lives, including their education and work experiences, thus avoiding treating them as blank slates (an important professional maxim, whether you are working with children, adolescents or adults):

I usually find out something about the students, what they're doing, what course they're doing, whether they've come straight from school, or whether
they've worked first. You know, try to get to know them a bit personally ... Usually there's five staff within our centre and usually we would make sure that the first lunchtime we would sort of all sit down and have a chat, a really casual sort of thing [Teacher B, Early childhood focus group].

Supervising teachers from large school settings described going to considerable lengths to position student teachers as professional colleagues and as members of an extended professional community:

I'll take them down the street for a coffee and tell them [that] probably the next day they're going to be interviewed by me in front of house. So, over that coffee, I'll get some kind of picture of them and then say, 'Well, I'll start by asking you, and then I'll ask you', just do a Tom and Jerry act ... So they get to know me a little better. And they quite enjoy telling [the children] where they've been, what they've done ... this in front of maybe a hundred kids, some of whom are going to see them in the classroom [Teacher A, Secondary focus group].

[In] the staffroom we're very mindful of making sure that they're welcomed formally. And beforehand, at a staff meeting, everyone knows who's coming into the school and who is having that student ... So we make sure that all of us, if we've got something that we do in a particular theme or policies, we make sure that we give them everything from every area that we can to fully arm them ... [Teacher A, Primary focus group #1].

For the supervising teachers, this initial emphasis on introducing students to the school or centre is clearly more than a polite formality, but a vital element in establishing a context for a generative professional dialogue with student teachers. The web of organizational practices, the physical spaces of buildings, the social relationships that constitute any institutional setting — all these dimensions frame the highly localised and situated nature of professional learning as pre-service teachers and their supervising teachers experience it. First and foremost in the minds of these supervising teachers is the need for pre-service teachers to establish good relationships with the children or students in their care, implying a larger vision of schooling than a managerialist focus on measurable outcomes.

This recognition of the situated nature of professional knowledge and practice exposes a fundamental contradiction between the activity systems of schools and the assumptions about professional learning reflected in many teacher education settings. We need only think of the way that teacher education students are usually assessed individually, particularly in fieldwork settings, to be confronted by a common practice within teacher education that flies in the face of the situated nature of professional learning, which these teachers were jointly articulating (and enacting) in the course of their conversations. Although increasing attention is being given to the socially distributed nature of professional learning within the research literature (Russell, 2002/2004), we continue to be mindful of a set of practices within teacher education that reduces learning to teach to an aspect of individual growth, somehow situated in the mind of the student. Indeed, the much
celebrated 'reflective practitioner' (Schön, 1983) has arguably come to convey such a model of professional learning, at the expense of acknowledging the socially situated nature of any learning — this is despite the value of Schön's original attempt to formulate an epistemology of practice that might do justice to the complexities of learning within professional settings (cf. Kemmis, 2005).

The perspectives of supervising teachers show such an individualistic model to be false, particularly during fieldwork. Respondents to the survey overwhelmingly prioritised 'establishing relationships with children', 'classroom management', and 'personal organisation' as skills and abilities for student teachers to develop during fieldwork. Supervising teachers who participated in the focus groups emphasised personal dispositions, including a capacity for reflection, curiosity, enthusiasm, risk-taking, and even 'madness' in students who strive to generate a truly dynamic and engaging classroom situation. In speaking of these dispositions, which acknowledge the sophisticated knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to 'read' classroom settings, as well as an ability to handle the social relationships of any educational setting, these teachers repudiate the notion that classrooms are constituted by children who present with relatively stable and measurable variables or outcomes. Instead, they reveal the way in which the development of student teachers is a fundamentally intersubjective, and therefore risky, undertaking and that each student teacher has a personal stake in participating in the pre-existing community of the classroom.

3. How might we better conceptualise the division of (intellectual) labour during fieldwork? How can we move beyond the novice/expert model that underpins most teacher education policies and programs? Can fieldwork provide a space for the co-construction of knowledge and collaboration between supervising teachers, pre-service teachers, and teacher educators?

The teachers who participated in the focus group conversations consistently positioned themselves as co-constructing knowledge with student teachers, rather than treating those student teachers as novices who were being 'trained'. Supervising teachers saw themselves as not only supporting students, but learning through their exchanges with them:

I enjoy taking [student] teachers because I feel that it does help my teaching a bit and I think it's important to get younger teachers in and let them have a meaningful contribution to what we're doing as well ... [Secondary teacher A, Teleconference focus group].

Some participants acknowledged that students made a direct contribution of new theories and practical suggestions:

I really enjoy the input that they bring into the classroom. And they challenge me because it makes me look at my teaching practice too [Primary teacher A, Teleconference focus group].

For others, the benefits were more to do with not becoming stale:
When you’ve been teaching a long time ... you just go into remote control and often once you’re on your set topic or your theme or whatever, it really makes you think ... And because you’re modelling for the time when they’re observing you, you have to really think about, okay, am I doing all the things I really should be doing and I often even think that I expect the student teacher to do [Secondary teacher B, Teleconference focus group].

One supervising teacher even related the experience of speaking with a student teacher about the dubious value of prepared worksheets for children, only to look down into her own hands at the worksheets she had just photocopied for her class. Her sense of irony in relating this anecdote showed how experienced teachers reflexively monitor their practices as they negotiate classroom situations from day to day.

Comments such as these prompted the research team to ask whether our own teacher education program actively supported such co-constructive partnerships or remained locked into a model which positioned student teachers as novices – a paradoxical conclusion, given the way the rhetoric of reflective practice typically challenges any hierarchical relationship between professional knowledge and academic knowledge, affirming the way both experienced and inexperienced teachers learn by reflecting on their professional practice.

This paradox leads us to consider again the division of intellectual labour and professional practice that actually frames fieldwork settings. What is the nature of the knowledge of classroom teachers? How might this knowledge be successfully appropriated by pre-service teachers? How might university-based teacher educators draw on this knowledge during interactions around fieldwork? How might classroom teachers draw more effectively on the knowledge that teacher educators bring to the fieldwork situation? How might the various participants in these overlapping activity systems expand the object of their work in order to redefine knowledge about teaching, and about learning to teach? These questions are not new. They have been asked many times (they are arguably at the heart of Schön’s original investigation into the nature of professional knowledge and inquiry). Our research, however, suggests that we are presently experiencing a failure of imagination on the part of all the key players in teacher education (teacher educators, policy-makers, and teachers) in understanding and reframing fieldwork as a site where all participants can learn from their exchanges with one another.

CONCLUSION

The use of fieldwork as a pedagogical strategy, designed to support the learning of pre-service teachers, has traditionally assumed that supervising teachers and teacher educators share a common object, at least where the practicum is concerned. Our exploration of supervising teachers’ perspectives on fieldwork suggests that this assumption of a common object is highly unstable, or at least more complex than first thought. This is due not only to the contradictions inherent within schools, early childhood centres, and teacher education settings as distinct
activity systems, but the contradictions that are emerging between these systems. Each sector has been subjected to a series of reforms that have radically recast the way teachers and teacher educators respectively engage in and understand their work.

Paradoxically, although these reforms might loosely be grouped together as examples of managerialism, they have not produced a greater understanding across the sectors of teacher education, schools, and early childhood settings as participants in each sector have grappled with the language of performance appraisal and other forms of accountability. To the contrary, each sector seems to be finding it increasingly difficult to appreciate the pressures that the other is experiencing; the example of the way teachers and teacher educators view the Early Years initiative in Victoria shows the kind of breakdown in communication that can occur. A further paradox is that current policy discourses increasingly construct teaching and learning in abstract, generic terms, without any acknowledgement of the situationally specific nature of these activities as they are enacted in diverse settings. Such managerial discourses mediate the professional practices of both teachers and teacher educators in powerful ways, preventing either sector from satisfactorily grappling with the deeply contextualised nature of professional learning and jointly developing a knowledge that might do justice to the complex ways in which professional learning is bound up with professional practice. Cultural-historical activity theory provides not only a means of identifying the contradictions within and between the sectors. It also offers a way of seeing those sectors differently.

Our study has brought home to us that neither the rhetoric of teacher educators nor that of teachers captures the complexity of the professional practices in which we are presently engaged. Teachers and teacher educators alike need to develop a new language that enables us to grapple with the present and future complexities posed by the concrete situations in which we are working. Together, we need to develop a better understanding of the socially mediated nature of learning, and to resist the way managerial ideology and processes position people as abstract individuals and treat the social and historical conditions in which they work as being of no real consequence when it comes to engaging in productive forms of pedagogy.

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