Ethics in Partnership in Teacher Education

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Recently, teacher education has confronted pressures to intensify both quantity and quality of "clinical experiences," resulting in both increased breadth and depth of partnerships supporting both K-12 and higher education. However, potential ethical issues have not been explored. This article reports results of a nationwide study examining ethics in partnership in teacher education in a representative sample of 248 institutions of higher education. Eighty-nine field directors and 61 clinical faculty responded to an ethics survey initially developed by the American Psychological Association (APA) from the APA Code of Ethics. Results indicated that respondents did encounter ethical issues in their work. A small percent reported facing pressure to act unethically, although a great majority perceived that issues were handled ethically. Implications include the need to examine and understand common dilemmas encountered in the field, and consider developing field-specific guidelines and strategies.

Introduction

Recently, teacher education has been under significant and increasing pressure regarding its treatment of field experiences within its preparation programs. In 2010, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education's (NCATE) Blue Ribbon Panel famously declared the need to turn teacher preparation "upside down" by centering preparation on hands-on fieldwork instead of traditional college coursework (NCATE, 2010). This declaration was followed by the reorganization of teacher education accreditation in 2013 and a renaming and redefining of field experiences as more intensive "clinical practice." Such practice was defined as "a high powered instructional strategy that is designed to enable the [teacher candidate] to make connections between professional coursework and the interpersonal and context-bound setting of the actual workplace" (Rust & Clift, 2015, p. 48-49). This new emphasis in teacher preparation was echoed in publications by both the National Education Association (NEA) and Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) (CCSSO, 2012; Nutter Coffman & Patterson, 2014). In sum, the movement has reinforced the need for stronger partnerships in support of expanded and higher quality placements that are mutual beneficial. Contextualized mentoring and closer connections with university coursework are key to meeting these goals (Hollins, 2015; Zeichner & Bier, 2018).

Although teacher education is notoriously slow to respond to calls to reform, some evidence indicates that these pressures are indeed having an impact on both theory and practice in the field. Changes identified in the professional literature include increased length of experiences, increased intensity of supervision, and the introduction of new roles for individuals connected with supervising these experiences. The clearest example can be seen in a national trend toward extending the length of student teaching from one to two semesters, even though experts caution

that raising quantity unaccompanied by concern over enhanced quality will not result in better prepared teachers (Arnett-Hartwick, 2015).

Additionally, more attention is being placed on the use of technology to enhance quality as well as quantity of supervision. Technology in this case ranges from various types of virtual supervision, eliminating the need for university supervisors to be onsite, to real-time coaching that gives teacher candidates immediate, intensive feedback on their performance (Liu, Miller, Dickmann & Monday, 2018; Schaefer & Ottley, 2017). Further, the traditional roles in field experience, also called the triad (teacher candidate, cooperating teacher, and university supervisor) may be shifting. In 2010 Zeichner used the terms "third space" and "boundary spanner" to refer to roles that exist across K-12 and higher education to support teacher candidates' growth. This work is not clearly defined, and individuals responsible for the work have various titles such as "clinical faculty" or "liaison." Several recent studies have noted important trends in this area such as shifting identifies and supervisory roles, and an addition of a fourth person to the traditional triad (Allen, Perl, Goodson, & Sprouse, 2014; Burns, Jacobs, & Yendol-Hoppey, 2016; Williams, 2014).

Clearly, both theory and practice appear to have been impacted by the changing environment in teacher preparation. However, along with pressure and change comes increased ethical responsibilities. In 1997, Ungaretti and colleagues cautioned that teacher educators "may immediately consider the practical and political implications [of dilemmas in the field] but often overlook the ethical principles applicable to many teacher education dilemmas" (p. 271). They referred to the myriad codes of ethics written to guide educators in the field, but noted a lack of guidance for teacher educators. They concluded their article by recommending development of such a code by a consortium of organizations (Ungaretti, Dorsey, Freeman, & Bologna, 1997). It is unclear whether or if such a code was ever developed. Instead, the research literature on ethics in teacher education seems to coalesce around questions of how teacher educators can best teach professional ethics to teacher candidates (e.g. Maxwell, 2017), rather than the ethical decision-making of teacher educators themselves. Therefore, the present study considers the ethical impact of current pressure and change in teacher preparation.

Methodology

Field directors and clinical faculty from 248 selected institutions of higher education were invited to participate in this study. They were asked to respond to a three question survey originally developed to identify ethical dilemmas encountered by psychologists (Pope & Vetter, 1992). Data analysis involved simple descriptive statistics and a chi square analysis to compare answers between the two populations surveyed.

Participants

Participants in this study were field directors and clinical faculty from 248 randomly selected teacher preparation programs in the United States. Clinical faculty and field directors were selected because of their likelihood to be involved in partnership work with schools (e.g. Zeichner, 2010). The 248 institutions were selected randomly out of the estimated 701 with undergraduate preparation programs in secondary education that were identified by National

Council on Teacher Quality in 2017 for a quality review. Secondary education programs were selected because they are likely to have more and diverse programs than those with elementary programs. The sample size was calculated with a 95% confidence level and confidence interval of 5 (Sample Size Calculator, 2019).

Instrumentation

The survey instrument used in this study was originally developed by Pope and Vetter in 1992 for a national ethics survey of members of the American Psychological Association (APA). The purpose of this study was to obtain guidance for revisions to the APA's Code of Ethics, original approved in 1952 and subsequently revised through similar surveys of its membership (Pope & Vetter, 1992). The instrument was used as a foundation for subsequent studies examining ethical dilemmas encountered by school psychologists (Dailor & Jacob, 2011; Jacob-Timm, 1999). These two studies built upon the original study by asking participants to identify and describe particular types of ethical dilemmas they might encounter in their particular field. Dailor and Jacob (2011) created an 88-item survey that also covered ethics training, perceptions of preparedness, and problem-solving strategies they used to address issues.

The original survey was used for this study because of its longstanding use and its brevity. It posits three year/no questions that were reproduced in full in the current study:

1. Within the past two years, have you or colleague faced an incident [in K-12 schools*] that was ethically challenging or troubling to you?
2. Did you or your colleague encounter administrative pressure to act unethically with respect to this incident?
3. Was the incident resolved ethically?

Procedure

An attempt was made to locate directly the contact information for Field Directors or an equivalent title (clinical director, clinical coordinator, field coordinator, clinical liaison) at each institution. Of the 248, contact information for 14 could not be found, and another eight requests were sent to generic college email addresses (8.9% of the total sample). With respect to clinical faculty, only 29 of the 248 institutions listed clinical faculty or equivalent (clinical professor, clinical instructor, field instructor, instructor of practice, professor of practice) (11.7%). These 29 institutions of higher education had a total of 92 clinical faculty. An email invitation was sent directly to participants with a link to the online survey. One reminder was sent to each population at an interval of one week.

Data Analysis

Simple descriptive statistics were used to calculate overall results, such as the percentage of respondents selecting each response for each question. Chi square tests were used to determine whether there was a difference in response by type of participant (field directors versus clinical faculty).

Results

Overall, responses were received from 89 field directors and 61 clinical faculty, representing a response rate of 35.6% for field directors at 66.3% for clinical faculty. Of these responses, 118 (78.7%) resulted in usable data. Results are reported in the Table. A majority of participants reported that they or a colleague had encountered an incident in the past two years in K-12 schools that they found ethically troubling. Of these participants, a small number reported that they felt administrative pressure to act unethically, with most incidents resolved ethically from the perspective of the participants (85.9%). No statistically significant differences were found in responses to each of the first two questions by type of respondent (field directors versus clinical faculty).

Table 1
Results of Ethics Study

Question	Yes	No
Faced an incident that was ethically challenging or troubling	58.5%	41.5%
Encountered administrative pressure to act unethically	7.7%	92.3%
Incident resolved ethically	89.5%	14.1%

Discussion and Implications

The results of this study indicate that university-based teacher educators responsible for partnership work with schools do appear to be encountering ethical dilemmas through that work. In this case, a majority of respondents reported that either they or a colleague encountered such an incident. Although few reported administrative pressure to act unethically in this situation, nearly 15% felt the incident was not resolved ethically.

Given that ethical dilemmas do appear to be present in partnership work, it is difficult to determine "acceptable levels" for purposes of drawing conclusions in this study. For example, is it acceptable that 7.7% of participants reported administrative pressure to act unethically? Is an "ethical resolution rate" of 86% acceptable? Perhaps it is not possible to attain perfect results. Regardless, standards are needed in order to interpret results. However, in a comprehensive literature search of ethics in teacher education, search results yielded research only in the area of the teaching of ethics and ethical decision-making to teacher candidates. The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) includes a wealth of information on their site on ethics for teacher candidates, including ethics statements from multiple national professional associations guiding the teaching profession. Further, AACTE established the Clinical Practice Commission (CPC) in order to create guidelines for mutually-beneficial partnerships between institutions of higher education and K-12 education. Their ten Proclamations (AACTE, 2018) address important principles for effective partnership but do not address ethics directly.

The primary implication of this study includes the very basic need to address ethics in teacher education among the professional community that now includes a growing number of field-based personnel. We may e addressing these issues in our roles as teacher educators by making future teachers aware of ethical standards in the teaching profession and holding them accountable for

displaying particular professional dispositions, but we may not be addressing ethics for our own profession.

Nearly 75 years ago, the American Psychological Association (APA) decided to write an ethical code based on the work of a committee that had been handling informal complaints. Their subsequent survey of their membership assisted them in revising the code to fit dilemmas encountered by their constituents. Revisions were to be based on results of subsequent surveys to take into account changes in the field and culture (Pope & Vetter, 1992).

Perhaps as a field we might consider beginning a similar process. The results of this study point strongly to the existence of ethical dilemmas encountered by teachers educators in working in partnership with K-12 schools, but does not provide data on the incidents themselves, such as some of the subsequent literature reviewed for the current study that reported types of incidents and problem-solving strategies used in the field to create ethical resolutions to these dilemmas. The first step is to understand more about the incidents experienced by teacher educators working in the field and some of the nuances of these situations. We know that the relatively recent emphasis on clinical experiences as the heart of teacher education has resulted in increased complexity of the field. "Boundary spanners" like clinical and other field-based faculty, whether employed by institutions of higher education or by K-12 schools, have defined "third spaces" in the field. The goal of this work is to create seamless teacher preparation models that move freely across setting and align theory and practice (Zeichner, 2010).

Some research has attempted to understand more about this work and how newcomers to the traditional "triad" (teacher candidate, cooperating teachers, and university supervisor) have shifted roles and created opportunities to rethink processes and outcomes in teacher preparation (e.g. Burns, Jacobs, & Yendol-Hoppey, 2016; Hollins, 2015). We also have a solid knowledge base surrounding some of the problems and challenges encountered in partnership work, such as uneven quality in field experiences, disconnected course and field work, and lack of respect and recognition for the complex work of mentoring (Hollins, 2015; Zeichner & Bier, 2018). However, discussion of ethics or ethical dilemmas such as the ones referred to in the present study are not addressed. Guidelines and strategies in this area do not appear to exist. With the relative newness of these roles and the changing landscape in the field, one could argue that understanding ethical issues needs to begin at ground zero.

Limitations and Conclusion

The major limitation of this study is the lack of data about the actual incidents referred to by participants, and the fact that it is reliant on perceptions. Therefore, no independent analysis can be conducted on the type or variety of dilemmas encountered. Limitations of the sample are also significant, including the difficulty in capturing the population of individuals employed by institutions of higher education but responsive for significant work in K-12 schools (Zeichner, 2010).

Despite these limitations, results do point to a particular need to understand ethical dilemmas that may be occurring in partnership work. Some participants reported encountering administrative pressure to act unethically, and about 14% believed that the incident in which they or a colleague

were involved was not resolved ethically. As a field, teacher education needs to consider how to study ethics and how to ensure ethical practices are identified and adhered to in a part of the profession that is evolving rapidly.

Author Note
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