

## **Supervision for Social Justice: Supporting Critical Reflection**

**By Jennifer Jacobs**

### **Introduction**

Throughout the literature, teacher education is often described as being based on a specific tradition (Zeichner, 1993), paradigm (Zeichner, 1983), or agenda (Zeichner, 2003). Examples of these descriptions include: behavioristic, personalistic, inquiry-oriented, social reconstructionist, academic, developmentalist, and social-efficiency (Zeichner, 1983, 1993, 2003). These approaches are closely linked to the beliefs and assumptions about the nature and purposes of schooling, teaching, teachers, and their education that gives shape to specific forms of practice in teacher education (Zeichner, 1983, p. 3). Zeichner (2003) refers to one of the three major approaches of teacher education as the social justice agenda, described as an approach that sees both schooling and teacher education as crucial elements

in the making of a more just society (p. 507). What would a socially just society look like? Often philosophers and researchers spend more time describing the injustices in society than about how social justice could be described (Wade, 2004). However, Adams, Bell, and Griffin (1997) offer:

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A socially just society is one in which all members have their basic needs met and all individuals are physically and psychologically safe and secure, able

### *Supervision for Social Justice*

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to develop to their full capabilities and to participate as effective citizens of their communities and nation. (as quoted in Wade, 2004)

In order to achieve social justice, there needs to be a leveling of the playing field so that equitable practices provide all people with an equal chance for success.

In education it seems as if disparities and injustice are becoming an everyday part of America's classrooms. One reason is the ever-increasing diversity of students as seen in changing demographics (Cochran-Smith, 2004). One out of every three students enrolled in elementary and secondary schools is from a racial or ethnic minority background, one in seven children between the ages of 5 and 17 speaks a language other than English, and one in five children younger than 18 lives in poverty (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Projections show that by 2035 the population of children of color will make up the statistical majority and by 2050 make up 57% of the population (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Within these changing demographics are disparities in educational outcomes for students that have or do not have certain advantages related to race, socioeconomic status, language, and culture (Gay, 1998; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). In *Savage Inequalities* (1991), Jonathan Kozol recounts many of the inequities that remain within the educational system. Due to fewer resources, lack of funding, inadequate facilities, and unqualified teachers in their schools, poor and minority children often receive an inferior education compared to children from upper and middle socioeconomic classes.

As preservice teachers begin their careers in these ever-changing classrooms riddled with inequities, they will face many challenges. According to McIntyre and Byrd (1988), many preservice teachers express concern about their lack of preparation to work in classrooms comprised of culturally, linguistically, racially, and socio-economically diverse student populations. Often novice teachers experience a 'cultural mismatch' as they walk into classrooms with students who have extremely different life experiences and backgrounds from their own (Achinstein & Barrett, 2004; Zeichner, 1992). This happens quite often since 90% of public school teachers are white (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Teacher education programs will need to find ways to 'sensitize and enable prospective teachers to understand diversity and to develop an equity-oriented pedagogy' that provides all students with an equal chance of success (Darling-Hammond, French, & Garcia-Lopez, 2002, p.1). Teachers concerned with equity give students what they need to succeed, while teachers who care about equality provide all students with the same support and resources regardless of need.

One area of teacher education that will need to respond to this increasingly multicultural society is field placement supervision. The supervision of preservice teachers usually takes place through the venue of classroom teaching observations, pre- and post-observation conferences, and teaching seminars (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1982). Often the role of a preservice teacher's supervisor is simply to facilitate that teacher's assimilation into the school culture without the encourage-

ment to question or change traditionally accepted school practices (Richardson-Koehler, 1988). Should a supervisor simply train teacher teachers to maintain the status quo? In order to educate teachers for these changing school contexts, there is a need to ìrealign supervision with an entirely different set of meanings and purposesî (Bowers & Flinders, 1991, p. 3). Supervision with the goal of social justice is committed to achieving equity within schools by providing support to preservice teachers as they to begin address issues related to demographic differences. This paper will focus on the literature surrounding supervision that addresses these issues related to social justice. It will be referred to as supervision *for* social justice denoting that the ultimate purpose or rationale for this type of supervision is the creation of a more just society.

## Methodology

The literature for this review comes from journal articles retrieved from a search of three databases (Academic Search Premier, ERIC, and Wilson Education Full Text) and from a variety of book chapters. Search terms included: *supervision, instructional/clinical supervision, field placements/experiences, preservice teachers, and teacher education*. When appropriate they were combined with terms such as: *social justice, multicultural, equity, critical, culture, and diversity*. The result of this search demonstrated a clear lack of literature relating supervision to issues of social justice or equity. Often there was one article written by an author on a topic related to supervision and social justice with no follow-up work, and there was a lack of literature from the past five years. In these articles, the concept of critical reflection continually surfaced as a tool that was advocated in order to achieve a supervisory practice focused on social justice and equity. Therefore, the search was expanded by using the terms *teacher education, prospective teachers, and critical reflection*. The literature in this review will be used to answer the following questions:

- ◆ How can supervision for social justice be defined?
- ◆ How can critical reflection be used to frame supervision around issues of social justice?
- ◆ What are tensions associated with supervision for social justice?

## How Can Supervision for Social Justice Be Defined?

The few items related to supervision that focuses on issues of equity and social justice are categorized as *multicultural* (Abt-Perkins, Hauschildt, & Dale, 2000; Davidman, 1990; Grant & Zozakiewicz, 1995; Page, 2003), *critical* (Smyth, 1985, 1988; Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1982), or *culturally responsive* (Bowers & Flinders, 1991; Gay, 1998). The first task is to uncover how each of these individual terms is defined and relates to one another. Table 1 synthesizes the supervision literature, articulating its purpose, assumptions, and the role of the supervisor.

### *Supervision for Social Justice*

Table I. Summary of Literature on Supervision Related to Social Justice.

| Orientation           | Authors  | Purpose  | Assumptions  | Role of Supervisor   |
|-----------------------|--|--|--|--|
| Multicultural         | Abt-Perkins, D., Hauschildt, P., & Dale, H. (2000); Davidman, P. (1990); Grant, C. A., & Zozakiewicz, C. A. (1995) | To move multicultural education knowledge into action by bringing the influence of culture (race, ethnicity, gender, class, religion, and ability) on learning to the forefront during field experiences.      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Multicultural knowledge is necessary.</li> <li>◆ Multicultural education must permeate a teacher education program (not be an add-on).</li> <li>◆ Competing definitions of multicultural education are problematic.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Model a multicultural way of being and teaching.</li> <li>◆ Meet with other supervisors to reflect on practice.</li> <li>◆ Develop tools and strategies to bring cultural issues to the forefront during planning, supervision, teaching, and assessment.</li> </ul>  |
| Critical              | Smyth, J., W. (1985,1988); Zeichner, K. M., & Tabachnick, R. B. (1982)   | To move beyond the technical aspects of teaching so teachers can see how their practice and the practices of schools are embedded and linked to the greater social and political context.                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Questioning the status quo will lead toward school change.</li> <li>◆ Schools are arenas for socialization.</li> <li>◆ Technical aspects of teaching are a means to greater social purposes.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Act as a facilitator or critical friend.</li> <li>◆ Increase teacher sensitivity to the link between schools and greater social themes.</li> </ul>  |
| Culturally Responsive | Bowers, C. A., & Flinders, D. (1991); Gay (1998)   | To recognize how teachers' cultural and language are influential in inhibiting or promoting understanding within the classroom and to help teachers adapt their practices to be more inclusive and responsive. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Classrooms, teachers, and supervisors are not culturally neutral.</li> <li>◆ Classrooms are related to the larger socio-political world.</li> <li>◆ Culture and language are often taken-for-granted in classrooms.</li> <li>◆ Cultural mismatches between students and schools influence achievement.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Make cultural and language patterns in the classroom more explicit to teachers.</li> <li>◆ Examine own cultural and language patterns and equitable practice.</li> <li>◆ Gain a knowledge base about cultural diversity and effective pedagogical skills.</li> <li>◆ Help teachers examine their content, practice, and materials for cultural equity.</li> </ul> |

As can be seen, the amount of literature related to supervision framed in terms of social justice and equity is limited and most is not very recent.

### ***Multicultural Supervision***

Davidman (1990) describes multicultural supervision as a tool to help teachers begin looking at their teaching with a multicultural perspective. This multicultural perspective involves taking aspects of a student's culture (race, ethnicity, gender, religion, SES, and disability) into account as a variable in the student's learning process. Davidman explains that many students have problems in school because there is a conflict between their culture and the culture or attitudes, beliefs, and values of the school. Teachers need to use their knowledge about students' cultures to design equitable learning experiences for all students. Teacher education programs may provide teacher candidates with multicultural knowledge through coursework, but often do not support the candidates putting this knowledge into action within their field experiences. Multicultural supervision attempts to develop the skills and knowledge that teachers will need to design, implement, and evaluate a multicultural curriculum (p. 45). During the supervision process, multicultural supervisors regularly push teachers to reflect on their decisions about content and teaching strategies, using a multicultural perspective focused on identifying values and assumptions embedded within schools and their own practice.

Grant and Zozakiewicz (1995) engaged in empirical research with 32 student teachers enrolled in a teacher education program that stressed reflection and responsiveness to diversity. They found silences or an absence of discussion and questions about diversity and equity in all areas of student teaching including supervision (p. 264). Grant and Zozakiewicz believe that one reason for this silence is a lack of knowledge about multicultural education and limited opportunities to see and experience multicultural education practiced in the field. Other possible reasons for multicultural silence include preservice teachers' feelings of powerlessness, lack of support, and lack of time. Grant and Zozakiewicz explain that supervisors must be about knowledgeable and committed to multicultural education and be willing to engage in their own professional development and self-reflection. They also suggest that multicultural supervisors: model and teach with a multicultural perspective, engage teachers in discussion about what multicultural education means, and help move multicultural education into action.

Abt-Perkins, Hauschildt, and Dale (2000) engaged in a self-study of their own practices as supervisors to answer the question, "What challenges—personal, contextual, and theoretical—do supervisors need to address to increase their effectiveness in addressing cultural issues?" (p. 29). The rationale for engaging in multicultural supervision was their belief that cultural differences between prospective teachers and their students result in lower academic expectations, ignorance of cultural biases in curriculum, and difficulty forming relationships with students. They also felt insecure in their own experience and knowledge of diverse popula-

### *Supervision for Social Justice*

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tions and wanted to support each other in their quest to bring up these topics with their preservice teachers. As a group they engaged in correspondence to collectively analyze their experiences, bringing issues of equity and cultural awareness to the forefront in supervisory conferences, modeling and encouraging critical reflection for preservice teachers, creating contexts that would be conducive to transformative conversations, and addressing their own biases as supervisors.

#### **Critical Supervision**

In a study of nine university supervisors at a large Midwestern university, Zeichner and Tabachnick (1982) found the existence of three different supervisory belief systems. The practices of three supervisors fell into the category of *technical-instrumental* which emphasized techniques and practices of teaching (p. 43), while four were *personal growth-centered*, which emphasized preservice teachers setting appropriate goals and working toward them (p. 44). Only two of the supervisors demonstrated what the researchers termed a *critical* orientation to supervision (p. 46). Critical supervision stresses the *discovery* of linkages between the action of classrooms and characteristics of schools as institutions, and linkages between classroom behavior and social forces in the community (p. 46). According to Zeichner and Tabachnick, those with a *critical* orientation to supervision still displayed aspects of the other two orientations (technical-instrumental and personal growth-centered); however, they used these characteristics as a means to reach more transformative ends. Those supervisors who displayed a critical orientation worried about preservice teachers being socialized into dominant patterns of behavior in schools. They hoped that through support, the preservice teachers would begin to question the status quo and begin to see how social themes manifest themselves in the classroom (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1982). During conferences and seminars, these supervisors started with the preservice teachers' daily classroom experience in order to draw out the broader social issues and consequences.

John Smyth (1985, 1988) argues for a more critical stance to the practice of clinical supervision in several position papers on the state of supervision. Clinical supervision is often presented as an empowering method of supervision because teachers help set agendas for classroom observations, tell the supervisor what type of data to collect, and then reflect with the supervisor in a post-conference to make sense of the data that has been collected (Cogan, 1973; Goldhammer, 1969). However, Smyth (1985, 1988) turns a critical eye on how the process of clinical supervision is actually being implemented. He believes clinical supervision is often reduced to a form of *teacher surveillance and inspection*, where a supervisor tells teachers what they are doing wrong and how to *fix* it, rather than a process fostering emancipation and teacher autonomy (p. 136). Clinical supervision is often enacted by simply focusing on the technical process of following a cycle (such as pre-conference, data collection, data analysis, post-conference) and trying only to improve teaching techniques. Smyth believes that when this technical view of

supervision practice prevails, untouched are the deeper social questions of the ends of education that have to do with truth, beauty, justice, and equality and the maintenance of the status quo is emphasized (Smyth, 1985, p. 6). A more emancipatory stance toward supervision involves supporting teachers in looking at their practice problematically and examining how the actions in their own classroom context are embedded in the larger historical, social, and cultural context (Smyth, 1988). The supervisor assumes the role of a facilitator or critical friend in helping teachers achieve these goals and may in fact be a teaching colleague (Smyth, 1988).

### ***Culturally Responsive Supervision***

Culturally responsive supervision provides a rationale for what supervisors should be attending to in the classroom while observing and working with teachers. Bowers and Flinders' (1991) theory of culturally responsive supervision reads:

Provides teachers with a third-party vantage point that may help them recognize how language and cultural patterns that they take for granted (and thus are not aware of) influence the learning environment of the classroom. The other responsibility of the supervisor is to help the teacher clarify and adapt professional judgment in a way that takes cultural differences into account. (p.7)

Bowers and Flinders have developed a handbook to support supervisors in enacting a more culturally responsive supervision for use with both preservice and inservice teachers. Included in their handbook are observation guides related to language and culture. These guides can inform the supervisory process by providing areas to focus on during observations, an organizational framework for observation field notes, and a way to provide feedback to teachers.

Culturally responsive supervision is informed by Bowers and Flinders' (1991) belief that supervision cannot be separated from the larger purposes of education and the larger socio-political world. They discuss how language and culture are often taken for granted in the classroom but must be highlighted because they can inhibit or promote the learning of students. Often language and culture are not viewed as a concern for supervisors during observations. Bowers and Flinders suggest that supervisors should look for language and cultural patterns representing historical and cross-cultural perspectives, complexity of language, metaphorical language, cultural stereotypes, nonverbal communication, student involvement, participation patterns, and gender bias. They also suggest that certain language and cultural patterns dominate classrooms and are seen as the norm but may conflict with non-dominant cultural norms. Examples of these cultural and language patterns that are valued in schools include: telling stories in a linear pattern, competition, individual achievement, and literate forms of discourse. Culturally responsive supervision does not eliminate many of the traditional concerns of supervisors such as classroom management, lesson sequence, etc. but places them in a broader context of culture and language. However, because of a teacher's cultural

### *Supervision for Social Justice*

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embeddedness and underdeveloped ability to see patterns independently, supervisors must focus on culture and language.

In the *1998 Handbook of Research on School Supervision*, Geneva Gay reminds readers that the real purpose of supervision is to improve the performance of all students. Since there is a gap between the achievement of students from racial and ethnic minorities and European Americans, supervision that is culturally responsive and gender sensitive is needed. In order for supervisors to enact culturally responsive supervision, they must have an understanding of achievement patterns among diverse student populations, of explanations for these achievement differences, of cultural characteristics that students within the classroom may display, and of inequitable school practices. This knowledge is necessary if supervisors are going to help teachers increase student achievement and identify areas of inequitable practice. Gay talks about the level of commitment that is needed by supervisors to engage in this type of supervision:

If supervisors are not personally and professionally committed to promoting gender and ethnic equity within the domain of supervision, getting teachers to do so in the classroom will be impossible because supervisors, like teachers with students, cannot lead, direct, guide, or facilitate in terrains they themselves do not know, value, or do. (p. 1218)

Culturally responsive supervisors help teachers by modeling cultural responsiveness, assessing instructional materials for gender and cultural equity, examining video recordings of teachers at work to see possible inequities in their teaching, and providing supplemental readings on various cultures and ethnicities (Gay, 1998).

In summary, supervision for social justice can begin to be defined by examining the supervisory orientations described as multicultural, critical, and culturally responsive. Even though these orientations may have slight differences, they all advocate questioning and problematizing the present conditions and practices in schools to foster greater equity. There is often a concentration on attending to equity in relation to race, class, ethnicity, language, and gender. One major concept these orientations advocate as a tool for supervision is the promotion of critical reflection within preservice teachers. Therefore, this paper will now move toward a discussion of how to encourage critical reflection within the supervisory process.

### **How Can Critical Reflection Be Used To Frame Supervision around Issues of Social Justice?**

The term reflection permeates the language of many teacher education programs as an important goal in their mission to educate prospective teachers (Adler, 1991; Smyth, 1989; Zeichner, 1993). Hatton and Smith (1995) have developed an operational framework that identifies a developmental sequence of five levels of reflection and describes how each of these levels can be characterized. Level 1 is termed



*technical rationality*, which is not really reflection but simply a reporting of events. This level is seen as an important aspect of initial teacher development and is a precursor to the other levels. Level 2 is identified as *descriptive* and includes providing reasons for one's actions based on personal judgment or the professional literature. Level 3 is *dialogic* reflection and is a form of deliberate cognitive discourse within one's self that includes weighing different viewpoints and exploring alternatives. Level 4 is described as *critical* reflection involves thinking about the effects of one's actions on others, taking the broader historical, social, and/or political context into account, and questioning one's practice. Level 5 is described as *contextual* and involves being able to apply levels 1-4 as new situations arise.

Critical reflection is related to many of the purposes and assumptions described in the supervisory orientations related to social justice. It attempts to broaden the vision of reflection by encompassing concerns about ipolitical/ethical principles underlying teaching and the relationship of schooling to the wider institutions and hierarchies of society (Smyth, 1989, p. 4) and often includes issues such as social justice, equity, access (Howard, 2003). Critical reflection serves as a tool to question what has been taken for granted in schools and learn how to analyze how issues such as race, ethnicity, and culture influence students' learning experiences (Howard, 2003). The role of the supervisor for social justice is to guide or coach the preservice teacher through the process of critical reflection. Fostering critical reflection involves helping preservice teachers look closely at themselves through examining their specific teaching context and requires modeling by a skilled supervisor.

Suggestions for the cultivation of teacher candidates' critical reflection were found in the multicultural, critical, and culturally responsive supervision literature. This information was then supplemented by searching the literature on critical reflection for techniques that supervisors could employ as well. Themes in the critical reflection literature included: critical reflection about self, critical reflection about context, and modeling critical reflection.

### **Critical Reflection about Self**

Nieto (2000) makes the argument that colleges of education need to provide prospective teachers of all backgrounds with the opportunity to question their own biases and begin to look at issues of privilege. In terms of supervision, this means helping preservice teachers begin to look critically at their own identity and experiences with prompting questions such as: "Who am I? What do I believe? Does who I am and what I believe have ramifications for the students I teach?" (Howard, 2003, p.199) Programs may begin with an autobiography assignment that induces students to "reflect on how the cultural context and conditions in which they grew up have influenced what they believe about education, learning, schooling, and teaching" (Daring-Hammond, French, & Garcia-Lopez, 2002, p. 203). The personal biography can help preservice teachers understand where their teaching practices and beliefs may have originated (Smyth, 1989).

### *Supervision for Social Justice*

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Many scholars (Abt-Perkins et al., 2000; Grant & Zozakiewicz, 1995; Howard, 2003) have argued that university supervisors also need to engage in self-reflection about how issues of race, ethnicity, gender, and class have influenced their own lives. It is especially important for white teachers and supervisors to explore their own white racial identity and the privileges and power whiteness provide (Grant & Zozakiewicz, 1995). Constructing a supervisory philosophy can be used to help supervisors examine the beliefs and assumptions they bring into the supervisory situation and the goals toward which they are working (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1982, p.51).

Engaging in critical reflection with other supervisors who have the same supervisory mission can also be an important growth process for supervisors (Abt-Perkins et al., 2000; Grant & Zozakiewicz, 1995). Abt-Perkins et al. (2000) conducted an analysis of their letter correspondence and field notes related to enacting multicultural supervision:

Only such conversations will allow us to find our blind spots and silences, to name our hesitations and fears, and to sustain the kind of dialogue with teachers that helps us all become more culturally responsive and responsible. (p. 47)

Supervisors may wish to invite colleagues to observe pre- and post-observation conferences in order to get feedback and engage in discussion about their practice (Grant & Zozakiewicz, 1995). The process of critical reflection does not need to develop just within preservice teachers, but within their supervisors as well.

#### **Critical Reflection about Context**

Abt-Perkins, et. al (2000) found that attempts to engage preservice teachers in critical reflection about injustice in general or the relationship between schools and the broader society were not very effective. Instead, helping preservice teachers shape their *own* problems in their *own* classroom contexts along cultural dimensions resulted in greater success (p. 45). For example, if a preservice teacher discussed having difficulties with student engagement, the supervisor might bring up questions about the student's race, gender, ethnicity, class, etc. or how the preservice teacher's beliefs or assumptions might be playing into the problem. The researchers also found that preservice teachers were more successful with critical reflection when the supervisor brought up an issue related to the preservice teacher's authority in the classroom or relationships with students. When preservice teachers could immediately see the short-term benefits and how the issue related to their context and current needs, they were more likely to engage in critical reflection (p. 40).

Similarly, Zeichner (1995) realized that many students did not respond to the inclusion of critical content in the student teaching experience. Therefore, he stopped trying to impose critical content but began to facilitate critical reflection by analyzing the preservice teachers' own classroom issues and experiences (p. 17). The preservice teachers' own action research projects became the content for the class. For example, one of the preservice teacher's projects revolved around her

difficulties managing the problematic behavior of certain boys in her classroom. This action research became the topic for class and took a critical turn when the class came to the realization that all the boys with the behavior problems were African American. Zeichner took the opportunity to engage the class in a critical discussion about race and then followed up with readings on cultural responsiveness by authors such as Gloria Ladson-Billings and Lisa Delpit. Successful critical reflection may be more likely when preservice teachers are able to look *close to home* in their own classroom contexts.

Davidman's (1990) multicultural teacher education program at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo has developed several tools for multicultural supervisors to use in order to support preservice teachers' critical reflection about their context. One tool is a *classroom demographic profile* that preservice teachers create using socio-cultural data about the students in their classroom (p. 47). This information can then be used in planning lessons, choosing instructional methods, and as data for pre- and post-conferences. Another tool, the *letter of context*, is written by preservice teachers to give to their supervisor before each classroom observation (p. 49). This letter includes a description of the lesson, requests for feedback, and a final section entitled *cross-cultural observations* in which preservice teachers identify 4-6 students that can be considered culturally different from themselves. They write up a summary that highlights how they are working to increase rapport with these students, possible problems and successes, and how they are providing meaningful instruction to these students (Davidman, 1990).

### ***Modeling Critical Reflection***

Preservice teachers may not have experience thinking about classrooms and schools in a way that problematizes and questions what is traditionally accepted or the status quo. Therefore, part of the responsibility of the supervisor is to model a critical way of thinking. One approach for modeling critical reflection is to use storytelling in which supervisors disclose their own stories about teaching students from different backgrounds and dilemmas (Abt-Perkins et al., 2000). When supervisors make themselves vulnerable by *passing along dilemmas*, they are able to show preservice teachers how to *live with tensions* (Abt-Perkins et al., 2000, p. 44). This also helps to dispel the idea of a supervisor as an instructional expert and shows that the supervisory relationship is safe and non-judgmental. Modeling can also occur during interchanges in a dialogue journal where the supervisor can pose questions to the preservice teacher to prompt critical thinking about his or her practice (Abt-Perkins et al., 2000; Zeichner, 1995). A trusting atmosphere established and maintained through dialogue journals may encourage preservice teachers to begin raising questions about their own practice (Grant & Zozakiewicz, 1995).

In addition to modeling a critical way of thinking, supervisors may also help preservice teachers actually see the injustices and inequities that exist in schools. Supervisors can help *identify opportunities* where issues of social justice and

multicultural education could be extended and/or included (Grant & Zozakiewicz, 1995, p. 272). During observations, supervisors can be more conscious of responses and reactions by students from diverse cultural backgrounds and bring this data into the supervisory conference (Davidman, 1990). It is also important for supervisors to look below the surface during teaching observations. Abt-Perkins, et al. (2000) described a classroom observation that on the surface appeared to exemplify quality teaching; however, when looked at more critically, the relevance of the subject matter and appropriateness of instructional strategies may have been inappropriate for students from various cultural backgrounds.

Further modeling can take place in seminars that accompany the field experience (Grant & Zozakiewicz, 1995; Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1982). The university supervisors can use this seminar time to model the type of teaching and critical reflection that they advocate (Grant & Zozakiewicz, 1995). Simply advocating more equitable practices is not good enough; supervisors need to be living embodiments of their own messages (Gay, 1998, p. 1218). The student teaching seminar can also be a place where the supervisor can support preservice teachers as they move their critical reflection into action by developing teaching units and pedagogical strategies that are more equitable and culturally responsive (Grant & Zozakiewicz).

Critical reflection can be a tool for supervisors to use to help preservice teachers begin looking at issues of diversity and social justice in classrooms. In order for such critical reflection to occur, supervisors must first help preservice teachers begin to look critically at themselves. Next, supervisors need to be responsive to the needs of preservice teachers by starting this reflection within the context the preservice teachers know best. Throughout the supervision process, the supervisor can facilitate preservice teachers' critical reflection by acting as a guide who models and lives this way of thinking. Finally, in order to be successful in this kind of supervision, supervisors need to engage in their own professional development and critical reflection about issues of social justice in their own lives and teaching.

### **What Are Tensions Associated with Supervision for Social Justice?**

Supervision can serve as a vehicle to engage preservice teachers in critical reflection and consequently help prepare them to teach the diverse students in their future classrooms. However, many issues must first be considered. One major tension is that supervision for social justice may not be appropriate for teachers at the preservice level. At this point in their careers preservice teachers are often overwhelmed and may relegate multicultural issues to a backseat in favor of simply learning how to survive and thrive during a regular school day schedule (Grant & Zozakiewicz, 1995, p. 268). Grant and Zozakiewicz found that many of the silences concerning multicultural and social justice issues were due to the preservice teachers' perceived lack of time for anything beyond the daily concerns of

teaching (p. 268). Can we realistically expect preservice teachers to add issues of diversity and injustice to their already overflowing plate of concerns?

Another tension is that engaging in critical reflection can be very difficult because preservice teachers will have to honestly face and be challenged about their own assumptions and beliefs about people from diverse racial, cultural, and economic backgrounds (Howard, 2003). They may need to answer questions that include: iHave I ever harbored prejudiced thoughts towards people from different racial backgrounds? If I do harbor prejudiced thoughts, what effects do such thoughts have on students who come from those backgrounds?i (Howard, p.198). Preservice teachers may feel uncomfortable talking about these issues due to the fear of offending others, appearing racist and culturally insensitive, or being politically incorrect (Howard). They may also question whether critical reflection about issues of social justice is possible when they are a guest in another teacher's classroom (Grant & Zozakiewicz, 1995, p. 268). Abt-Perkins, et al. (2000) worried that in order to practice more multiculturally, our students (preservice teachers) would have to question status-quo practices and take risks at a very vulnerable point in their careersi (p. 39). Can preservice teachers be expected to take the risk of engaging in critical reflection when they are often the least powerful players in the triad (cooperating teacher, university supervisor, preservice teacher)?

Even if preservice teachers are ready to talk about issues of diversity and social justice, they may not have enough knowledge to effectively engage in these discussions when they reach their field experience (Grant & Zozakiewicz, 1995). In Dinkelman's (2000) study of fostering critical reflection in secondary social studies preservice teachers, he found that many of the teachers lacked content knowledge about how to implement critically reflective teaching. One of his participants wanted to create a social studies unit on Mexico that went beyond food, clothes, and holidays but had difficulties knowing where to start and what content to teach instead.

Gore and Zeichner (1991) argue against the claim that preservice teachers are unqualified to examine critical issues because of their narrow focus and understanding of classrooms. Even with preservice teachers' limited knowledge, they still need to see that ipolitical and moral issues are not separate from classroomsi (p. 132). The authors argue that issues of inequity often fade into the background of classrooms and that preservice teachers may require support foregrounding these issues early and continuously in their teacher education program. If diversity and inequity are not brought up in the preservice years, then will there ever be a catalyst for discussion during the inservice years?

Another tension about supervision for social justice concerns the role of the supervisor. Should a supervisor simply be someone looking for quality teaching practices that result in student learning? Or should a supervisor also be working to help change the inequities that are present in our society? Who should be setting the agenda for teaching observations? Bowers and Flinders (1991) argue that the supervisors not only help preservice teachers solve their problems through supervi-

sion but also help them formulate these problems in the first place. They argue that due to the taken-for-granted nature of cultural knowledge, teachers often require a third-party perspective in order to gain fresh insights into what we and others take for granted (p. 25). Dinkelman (2000) participants reported that their motivation to engage in critical reflection was tied to the university supervisor's attention to critically reflective issues. Many appreciated being asked difficult questions about their rationale for their teaching choices.

Should supervisors see their jobs as just supporting preservice teachers in their everyday struggles with teaching, or should they be a positive irritant in regard to critical issues? (Abt-Perkins et al., 2000, p. 39) There is often a tension between the supervisor's commitment to caring for their students (preservice teachers) and the supervisor's commitment to the cause of creating a more socially just and equitable society (Abt-Perkins et al., 2000; Gore & Zeichner, 1991; Zeichner, 1995). For Gore and Zeichner (1991), this became an issue in their teacher education program as preservice teachers chose topics for action research projects. The supervisors wanted to allow candidates to choose their own topics and have a voice in the development of their project, but at the same time certain projects and research questions contained elements of racism or sexism that were not recognized by the preservice teachers. In this case, whose agenda should dominate the supervisor or the preservice teacher? There is also a tension about bringing up issues when preservice teachers and their cooperating teachers feel that nothing in the classroom is problematic. How do we open conversations about race, class, or gender differences when all seems to be going smooth in the classroom? (Abt-Perkins et al., 2000, p. 38) How can these issues be addressed authentically when they are not part of the normal conversations found in schools? This unfamiliar questioning may be interpreted as threatening to the preservice teacher and the supervisor can be seen as unsupportive.

A final tension is that many university supervisors do not have experience teaching or living with diverse groups of people, so they may question their own knowledge and feel uneasy about bringing up issues of social justice during supervision (Abt-Perkins et al., 2000). If supervision for social justice is to become a priority for their teacher education programs, universities must be willing to provide professional development for supervisors so they can become more culturally responsive and knowledgeable. Optimally, universities will recruit and hire university supervisors who are committed to encouraging and guiding preservice teachers to become more critical and multicultural in all aspects of their practice (Grant & Zozakiewicz, 1995, p. 270).

## **Conclusion**

The orientation of supervision for social justice comes out of traditions of supervision labeled as multicultural, critical, and culturally responsive. All of these orientations advocate supporting teachers in their efforts to critically reflect and to

problematize their teaching. However, critical reflection is a complicated endeavor. The addition of critical content and reflection into teacher education field experiences has not been very promising. Grant and Zozakiewicz (1995) studied their own teacher education program, which was committed to reflection and diversity, and found complete absences of or very limited attention to multicultural issues during the student teaching experience. The few examples of multicultural education usually consisted of surface-level lesson plans about the facts, fairs, foods, and festivals associated with various cultures (Grant & Zozakiewicz, 1995, p.265). After several years of course evaluations, Zeichner (1995) found his attempts to infuse critical content into the preservice teacher seminar were unsuccessful and interpreted by students as another academic hoop unrelated to their work in the classroom (p.17). The literature shows that fostering critical reflection is multifaceted and that it involves preservice teachers engaging in critical reflection directed at themselves before reflecting more broadly about their classroom or society. Also, preservice teachers may have more success starting off critically reflecting about their own specific classroom context and needs before moving to injustices related to school and society. Finally, future teachers may not have the experience to engage in critical reflection without the support from someone such as a university supervisor who can model this way of thinking.

The diversity and inequities in our classrooms are likely to increase in the years to come; therefore the overwhelming tensions associated with supervision for social justice should not become an excuse or roadblock to give up on this idea. Supervision that highlights issues of social justice and equity cannot be dismissed.

Future teachers cannot, on their own, solve the many societal issues confronting the schools, but they should certainly know what those issues are, have a sense of their own beliefs about those issues, and understand the many ways in which those issues will come alive within their school's walls. (Liston & Zeichner, 1996, p.xi)

At the moment, most of the literature on both critical reflection and supervision for social justice is limited and often consists of descriptive pieces. More empirical studies are needed, especially those that investigate the outcomes of this supervision on the views and actions of preservice teachers (Adler, 1991). More importantly, the influence of supervision for social justice on student learning must be explored as well. Is supervision for social justice a worthwhile endeavor? If the goal of teacher education is to prepare teachers to maintain the status quo, then maybe it is not the right choice. However, if the goal of teacher education is to create teachers who are working toward the success of all students and the possibility of a more equitable future, then perhaps it is a step in the right direction.

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### *Supervision for Social Justice*

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