

A Field Supervisor's Blueprint for Optimal Distance Supervision Experiences

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ABSTRACT

High-quality field experiences are one of the most critical components of effective special education teacher preparation, with research showing they directly impact teacher effectiveness and student outcomes (Bussey & Lay, 2023; Dunst et al., 2019). As teacher preparation programs evolve to meet changing demands, new models of field supervision are emerging, offering promising benefits while introducing new challenges. This article examines how thoughtfully structured field supervision, supported by technology and collaboration, can enhance the quality of feedback, promote reflective practice, and improve outcomes for special education teacher candidates. A practical framework is presented to help university field supervisors guide special education teacher candidates through a successful, well-supported hybrid field experience. These insights aim to inform programs serving candidates in rural or remote areas who seek to elevate the impact of their field supervision practices.

KEYWORDS

Educational technology, field experiences, hybrid field supervision, special education teacher preparation, video-based feedback

Mae, a field supervisor for a special education teacher preparation program at a large 4-year public university, had become accustomed to using a hybrid approach to support special education teacher candidates (SPED TCs) during their field experiences at PreK-12 partner schools. The era of exclusive in-person field supervision experiences was a thing of the past, especially after COVID-19 and the recent budget cuts made to her department. To complement the in-person practicum, Mae's program used a video-based learning platform that allowed SPED TCs to record and upload teaching videos for feedback.

Although Mae saw the clear benefits of blending in-person and virtual field observation experiences, there were also unexpected challenges. Without formal training or clear guidance on how to use the video-based learning platform, some SPED TCs struggled with the technological aspects, such as recording and uploading their videos with clear audio, positioning the camera to capture a full view of the instruction or classroom, and minimizing student distractions during recording. These challenges brought forth added stressors that disrupted the field experience and made it difficult for Mae to assess SPED TCs' instructional performance adequately. Mae was certain that there had to be a more proactive and structured way to set SPED TCs up for a successful hybrid field experience, which would also allow her to assess their instructional practices effectively.

The educational experiences of children with disabilities are shaped by the expertise of their teachers, which is determined by the quality of their teacher preparation programs (Bussey & Lay, 2023). As emphasized in a meta-synthesis conducted by Dunst et al. (2019), field experience with supervision from a university field supervisor is a platform for teacher candidates (TCs) to acquire instructional skills and

is the most critical factor in effectively preparing future teachers. Dunst et al. concluded that spending more time in field supervision experiences resulted in better quality teaching and improved student outcomes. Field supervision experiences are also crucial in boosting new teachers' commitment to remain in the field (Grobart & Zepp, 2024; Smith, 2018). While quality field supervision experiences remain a pillar of many special education teacher preparation programs (TPPs), recent political trends in higher education and calls to integrate technology into the field supervision experiences of TCs may compel these programs to reevaluate traditional field supervisory models that rely primarily on in-person observations.

Recent political shifts, particularly billions of dollars in proposed budget cuts to public and higher education programs tied to anti-Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion efforts (PBS News, 2025), have resulted in layoffs of university and public-school personnel involved in teacher preparation, as well as disruptions to teacher field experience programs (Lieberman, 2025). These political shifts are expected to impede special education teacher preparation efforts and exacerbate the ongoing special education teacher shortage. The combined impact of financial pressures and guidance from accrediting bodies, such as recommendations to incorporate annotated virtual observations (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2016; Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, n.d.), and the CEEDAR Center's endorsement of e-coaching as essential (Dieker et al., 2014), underscores the need to shift from traditional supervision models to more innovative, technologically-enhanced supervisory approaches that offer instructional benefits and potential cost-savings.

Traditional field supervision models primarily rely on in-person observa-

tions and feedback (Callaway-Cole & Kimble, 2021), requiring SPED TCs to reflect on their teaching based on memory recall (Van Boxtel, 2017). These traditional field experiences can also limit the frequency of field supervisor contact, particularly for TCs placed in diverse or geographically dispersed areas (Paulsen & Schmidt-Crawford, 2017). The logistical complexities of scheduling in-person visits and the reliance on memory-based reflection can limit the effectiveness of feedback and hinder TC growth (Van Boxtel, 2017). Hybrid supervision models can address the inefficiencies of traditional in-person approaches by reducing costs (Schmidt et al., 2015), saving time, and enhancing the quality of candidate reflections (Van Boxtel, 2017). Hybrid models also foster more frequent field supervisor interactions and provide more timely and useful feedback for TCs (Paulsen & Schmidt-Crawford, 2017).

Distance supervision, which involves using technology to supervise TCs across locations (Schmidt et al., 2015), offers significant financial and time-saving advantages compared to traditional in-person methods. When supporting SPED TCs in remote areas, Schmidt et al. (2015) found that over 4 years, distance supervision costs were substantially less (under \$200,000) than traditional supervision costs (over \$650,000). Similarly, Van Boxtel (2017) observed that field supervisors saved approximately 9 hours in travel time and around \$185 in mileage reimbursement over two quarters. While the cost of the distance supervision platform per person was about the same as the mileage savings, the time saved was reallocated to providing high-quality support to TCs, such as lesson plan coaching, and to advancing the field supervisor's tenure and promotion responsibilities (e.g., research and service). Van Boxtel further demonstrated that embedding distance

supervision into traditional field supervision models could reduce the cost of hiring adjunct faculty by nearly \$4,000 over two quarters. Additionally, the annotation feature allowed supervisors to provide more precise feedback, enabling TCs to review annotated video recordings for deeper reflection and increased instructional confidence. As exemplified in these studies, hybrid supervision models that integrate distance technology offer some compelling advantages over exclusive in-person supervision. These hybrid models are particularly well-suited for special education TPPs facing budget cuts, serving rural or remote areas, or navigating complex logistical challenges (Schmidt et al., 2015), such as dense urban traffic or widespread island communities, like those found in Hawai'i.

Research consistently shows that hybrid approaches to field supervision can yield results comparable to, or even exceeding, traditional in-person approaches in preparing teachers (Paulsen & Schmidt-Crawford, 2017; Smith et al., 2020; Van Boxtel, 2017; Vu & Fisher, 2021). Moreover, leading scholars have specifically recommended embedding distance supervision strategies into field supervision for their positive impact on the learning opportunities of preservice special educators (Billingsley & Scheuermann, 2014). These approaches are also recognized as cost-effective and efficient, particularly in enhancing the quality of special education teacher preparation for candidates supporting high-need students in rural or remote areas (Paulsen & Schmidt-Crawford, 2017; Schmidt et al., 2015; Van Boxtel, 2017).

Despite this growing body of evidence supporting the efficacy and benefits of hybrid field supervision approaches in special education teacher preparation, additional guidance is needed to help programs effectively navigate the tech-

nological and communication challenges (Paulsen & Schmidt-Crawford, 2017; Smith et al., 2020) and to intentionally adapt traditional field supervision practices to virtual formats. To build on the existing literature, we will outline strategies to address technological barriers and provide practical guidance for intentionally implementing hybrid practices to enhance traditional supervision approaches in special education TPPs. This work is especially relevant for programs operating under budget constraints or supporting TCs in remote or logistically challenging settings. To lay the foundation for these strategies, we will first outline the core elements of field experiences for SPED TCs. Then, we will examine the hybrid supervision model, presenting actionable strategies to potentially improve traditional supervision methods for special education TPPs interested in adopting or refining hybrid practices.

THE NUTS & BOLTS OF FIELD EXPERIENCES FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER CANDIDATES

Field experiences include various activities, such as TCs observing experienced teachers and delivering instruction in authentic classroom settings (Cirillo et al., 2020). Typical field experiences that are impactful hinge on three active participants working together, including the preservice SPED TC, the school-level cooperating teacher, and the university field supervisor (Bussey & Lay, 2023). Field supervisors and cooperating teachers are instrumental in developing SPED TCs, as they ideally collaborate to coach and assess how SPED TCs' skills manifest in realistic learning environments and how they critically reflect on their teaching practices.

University supervisors help to prepare SPED TCs for a multitude of roles and responsibilities in the field of special education, which may include

collaborating with stakeholders, designing lesson plans, applying effective classroom and behavior management strategies, utilizing evidence-based instructional practices for students with disabilities, demonstrating professionalism, and developing and implementing individualized education programs. The field supervisor serves as the university's representative, providing observation, support, and guidance to the student teacher through reflective teaching practices. (Bussey & Lay, 2023). Additionally, the field supervisor evaluates how the SPED TC bridges theory to practice by guiding them in applying coursework from their program to the real-world field of special education, where the SPED TC works directly with students who have disabilities (Bussey & Lay, 2023; Grobart & Zepp, 2024). Ultimately, the field supervisor works alongside the cooperating teacher to provide (a) a model of being an effective special education teacher and (b) ample practice opportunities to implement specially designed instruction.

SPED TCs have unique strengths and needs, and field supervisors help them capitalize on and refine these through tailored support, much like special educators create individualized goals for their students (Bussey & Lay, 2023). Field experiences are essential for developing quality special education teachers (Grobart & Zepp, 2024), making the approach to field supervision imperative. Various approaches to field supervision exist, each offering unique benefits.

INTEGRATING TWO MODELS OF FIELD SUPERVISION TO FORM THE HYBRID APPROACH

There are two forms of field supervision experiences used in the hybrid approach. First is the traditional in-person approach, where the field supervisor comes to the SPED TC's applied learning environment in the host

classroom and observes them engaging with students in real-world instructional contexts (Callaway-Cole & Kimble, 2021). Ideally, some of that in-person time is reserved after the lesson for the SPED TC to debrief and consult with their field supervisor and cooperating teacher about how the lesson went (Grobart & Zepp, 2024). Second is the distance supervision approach, where the field supervisor virtually visits the SPED TC's host classroom by observing a live or recorded version of the SPED TC implementing a lesson through a video-based learning platform. Similar to the traditional approach, best practice is for the lesson observation to be followed by a three-way lesson observation debrief between the SPED TC, the field supervisor, and the cooperating teacher (Smith, 2018). However, unlike traditional approaches, distance supervision lesson observation debriefs can be conducted using video-based learning and assessment platforms. These can include time-stamped written feedback from the field supervisor and cooperating teacher, along with reflective comments from the SPED TC embedded throughout the recorded lesson. Additionally, some platforms support asynchronous written and video exchanges between the SPED TC, field supervisor, and cooperating teacher, facilitating ongoing collaboration and feedback (GoReact, 2025a).

A hybrid approach provides SPED TCs with field experiences that combine traditional in-person and distance supervision approaches. Both distance supervision and traditional in-person supervision have their advantages and disadvantages. However, combined, they can help offset the challenges of relying exclusively on one approach.

Advantages of the Hybrid Approach to Field Supervision Experiences

Combining traditional in-person and distance supervision approaches can significantly benefit TCs (Vu & Fisher,

TABLE 1: Comparison of Hybrid vs. In-Person Field Experiences

ASPECT	HYBRID FIELD EXPERIENCE	IN-PERSON FIELD EXPERIENCE
Observation Flexibility	Flexible scheduling: Videos can be reviewed multiple times	Requires travel and scheduling coordination
Feedback Timing	Allows time-stamped, asynchronous, or synchronous video-based feedback; feedback can be provided immediately after the lesson	Real-time feedback is possible during or immediately after the lesson
Access & Efficiency	Fosters frequent contact and accessibility between all stakeholders across multiple locations, including remote and rural placements	Limited by travel time and geographic reach
Rapport Building	Less personal interaction may reduce relationship-building opportunities	In-person interaction supports stronger rapport
Reflective Practice	All stakeholders can rewatch and reflect on lessons independently and/or collectively	All stakeholders rely on memory, notes, or verbal feedback
Performance Anxiety	Reduced SPED TC anxiety without the physical presence of the observer	SPED TC may feel increased pressure during instruction with an observer present
Technology Dependence & Proficiency	Requires access to reliable video and audio platforms, along with resources and time dedicated to developing technology proficiency	Minimal reliance on technology and related training resources during live observation
Authenticity of Teaching	Captures more natural instruction; reduces observer influence (Hawthorne effect)	Teacher and student behavior may be influenced by observer presence (Hawthorne effect)

Note. SPED TC = Special Education Teacher Candidate

2021). Contrary to the perception of virtual learning being less prestigious than traditional in-person instruction (Hodges et al., 2020), TCs who participated in virtual field supervision performed the same academically as those who participated in traditional in-person supervision (Vu & Fisher, 2021). Furthermore, most participants in Smith et al.'s (2020) study preferred a mixed approach of in-person and distance supervision rather than using either method individually, reporting that this combination enriched the quality of their field experiences. Table 1 highlights key differences between the hybrid and in-person supervision approaches, illustrating the distinct advantages and limitations of each.

The ability for SPED TCs to record and upload lessons to distance supervi-

sion platforms has several advantages. First, field supervision in rural settings can be costly and time-consuming, as field supervisors often spend significant time traveling (Schmidt et al., 2015); thus, utilizing innovative technology such as video-based lesson platforms for field supervision presents a promising solution to minimize costs, travel time, and supervision scheduling (Lynn et al., 2022; Smith, 2018). This approach may also be beneficial in non-rural settings, where field supervisors, who often manage large caseloads of SPED TCs (Bussey & Lay, 2023), oversee multiple teacher candidates across diverse geographical locations.

Second, unforeseen weather anomalies, health pandemics (e.g., COVID-19; Cirillo et al., 2020), and the complex

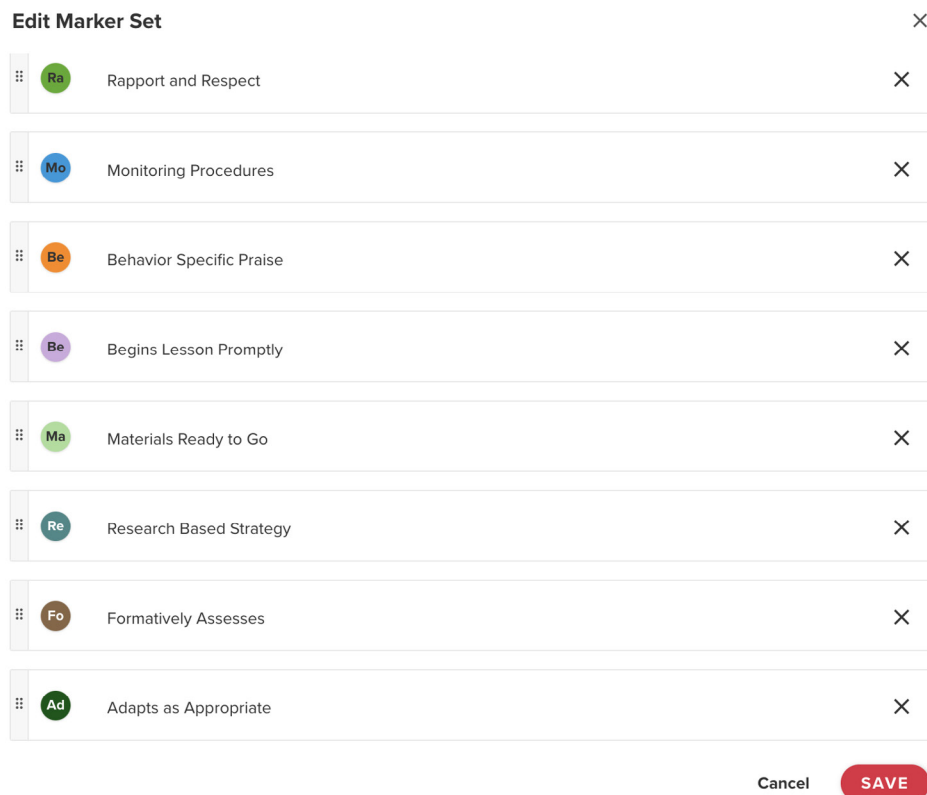
medical needs of some students with disabilities or field supervisors can jeopardize the feasibility of traditional in-person field experiences. Some SPED TCs' field experiences may involve working with students with disabilities who are immunocompromised and have extensive medical needs. Some students with disabilities who have complex medical needs may receive skilled nursing services and require strict visitor policies that prevent outside visitors, such as field supervisors, from regularly coming to the classroom. There may also be instances where field supervisors need to limit their exposure to groups of people in close quarters due to being immunocompromised, particularly when flu and other illnesses are rampant. Access to distance supervision tools can

mitigate harsh weather patterns or illness susceptibilities that prevent field supervisors from traveling to supervise SPED TCs in person.

Third, video-based lesson and assessment platforms support the development of reflective teaching by enabling SPED TCs to repeatedly review recordings of their instruction, helping them to quickly identify and adjust their teaching practices (Lynn et al., 2022). Learning how to be a reflective special educator involves learning from one's own experiences and is critical to the growth of SPED TCs (Bussey & Lay, 2023). Distance supervision incorporating reflective video analysis can lead to more in-depth reflective comments from TCs during collaborative post-observation discussions, helping them make more informed decisions in future lessons when applying feedback (Kaneko-Marques, 2015). Additionally, it enhances their self-awareness as they identify mannerisms and habits by analyzing the recorded lesson, which they might not have noticed otherwise during a non-recorded in-person observation (Smith, 2018). Video-based lesson and assessment platforms offer unique feedback opportunities when a recorded video of the SPED TC's lesson is uploaded, presenting other features that in-person supervision does not provide.

Video-based learning and assessment platforms enable time-stamped feedback and embedded, personalized written comments from the field supervisor and cooperating teacher at precise moments during a recorded lesson, a feature described as efficient and impactful (Smith, 2018). SPED TCs and supervisors alike reported that this feature significantly enhanced teaching performance by offering targeted, actionable insights aligned with specific teaching behaviors as they occurred. Some platforms, such as GoReact, enable users to create and insert prepopulated color-coded

FIGURE 1: Examples of GoReact Prepopulated Color-Coded Markers Aligned to Field Experience Criteria



ed markers when providing time-stamped feedback. These markers serve as predefined comments or cues that can be quickly applied at specific moments in the video, aligning with the program's designated criteria (Lynn et al., 2022). For example, if the teaching criteria set by the program are for the SPED TC to use behavior-specific praise or provide opportunities for students to respond, prepopulated color-coded markers could be used to represent these skills (e.g., see Figure 1; Be for behavior-specific praise and Fo for formative assessment or opportunities to respond). Then, when the field supervisor or cooperating teacher observes the SPED TC demonstrating these practices, they can quickly and efficiently insert the Be or Fo marker to highlight effective implementation or indicate where the skill was absent but could have been beneficial, offering immediate and actionable feedback aligned

with the lesson's timing. Prepopulating these markers allows field supervisors and cooperating teachers to identify the specific criteria they are assessing in the SPED TC's teaching and provide quality, targeted feedback efficiently at precise times during the lesson.

An additional useful element of this type of time-stamped feedback on a previously recorded lesson is that it provides a mechanism for non-disruptive feedback (Smith, 2018). This low-profile feedback approach eliminates the need for the field supervisor to be physically present, potentially reducing the Hawthorne effect, which is the tendency for individuals to alter their behavior when they know they are being observed (O'Leary, 2020). In contrast, in-person observations may introduce conditions that unintentionally modify the authenticity of the observed lesson, potentially impacting the natural behavior of the

teacher and students. For example, a student who is aware of the observer's presence may alter their behavior when an observer is present, thereby impacting the flow of the lesson. While not a flawless solution, distance supervision observation methods that involve the SPED TC not disclosing the presence of an observer watching the recording can help reduce the potential for Hawthorne effects (O'Leary, 2020).

Disadvantages of the Hybrid Approach to Field Supervision Experiences

Several challenges exist when using distance supervision platforms and methods. First, the presence of a recording device can distract the students that the SPED TCs are working with (Smith, 2018). Students, particularly those who experience sensory challenges, may be distracted by the novelty of being recorded, which can shift attention away from instruction. This can create additional challenges for the SPED TC during formal observations, which may already involve heightened levels of stress or anxiety.

Second, the distance supervision approach lacks physical human interaction and can hinder the development of collaborative partnerships, potentially leading to a disconnect between the field supervisor and cooperating teacher (Smith et al., 2020). These individuals must collaborate to provide SPED TCs with quality field experiences (Bussey & Lay, 2023). A disconnect between the cooperating teacher and the field supervisor can result in a lack of quality feedback for the SPED TC. Participants in Smith et al.'s (2020) study noted concerns with delayed, disconnected, or nonexistent feedback on the distance supervision platform. Additionally, SPED TCs in the same study highlighted the value of in-person support and interaction with field supervisors, particularly

at the beginning and end of their field experiences, to enhance their teaching.

Third, technological challenges can prevent the effective use of video platforms for observations (Smith et al., 2020), which supervisors, TCs, and cooperating teachers might see as an added burden or a new skill to acquire. A lack of training for cooperating teachers, field supervisors, and SPED TCs, insufficient updates on new platform features, and limited access to technical support can create barriers. Additionally, issues such as inadequate test runs, poor camera placement, and insufficient audio can impact the quality of recordings, potentially requiring SPED TCs to redo their lessons. These conditions can cause undue frustration for SPED TCs and field supervisors. Poor-quality videos of the SPED TC's lesson, coupled with limited access to their teaching materials (e.g., PowerPoint presentations, worksheets), can restrict the view of the classroom for field supervisors, not allowing them to get the entire context of the lesson. While distance supervision presents challenges, effective strategies exist to overcome them.

When intentionally structured and designed, distance supervision and learning can be beneficial to TCs. Similar to traditional in-person supervision, distance supervision takes time to design and build in learner support (Hodges et al., 2020; Vu & Fisher, 2021).

Field supervisors, some more than others, may need support in several areas related to distance supervision. With varying digital fluency among field supervisors, it is recommended that teacher preparation programs make the necessary support accessible and available to their faculty; support may include professional development in online teaching pedagogies and video-based lesson platforms or learner management system training (Hodges et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2020). When implementing

distance technology, programs should consider the time and resources needed to properly train stakeholders on how to set up and use the technology.

THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS: TAKING STEPS FOR OPTIMAL DISTANCE SUPERVISION EXPERIENCES

Mae contemplated how she would navigate a hybrid model of field supervision by balancing a combination of in-person and video-based distance learning strategies, including virtual recordings, digital tools, and evolving technologies. She knew this approach held real promise, especially for expanding access and offering more flexible feedback. But she also recognized that, without structure and planning, the hybrid model could quickly become overwhelming for both her and the SPED TCs. Thus, Mae began mapping out steps grounded in research to ensure that SPED TCs received the support, clarity, and feedback needed to thrive in this new supervision format. Mae's goal was simple but vital to SPED TCs, realizing the full potential of a rich and meaningful field experience.

Step 1: Provide Orientation and Technical Support for Video-Based Learning Platforms

Unlike in-person field supervision, which relies on real-time, in-person observations, hybrid field experiences require additional preparation to ensure that all stakeholders are equipped to engage effectively with technology-based tools. Without this upfront training and planning, technical difficulties can disrupt the observation and feedback process. As a proactive measure against potential technological challenges, field supervisors, SPED TCs, and cooperating teachers should receive training to orient them to the selected video-based learning platform before its use (Smith et al.,

TABLE 2: Tech Prep Checklist: A Blueprint for Prerecorded Virtual Observations

STEPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL VIRTUAL OBSERVATION	KEY CONSIDERATIONS
Record a virtual classroom tour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include the classroom layout - show how it supports instruction and students' needs • Share classroom routines established for the students and the teacher
Have access to technological support contacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure tech support contacts (email, website, phone) are easily accessible for troubleshooting
Check the recording device for video and audio quality	<p>Laptop/Mobile device webcam</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirm that the video-based learning and assessment platform offers a free recording application for the mobile device <p>External microphones</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider if the distance from the recording device may affect the audio, and adjust accordingly • Record a short test clip to test audio and video quality
Ensure an appropriate camera angle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Position the recording device to capture the broadest classroom view
Obtain consent to record students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirm parent/guardian consent for all students in the recording • Follow any school policy related to recording students
Acclimate students and remove camera distraction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give time for students to adjust to the recording device before starting • Cover the recording screen with dark paper or place the device discreetly to reduce distraction
Upload the video and notify the university field supervisor and cooperating teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Log in to the platform using your teacher preparation program credentials • Locate the correct assignment on the platform • Select and upload the video file, ensuring it meets the size and format requirements • Wait for the upload to finish, then submit and share the video • Notify your university field supervisor and cooperating teacher (e.g., by email) to confirm the video has been uploaded

2020). They should also be regularly updated on new features of the chosen video-based learning platform and have access to technical support contacts for troubleshooting.

Before the semester began, Mae attended a brief training on the video-based learning and assessment platform to learn about new features like enhanced feedback tools and simplified video upload options. Equipped with the confidence to navigate the platform and support her SPED TCs efficiently, Mae led a virtual orientation for her SPED TCs and cooperating teachers, covering video recording and upload-ing procedures, tech tips on camera placement and audio quality, and quick

references for troubleshooting support. During the orientation, Mae shared the "Tech Prep Checklist: A Blueprint for Successful Prerecorded Virtual Observations," as shown in Table 2. The checklist included key steps for setting up the recording environment. While Mae reviewed each step on the checklist, she also answered cooperating teachers' and SPED TCs' questions to ensure they felt comfortable with the video-based learning platform. This early onboarding helped minimize avoidable technical issues and ensured TCs and cooperating teachers were prepared for a seamless start to the practicum, feeling supported and tech-ready.

Step 2: Set Up Prepopulated Markers in Video-Based Learning Platforms

In traditional in-person field supervision, feedback is typically given verbally and or in written notes after an observation. In contrast, hybrid formats also utilize video-based platforms that allow for one-touch feedback through tools like prepopulated, color-coded markers.

Developing these markers based on the criteria SPED TCs must demonstrate during their formal observations can facilitate seamless and efficient feedback (see Figure 1). Although an initial time investment is required to integrate these markers into the platform, their ongoing use will enable field supervisors and co-

operating teachers to efficiently deliver time-stamped feedback, streamlining the feedback process and aligning it with program expectations (Lynn et al., 2022). Additionally, it may help foster a collaborative partnership between the field supervisor and cooperating teacher by supporting the delivery of cohesive, quality feedback that remains aligned with the expected skills while allowing flexibility for open-ended comments. Furthermore, SPED TCs can utilize the markers to evaluate their teaching skills and compare their self-assessment with the feedback provided by their field supervisors and cooperating teachers. This comparison can serve as a valuable foundation for reflective discussions during debriefing and coaching sessions, helping to facilitate the recommended three-way debrief session between SPED TC, the university field supervisor, and school-level cooperating teacher (Smith et al., 2020). When SPED TCs use the markers to self-assess their teaching skills or engage in peer assessment, it can also help them become more familiar with the specific instructional practices they need to demonstrate.

To support more focused feedback and reflection, Mae's program coordinator created and uploaded prepopulated, color-coded markers (e.g., Be: behavior-specific praise; Fo: formative assessment techniques) aligned with key teaching skills into the video-based platform for all SPED TCs, cooperating teachers, and field supervisors to use. Thus, allowing Mae and the cooperating teachers to quickly tag specific teaching moments with time-stamped feedback during lesson reviews. Then, before formal observations began, Mae introduced the markers to SPED TCs and gave them time to practice using the markers with a sample teaching video for future self-assessment opportunities and to deepen their understanding of effective

instructional strategies. During lesson debriefing sessions, Mae used the markers to facilitate reflective discussions, ensuring her feedback aligned with the cooperating teachers she partnered with. This approach reinforced core teaching expectations, fostered collaboration among all supervision partners, and helped SPED TCs gain a clearer understanding of high-leverage practices within their classroom and with their students.

Step 3: Equip SPED Teacher Candidates with a Self-Checklist to Practice Recording a Virtual Classroom Tour

In conventional on-site field supervision, field supervisors gain direct situational insight into the classroom environment by being physically present during lessons, but in hybrid formats, video recordings can limit visibility into important contextual elements. To address this, hybrid models offer a unique opportunity for SPED TCs to provide virtual classroom tours, helping field supervisors gain insight into the learning environment before lesson planning and formal observations begin.

To address the potential challenge of video-recorded lessons not fully capturing the context of the lesson or overall classroom setup, supervisors can ask SPED TCs to test the recording and uploading features of the video-based learning platform by conducting a virtual tour of the classroom. This can introduce the classroom setup to the field supervisor ahead of scheduled observations. Simultaneously, the virtual tour allows SPED TCs to critically consider how the learning environment can best support their students, while also enabling them to conduct a test run to identify and resolve potential technological issues before recording a lesson (Smith et al., 2020).

Smith et al. (2020) also encouraged using a self-checklist (see Table 2) for

SPED TCs when conducting the practice run to ensure a smooth recording and uploading process. This checklist should be provided to SPED TCs outlining important technological considerations for recording and prompts that offer field supervisors a virtual classroom tour. Prompts for the virtual tour may include: (a) How is the classroom physically arranged? (b) What classroom routines are established for students and teachers?, and (c) How do the physical setup and established classroom routines align with the students' characteristics? These prompts can foster SPED TCs' critical thinking for lesson planning purposes and can be adapted and tailored to meet the expectations of various special education teacher preparation programs.

For the technological preparation, Smith et al. (2020) recommended including several key elements on the checklist to enhance video quality. These include setting up the camera well in advance of the recorded or live lesson, allowing students time to acclimate while ensuring a clear view of the lesson, using an external microphone to improve audio quality, and employing a mechanism (e.g., taping a dark colored sheet of construction paper over the laptop screen when recording) to prevent students from seeing themselves during the recording, thereby minimizing distractions. Checklist recommendations for lighting and framing include positioning the camera to capture the widest possible view of the classroom while maintaining clear audio quality. Having more light in front of the TCs than behind them is also important to avoid shadows and ensure a clearer video image (GoReact, 2025b). Background tips offered by GoReact (2025b) include keeping the area free of clutter and standing in front of a solid-colored background, as some cameras do not record clearly against bright white backdrops. Additionally, depending on school policies and procedures,

another consideration to include on the checklist is for SPED TCs to confirm all students featured in the recorded video have video consent release forms on file with parent or guardian approval.

When completing the self-checklist for the virtual classroom tour, we recommend that field supervisors allow TCs to apply this time investment toward their required practicum hours, because engaging with the technology can offer significant long-term benefits. TCs can reflect on quality, time-stamped, annotated feedback from their field supervisors and cooperating teachers (Lynn et al., 2022) rather than just relying on memory from in-person observations (Van Boxtel, 2017). The virtual classroom tour can help TCs become more effective users of technology while also prompting them to think of how to create positive and supportive learning environments for their students. Furthermore, it also enables field supervisors to provide enhanced coaching on lesson planning before the in-person visit due to their familiarity with the classroom.

To ensure a smooth and efficient use of the video-based learning platform, Mae asked her SPED TCs to conduct a brief virtual classroom tour as a test run before recording formal sessions. This time was applied toward TCs' practicum hours, as it fostered reflection on the classroom environment for better lesson preparation and enhanced their technological skills as 21st-century special educators. This approach enabled SPED TCs to familiarize themselves with the recording and uploading process, providing Mae with valuable context about the classroom layout and routines. With this context, Mae could tailor her feedback to the specific dynamics of the learning environment, making her observations more relevant and meaningful. Using a simple self-checklist, SPED TCs practiced camera setup, lighting, and audio quality. Also, Mae

encouraged them to cover laptop screens to reduce student distractions, reflect on how their classroom setup supported student needs, and confirm that media release forms were on file for students appearing in the video. These steps reduced technical hiccups, boosted SPED TCs' confidence, and set the tone for a productive, well-supported field experience.

Step 4: Obtain Lesson Plan and Other Pertinent Materials Before Lesson Review

During in-person field observations, field supervisors can view instructional materials and student work firsthand during the lesson. In hybrid formats, however, limited camera angles and visibility may prevent field supervisors from fully seeing the tools students are using, thus making it essential to receive relevant instructional materials in advance.

The field supervisor should receive the lesson plan along with accompanying lesson materials (e.g., slide deck, graphic organizers, and other tools that students will be interacting with) from the SPED TC ahead of time, not only to offer feedback on how the SPED TC might improve the lesson before it is implemented (Bussey & Lay, 2023) but also to have a preview of the lesson and gain important context. This step serves as a crucial stage-setting element that supports meaningful observation and feedback. Previewing the lesson plan and materials may assist the field supervisor in gaining an overall picture and understanding of what they will observe on the video-based learning platform. This context can fill any gaps due to limited camera angles or visual coverage during the recording. For example, if students work at their desks on a graphic organizer, the camera angle may not capture its details, potentially causing the field supervisor to miss important information needed to provide the SPED

TC meaningful feedback on strategies or accommodations to meet students' needs. Providing the graphic organizer in advance allows the field supervisor to reference it while viewing the lesson, ensuring they can offer more accurate, targeted, and quality feedback.

Mae asked SPED TCs to send their lesson plans and accompanying materials to her ahead of the scheduled observations. Having the materials beforehand allowed Mae to preview the lesson and provide early feedback to support SPED TCs with practical instruction and lesson implementation. During one observation, students worked on a graphic organizer that was not visible in the video; however, Mae could reference her copy and still assess the SPED TC's ability to guide students in using it effectively to ensure her feedback remained accurate and meaningful.

Step 5: Schedule a Three-Way Post-Observation Debrief & Ensure Timely Review and Notifications

In traditional in-person field experiences, immediate post-observation debriefs with all parties can be difficult to coordinate due to scheduling conflicts, travel demands, or the cooperating teacher's instructional responsibilities. In contrast, hybrid field experiences that utilize recorded lessons can offer greater flexibility to schedule structured, reflective post-observation meetings.

The field supervisor should schedule a three-way post-observation debrief with the SPED TC and the cooperating teacher before observing the lesson. This post-observation meeting promotes timely, cohesive feedback, reducing the potential disconnect distance supervision can create between the field supervisor, cooperating teacher, and SPED TC (Smith et al., 2020). This type of coordinated post-observation debrief may occur on the same day of the lesson, yet

should occur no later than a few days after the lesson is implemented and viewed. This allows the field supervisor and cooperating teacher to share unique insights and timely feedback to support the SPED TC's reflection and identify the next steps to improve future lessons.

Another way to ensure that SPED TCs receive timely feedback is to establish an agreed-upon time of when the video will be uploaded and ready for viewing ahead of time, or an expectation that teacher candidates email their field supervisor and cooperating teacher immediately after uploading any recorded lesson to the video-based learning platform. This agreed-upon date or notification practice alerts both parties when the lesson is ready for viewing and may help prevent delays in feedback or the risk of the SPED TCs receiving little to no feedback by the end of the semester (Smith et al., 2020). Additionally, the notifications should be two-way (Smith, 2018), particularly if feedback is given using an annotated time-stamped feature. Once feedback is provided, the field supervisor and cooperating teacher should promptly inform the SPED TC that it is available for review. To maximize the effectiveness of the scheduled post-observation debrief, all parties (field supervisor, SPED TC, cooperating teacher) should review the feedback beforehand to be fully prepared for a productive discussion.

To promote timely and coordinated feedback, Mae scheduled a three-way post-observation meeting with the SPED TC and cooperating teacher before the lesson was implemented. Mae asked the SPED TC to notify both her and the cooperating teacher when the video recording of the lesson was uploaded and ready for review to ensure they could provide timely feedback. Mae also planned to ensure that the SPED TC was notified when feedback from both her and the cooperating teacher was entered

for their review and reflection. Before the post-observation debrief meeting, all parties were asked to review the lesson observation feedback and reflective comments to come to the conversation ready to reflect, problem-solve, and plan the next steps.

Step 6: Observe and Deliver Timely, High-Quality Feedback

During in-person observations, feedback is often provided verbally or through handwritten or typed notes shortly after the lesson, and opportunities for in-depth, time-stamped analysis may be limited. However, hybrid field supervision leverages recorded lessons and integrated platform tools that can allow for more flexible, pointed, and reflective feedback.

If the lesson is prerecorded, Smith (2018) recommended that field supervisors and cooperating teachers view the recording no more than 3 days after being notified that the lesson was uploaded to the video-based learning platform to maintain timely feedback. By utilizing both the time-stamped prepopulated markers and open-ended feedback features of the platform, field supervisors and cooperating teachers can provide feedback aligned with the research-based criteria (Lynn et al., 2022) of the preparation program while also leveraging the open-ended comment feature to personalize feedback. This dual approach supports the diverse strengths and needs of the SPED TCs and is especially beneficial in hybrid models where field supervisors may be managing numerous students across multiple school sites (Bussey & Lay, 2023).

Encouraging the SPED TC to engage with time-stamped comments directly within the video-based learning platform can promote self-analysis and reflection skills (Smith, 2018), a vital aspect of the field experience process that develops high-quality

SPED TCs (Bussey & Lay, 2023; Kaneko-Marques, 2015). Leveraging the SPED TC's reflective comments alongside feedback from the field supervisor and cooperating teacher can promote a more productive three-way post-observation debrief session where all parties collectively reflect on the TC's progress and work collaboratively to establish future goals for continued growth (Smith, 2018). After the three-way debrief, the SPED TC can critically reflect on the discussion and analyze student outcome data to generate a written reflection that identifies detailed strengths and areas for improvement to incorporate into a future lesson. During this reflection process, the SPED TC can rewatch specific points of the recorded lesson, referring back to the time-stamped feedback as needed to develop a more robust and accurate written reflection. Requiring the SPED TC to submit this written reflection within two to three days after the three-way debrief helps capture and solidify their insights while they are still fresh, aligning with Smith's (2018) recommendation to provide feedback within three days of viewing the lesson.

To ensure timely and meaningful feedback, both Mae and the cooperating teacher reviewed the prerecorded lesson within 3 days of receiving the SPED TC's notification. Mae and the cooperating teacher included time-stamped markers and open-ended comments on the video platform to align their feedback with program criteria while also referencing prior debriefing conversations with the SPED TC to personalize it to their strengths and needs. Mae encouraged the SPED TC to engage with the comments from her and the cooperating teacher directly on the platform and reflect in writing after their three-way debrief.

Mae noted that the post-observation debrief helped clarify areas of

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instruction that were difficult to assess through video alone. It also gave the SPED TC a valuable opportunity to explain their instructional decision-making and ask thoughtful questions about navigating unexpected situations that arose during the lesson. This collaborative approach helped the SPED TC feel supported and made the feedback process a key moment for reflection and professional growth. By reviewing the video-recorded lesson and submitting a reflection within three days, the SPED TC could capture their insights while still fresh and use the feedback to guide improvements in future lessons. By following the tech preparation checklist guidelines provided by Mae, the SPED TC successfully captured the lesson, ensuring appropriate reflection and feedback on the instruction. Mae was confident that the SPED TC developed useful technological skills, gained valuable insights to strengthen future instruction, and that the experience supported their overall growth as an aspiring special educator.

LIMITATIONS & CONSIDERATIONS

Further research is needed to explore the impact that hybrid approaches have on the skills of SPED TCs when compared to more traditional methods, while also examining the expenditure of resources needed to effectively implement one approach over the other. While hybrid practices hold considerable potential to enhance traditional supervision models (Smith et al., 2020; Vu & Fisher, 2021) and can offer notable cost, time, and quality benefits, particularly for special education teacher preparation programs with budget constraints supporting teacher candidates in remote or logistically

challenging areas (Schmidt et al., 2015; Van Boxtel, 2017), several critical considerations warrant thorough evaluation before implementation.

A fundamental concern involves internet connectivity and diverse network access policies, especially for programs operating in rural or remote regions. Programs considering hybrid practices that serve rural and remote areas with internet connectivity challenges should consider cellular data networks that present a proven solution for mitigating such connectivity issues (Schmidt et al., 2015).

Beyond infrastructure, programs must carefully weigh the initial time investment required for technology training and preloading instructional markers against the substantial long-term advantages. These benefits encompass improved collaboration and cohesion of program expectations between cooperating teachers and supervisors, alongside sustainable efficiencies such as instant one-click feedback (Lynn et al., 2022), enhanced supervisor feedback quality, and more in-depth reflection practices of TCs (Van Boxtel, 2017). Although many scholars attest to the cost-saving potential of distant technology (Lynn et al., 2022; Schmidt et al., 2015), it is crucial to assess whether these savings, such as mileage reimbursement (Van Boxtel, 2017), adequately offset potential licensing fees for digital platforms. Finally, investments in dedicated technical support and diligent attention to privacy concerns associated with third-party video recording and storage are essential, though these can typically be addressed through appropriate vendor contracts and data sharing agreements. These considerations can help programs make informed decisions on whether hybrid

practices pave a viable and worthy path toward achieving their goals.

CONCLUSION

As special education teacher preparation programs serving remote and hard-to-reach areas adapt to the changing needs of schools, SPED TCs, and the evolving political landscape, hybrid field supervision has emerged as a practical, real-world solution. By blending the relationship-building and coaching benefits of in-person supervision with the flexibility and reflection supported by video-based tools, this approach offers a balanced and responsive way to support special education teacher development.

Field supervisors may face challenges such as scheduling conflicts and travel demands; however, many institutions help mitigate these issues through structured workload credit systems. With thoughtful planning, programs can further support effective supervision by incorporating tools like technological training modules, time-stamped video feedback, self-assessment instruments, and three-way debriefs to create consistent, meaningful, high-quality learning experiences. These supports not only enhance feedback and skill development but also cultivate the reflective practices and collaborative skills that new special educators need to succeed.

Ultimately, hybrid field supervision offers a flexible, scalable solution for today's dynamic educational landscape. When thoughtfully designed and well-supported, it can create a pathway to more equitable, accessible, and effective field experiences. This approach empowers SPED TCs to build the confidence, instructional expertise, and professional mindset needed to meet the complex demands of the classroom and promote positive outcomes for students with disabilities.

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