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# Supervisory discussions during the early childhood education and care student teacher practicum period – the cultural scripts, phases and discourses

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## ABSTRACT

Practicum periods are an essential part of early childhood education and care (ECEC) teacher training. To support a student's learning, they need supervision by an expert ECEC teacher to process and analyse information, and supervisory discussions are key forums for that. The aim of this study is to examine the cultural scripts that are identifiable through discourse analysis of supervisory discussions between an ECEC student teacher and a supervising ECEC teacher. In the analysis we focused on the practical cultural script, phases of the supervisory discussions and the structure of the supervisory relationship. The data comprised recorded supervisory discussions. Three discursive phases can be identified in supervisory discussions: (1) the Launching phase, (2) the Reflective phase and (3) the Closing phase. The supervising ECEC teacher is responsible for conducting the discussion and for extending the topics of supervisory discussion. The results of our study show that practices in the ECEC centre dominate supervisory discussions and the role of educational theory remains at the margins. The results further highlight the need to develop collaboration between universities and ECEC centres.

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Early childhood education and care teacher training, supervisory discussions; script; discourse analysis

## Introduction

Teaching practice is an integral part of early childhood education and care (ECEC) teacher education and central to the development of early childhood education expertise (La Paro et al. 2018). The curriculum of teacher training defines the aims and contents of the practicum and above all, the conception of ECEC teacher expertise and identity build cultural understanding for the practicum. The ECEC teacher practicum periods are implemented in 'boundary spaces' between the universities and ECEC centres. According to Edwards (2010), in boundary spaces it is possible to create new knowledge in collaborations across institutional boundaries. Crossing institutional boundaries allows the connection between theory and practice.

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Prior studies have examined the professional development of pre-service ECEC teachers during practicum periods in a range of settings including the infant-toddler practicum (Recchia and Shin 2010; Rouse, Morrissey, and Rahimi 2012) and in a range of cultural contexts (e.g. Jónsdóttir 2015; Karlsson Lohmander 2015; Onnismaa, Tahkokallio, and Kalliala 2015) and by applying several practicum designs and supervision methods like double supervision (Onnismaa, Tahkokallio, and Kalliala 2015) and an early practicum and horizontal networks (Ribaeus, Enochsson, and Löfdahl Hultman 2020). Studies have also analysed both positive and negative experiences of students during their practicum periods (e.g. McLoone-Richards and Robinson 2020). McLoone-Richards & Robinson's 2020 study revealed that students' positive experiences were closely related to the supportive, inclusive organisational culture and daily interactions with practitioners in the practicum settings. Negative experiences and challenges were related to organisational culture in which students were overlooked or the practitioners neglected their voice.

The most important goal of teacher training is to strengthen the ECEC expertise of student teachers. Karlsson Lohmander (2015) describes how a research-based ECEC teacher curriculum at university offers theoretical knowledge and provides tools for reflection, analysis and ensuring high-quality early childhood education. By reflecting on their experiences during practicum periods, students gradually apply theoretical concepts to their practice and evaluate their theoretical and pedagogical knowledge in the context of practical experiences (Karlsson Lohmander 2015). The process is also influenced by the ECEC centre's working culture, into which the student socialises (Onnismaa, Tahkokallio, and Kalliala 2015).

At the practicum site, supervision is needed to facilitate the student's learning, strengthen their understanding of the work of a teacher in an ECEC centre and perception of themselves as an expert in ECEC. The supervising ECEC teacher has a central role in supervising the student teacher's learning at the ECEC centre (La Paro et al. 2018; Onnismaa, Tahkokallio, and Kalliala 2015). With the help of the supervisor, the student reflects on their practical experiences of teaching practice and expresses by words their implicit or tacit knowledge, which is combined with theoretical knowledge (Kaarby and Marie Lindboe 2016). Supervision of teaching practice is seen as a pedagogical activity, the main goal of which is to strengthen the student's sense of agency and sense of participation (Vehviläinen 2014; Vehviläinen and Souto 2021). Assumptions and beliefs about learning and teaching provide the rationale for the supervisor's approaches (Leshem 2012). However, this is not enough; supervising ECEC student teachers' learning facilitation requires the supervising ECEC teachers to be aware of their supervisory activities (Foong, Bt Md nor, and Nolan 2018). ECEC student teachers' supervision as activity and supervisory discussions have not been extensively studied in the field of ECEC research. The goal of our research is to launch a debate in response to the need for this information.

Our understanding of supervision as an activity is based on sociocultural theories, whereby the community's discourses and the role of the student contribute significantly to learning (see Lipponen and Kumpulainen 2011; Säljö 2004). In our research, we see supervisory discussions as a social activity that is often guided by an unconscious model of action, i.e. a cultural script. The script contains the order of things and relationships between the actors (Gutiérrez, Rymes, and Larson 1995). In this study, we have examined

the cultural scripts that are identifiable through discourse analysis of supervisory discussions between an ECEC student teacher and a supervising ECEC teacher as part of an ECEC sociocultural learning environment.

Our research questions are:

- (1) How are the supervisory discussions between the student and the supervising ECEC teacher structured and phased?
- (2) How is the supervisory relationship between the student and the supervising ECEC teacher structured in the supervisory discussions?

## Supervisory discussions

Supervisory discussions can be considered as being the most important form of supervision in ECEC teaching practice (Liinamaa 2014). From the point of view of sociocultural learning, knowledge is located in discourses, i.e. descriptions and analyses of events and things. Communication processes, such as supervisory discussions, play a central role in learning through which the student acquires knowledge and skills. In supervisory discussions, the supervisor introduces the student to the historically and culturally structured discursive reality of the professionalism and pedagogy of ECEC, into which the student is being socialised (see Burr 2015; Säljö 2004)

There are two perspectives in the supervisory discussion: the student's and the supervising teacher's – the beginner's and the expert's – and the relationship between them is inevitably asymmetric (Vehviläinen and Souto 2021). According to Vehviläinen and Souto (2021), instead of sticking to the concept of neutral supervision, asymmetries should be clarified and investigated because unconscious power relations can have implicit effects on interaction. For example, the balance between a student's autonomy and the tendency to influence the student is reflected in interaction practices (Vehviläinen and Löfström 2016). Also, the student teacher's role between two activity systems or institutions – the university and the ECEC centre – means balancing the role of an equal agent and a visitor needing approval for their actions (Liinamaa 2014). Additionally, Kupila, Ukkonen-Mikkola and Rantala (2017) describe the relationship between supervisor and student teacher as 'fellow travellers'. From the perspective of sociocultural learning, it would be useful to position the student as the author of their own learning (Lipponen and Kumpulainen 2011).

The supervisor uses their expert status, especially by praising and advising the student (Knezic et al. 2019; Vehviläinen and Löfström 2016). Alternatively, the supervisor can leverage their expertise by opening up a space for dialogue by examining the student's statements and judgments (Knezic et al. 2019). Foong et al. (2018) describe how the supervisor's goal is to make the student reflect on their experiences and observations. Researchers highlight the purpose of the supervisor's reflective questions to initiate in-depth reflection on the student's own learning. Knezic et al. (2019) add that the supervisor challenges the student to consider alternative solutions by opening structured observations of the essential parts of the practice. Supervisor discussions produce particularly high-level assessments, mostly involving ample arguments that set out the reasons for certain actions or situations and developed ideas behind some of the requirements (Knezic et al. 2019).

Supervision progresses and is phased over time defined by purposefulness and working on a common object (Vehviläinen 2014, 10). Both Liinamaa (2014) and Vehviläinen (2014) have emphasised the importance of the first phase of the supervision process. At that time, the student and the supervisor should discuss how the student sees their own situation and the process ahead (Liinamaa 2014). It is suggested that more attention must be given to preparing students and supervisors for their positions during the practicum (Leshem 2012). In addition, the progress of the supervision process and the division of labour should be planned together (Vehviläinen 2014). The second phase focuses on joint action and the third phase is a phase of closing up (Liinamaa 2014). However, Leshem (2012) points out that the supervision is a complex and dynamic non-linear process and entwined in contextual situations.

We can recognise some shared understanding concerning the nature of the supervision. This can be interpreted as a kind of cultural script, which according to Wierzbicka (2002, 401) means the 'representation of cultural norms which are widely held in a given society, and which are reflected in language'. In our research, we see supervisory discussions as a social activity that is often guided by an unconscious model of action, i.e. a cultural script. The cultural script can be interpreted as the structure of interaction in a certain context. This structure includes concepts of participants' expertise and positions and the practices and knowledge that are acceptable and valuable in certain situations (Gutiérrez, Rymes, and Larson 1995). Scripts are adopted through participation. During their previous life history, both the supervisors and the student teachers have learned culturally accepted ways of interacting. It is challenging to change the cultural practices and scripts; breaking the cultural scripts requires reflecting on preconceived ways of practices and introducing new ways of thinking (Edwards 2010; Gutiérrez, Rymes, and Larson 1995).

According to our interpretation, theoretically the cultural script of the supervisory discussions can be defined as follows: supervision discussions represent the discursive reality of ECEC (see Säljö 2004). Supervisory discussions progress and have certain phases (Liinamaa 2014; Vehviläinen 2014). The relationship between supervisor and student teacher is asymmetric (Knezic et al. 2019; Vehviläinen and Souto 2021) – a supervisor is an expert and the student teacher is a novice. When learning is reciprocal, a supervisor and student might also be interpreted as 'fellow travellers' (Kupila, Ukkonen-Mikkola, and Rantala 2017). Supervisory discussions are reflective (Foong, Bt Md nor, and Nolan 2018; Knezic et al. 2019) and entwined in context (Leshem 2012; Onnismäa, Tahkokallio, and Kalliala 2015).

## **Finnish ECEC and teacher training**

Finnish ECEC has faced many changes in recent years. The administration shifted from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health to the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2013. After that, legislation was updated and the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (Act 540/2018) came into force in 2018. Furthermore, control became stronger and the ECEC centres were obligated to follow the new national guidelines, the National Core Curriculum for ECEC (Finnish National Agency for Education 2018).

Recently, the pedagogical role, responsibility and leadership of ECEC teachers have been highlighted in Finland as well as in other countries (Bøe and Hognestad

2014; Finnish National Agency for Education 2018). The changes emphasise the role of ECEC teacher as a pedagogical leader of the team. While the ECEC teachers' new professional and pedagogical demands are recognised at the national level and seen as an important part of the work of supervising teachers (Puroila, Kupila, and Pekkarinen 2021), Fonsén, Varpanen, Kupila and Liinamaa (2021) have pointed out that the leadership role of the teacher is still unclear and needs clarification at practical and conceptual levels. ECEC teachers are expected to be education specialists, and the role is widening towards pedagogical leadership according to the new requirements. In the practicum period, ECEC teachers need to explain their pedagogical leadership role to students, even if this is still unclear to themselves.

Finnish ECEC teacher training is via a bachelor's degree in education (180 credit points) at a university. ECEC teacher training consists of basic and subject studies in educational science and professional studies in early childhood and preschool education. At the University of Helsinki, 15 credits of field-based studying have been divided into two periods during the second and third academic years. The duration of both practicum periods is five weeks, and they are carried out in ECEC centres in the capital area. Each practicum is carried out in a different ECEC centre, and supervising ECEC teachers do not know the students beforehand. In this study we concentrate on the final practicum period, which is the final course in their studies towards a bachelor's degree.

The role of ECEC teachers in the practicum is to provide guidance to ECEC student teachers and support opportunities for them to learn in practice how to plan, implement and evaluate pedagogical work, as well as to provide critical feedback on students' performance. The role of supervisors is also to model the profession in practice and guide students in participation in the working community. Furthermore, they discuss the aims and values of ECEC and theory as the basis of education with students. There are no precise instructions given regarding the structure or number of supervision discussions, only general guidance from the university (Ukkonen-Mikkola et al. 2021).

## Methodology

The methodology of the research was based on discourse analysis which follows the idea that social reality is constructed through language (Burr 2003). According to Paltridge (2012, 2), the goal of discourse analysis is to combine the regularities of language with the regularities of social action and context. Further, discourse analysis makes it possible to study how the relationships between participants affect the use of language (Paltridge 2012, 2). In our study, we analysed supervision in supervisory discussions, and operated in between the content and the dynamics of the discussion.

Remes (2006) describes how discourse analysis brings to light the power that determines events through the prevailing way of speaking. In the supervisory discussions that we were researching, we looked for ways of speaking that we refer to as cultural scripts. These are cultural ways of speaking built into the supervisory event. Through discourse analysis, we focused on looking at the phases of the supervisory discussions and the structure of the supervisory relationship.

## Data collection

The study was conducted in an ECEC teacher training facility in Finland. To further develop and strengthen ECEC teaching practices, the University of Helsinki, in collaboration with the city of Helsinki, created a new research-based initiative funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Three ECEC centres were carefully selected from the university's cooperative municipal training centres based on factors that support the quality of supervision, which comprised a unit called *Tutkivat ja kehittävät harjoittelupäiväkodit* [Research and development in ECEC centres].

The student teachers' practicum period was implemented in August to September 2020 but, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the practicum was exceptionally conducted as a three-week intensive period. Supervising ECEC teachers were instructed to record three supervisory discussions during the practice period: one discussion from the beginning, another from the middle stages and the last from the end of the practicum. The researchers did not participate in the data collection.

Six supervisor-supervisee pairs participated in the study. All of the supervising teachers had completed early childhood teacher education at the university, and one of them had completed a master's degree in early childhood education. At the time of the study the experience of the supervising teachers varied from one year to over 30 years with, on average, 19 years of experience as an ECEC teacher. The initiative included supervision training and four of the teachers had earlier completed supervision training at the University of Helsinki's Faculty of Education. They also had previous experience in supervising students. Two supervisors were acting as supervisors for the first time.

There are 15 recorded supervisory discussions: three discussions from four pairs, two discussions from one pair and one discussion from one pair. In total we had seven and a half hours of recorded material. Recorded audio data was transcribed and, when transcribed, the material produced 64 pages of data.

## Analysis

In the analysis, meanings were sought from the data through which discourses could be found. As Remes (2006) argues, discourse itself embodies the deeper ontological and epistemological meanings on which it is based. The way of speaking in the supervisory discussion thus reflects the socioculturally formed meanings found in the background of ECEC and the role of the ECEC teacher (Burr 2015). Through these discourses, it was possible to identify the importance of the supervisory discussion in supervising the student towards the professionalism of ECEC and teacher identity. What was not raised in the discussions also seems particularly relevant. According to Alvesson and Kärreman (2000), micro- and macro-level discourses can be different. In the case of supervisory discussions, the discourse on the professionalism and pedagogy of ECEC in the work community (micro level) may differ from the discourse produced by education and guidance documents (macro level).

The analytical process was carried out at first through individual interpretations and then through discussion and reflection among the researchers. As a result of our first analysis stage, we identified discourses which occurred in several supervisory discussions. At the next stage of our analysis, we focused on the situation in which a certain discourse

**Table 1.** The cultural script of a supervisory discussion.

1. Launching phase discourses	2. Reflective phase discourses	3. Closing phase discourses
<b>The supervisory relationship-building discourse</b> Building confidential relationship Discussion on supervision <b>The orientation discourse</b> Discussion on the practicum period's goals and tasks Discussion on ECEC group <b>The pedagogical and practical planning discourse</b> Discussion on the planning of pedagogical activities	<b>The reflection discourse</b> Discussion on implemented pedagogical activities	<b>The confidential reflection discourse</b> Discussion on implemented pedagogical activities <b>The contextual reflection discourse</b> Discussion on student's learning in a broader context of ECEC <b>The future-oriented discourse</b> Discussion on the student's future as a ECEC teacher

takes place and structured the phases of supervisory practical cultural script. Finally, we examined the structure of the supervisory relationship during the different phases of the process by analysing the topics of discussion and the roles of the speakers (e.g. initiator) (Margaret, Taylor, and Yates 2001, 338; Vehviläinen and Souto 2021).

## Research ethics

The research followed the guidelines for good and responsible research ethics given by the Finnish advisory board on research integrity (2012). Written research permission was obtained from the municipality, the ECEC centres, supervisors and students. Participation in the research was voluntary, and the anonymity of informants was protected. All quotations have been anonymised, and the names of the ECEC centres have been withheld.

## Results

The cultural script of supervisory discussions included three phases: (1) the Launching phase, (2) the Reflective phase and (3) the Closing phase. In the Launching phase the building of relationship and the orientation towards a common process play an important role. In the Reflective phase, the discussions focus on reflection based on shared experiences in the ECEC group. In the Closing phase, the content of the discussion is built especially on the closure of the supervisory relationship and the orientation of the student towards working life. The supervision discussion phases include different discourses that are described in Table 1.

At the beginning of the supervisory relationship, the asymmetry between the supervisor and the student is stronger than at the end. The supervisor takes on the role of an expert by taking discussion initiatives and sharing expertise. The supervisor's supervisory skills are especially needed at the beginning of the practicum period as the student and the supervisor build the relationship. The relationship is balanced by elements of confidence and co-learning. Also, the supervisor's ability to make the student reflect on their learning balanced the supervision relationship, as the student is an expert in their own learning.

## Launching phase

At the beginning of the first supervisory discussion, we identified the sequence of **the supervisory relationship building discourse**, which included features of confidence building. Next, we identified **the orientation discourse** in which the supervisor and the student oriented themselves to the learning process during the practicum period. Lastly, the Launching phase included **the pedagogical and practical planning discourse** in which the supervisor and the student discussed planning and organising the pedagogical activities for the ECEC group.

In **the supervisory relationship building discourse** the discussion starts with the supervisor's initiative in the form of a question about students' feelings. In reply, the student describes their feelings about meeting the children and the work community. The supervisor uses their expert status mainly to praise and encourage the student and, according to our interpretation, strives to build a trusting and encouraging relationship with the student (see Knezic et al. 2019; Liinamaa 2014; Vehviläinen 2014).

The supervisor also asks about the student's need for supervision. According to our interpretation, the supervisor tries to break the asymmetry of the relationship with this question and support the student's role as the author of their own learning (see Lipponen and Kumpulainen 2011). Based on our data, the student seems to have challenges in defining their expectations for supervision. In the example below, the supervisor repeatedly directs the discussion to the same question: what does the student expect from the supervisor? The student is unable to answer the supervisor's question. Through the following example, asking about the supervision can be seen as orienting the student to the possibilities for supervision through the routine of asking a question.

Supervisor: [...] Well, what kind of support would you think you would need [...] for your final practice, so what kind of support do you want from me?

Student: Well ... [thinks] Really hard to say all of a sudden.

Supervisor: Do you find something as challenging [...] do you feel like you want to know more, or that I told you more, or that you'd like me to direct you all the way, or what do you think?

Student: Hmm ...

Supervisor: [...] Well but do you think there is some like part where you feel you still need, or you want more guidance or ... ?

Student: I can't really answer this now ... (Pair 4, Discussion 1.)

Since it is challenging for the student to articulate their expectations and aspirations, the supervisor's expertise in supervision is needed.

In **the orientation discourse** the supervisor and the student focus on the learning process for the practicum period and its determining factors: goals, tasks and learning community. In our data only two of the six supervising teachers raised goals and tasks for discussion at the level of dialogue. In the following dialogue, the supervisor brings the goals of the practicum into the conversation, after which the student also produces their own response on the goals. Discussion changes the student's role to becoming more active in the conversation and increases their influence on the discussion and the practicum.

Supervisor: *You move forward according to your own goals. [...]*

Student: *One of my goals is to learn how to plan more comprehensive entities instead of isolated moments of activities. (Pair 3, Discussion 1.)*

Bringing the goals into the discussion is the responsibility of the supervisor. Also, the learning tasks included in the teaching practice remain on the margins of the discussion, but it would also be important to bring them into the joint discussion for the task purpose of learning tasks is to direct students' thinking and activities towards the goals of practicum (see Balduzzi and Lazzari 2015). Discussing the goals would seem to support the student's role as the author of their own learning (see Lipponen and Kumpulainen 2011).

The most important learning community for the student appears to be the ECEC group. This topic comes up in all supervisory discussions partly on the supervisor's and partly on the student's initiative. During the Launching phase, there is a discussion about becoming acquainted with the group of children and the formation of a relationship between the student and the ECEC group, as well as the student's way of building interaction with the children. Towards the end of the first supervisory discussion, in **the pedagogical and practical planning discourse** the student and the supervisor orient themselves to the pedagogical activities to be carried out by the student. The supervisor is an expert in ECEC centre practices, in which case the student has to rely on the supervisor's expertise in their planning. The student's reliance on the supervisor's support in challenges in pedagogical planning provides an opportunity to balance the relationship through collaborative learning, which is one of the central methods of sociocultural learning (see Lipponen and Kumpulainen 2011). Planning pedagogical activities according to children's stage of development appears to be a central part of the ECEC teacher's professional responsibility, as the following excerpt shows.

Student: *Yeah, when I plan, I noticed that I clearly still needed to learn what is suitable for a certain age.*

[...]

Supervisor: *It is challenging in this age group when you have children at such different stages of development, and anyway it is really a bit impossible to always plan activities which are just right for every child when the needs are really different. With it, at least as a teacher, I am a little pained to have to make such choices. (Pair 6, Discussion 1.)*

## Reflective phase

The common experience of the student's planned and implemented pedagogical activities in a ECEC group serves as a basis for **the reflection discourse** in which the supervisor seeks to arouse the student's reflective thinking through questions and their own observations. The supervisory discussion generally started with a question from the supervisor to the student. With the help of the question, the supervisor directs the student's attention to the activities that they have implemented.

The student brings to the discussion the reactions of the ECEC group to the planned pedagogical activity, the challenges of teaching an ECEC group and reflects on the success of their own planning process. Although the student evaluates their teaching critically, they feel that they can influence the outcome of pedagogical situations by changing their activities. In turn, the supervisor brings their own observations of a situation. In addition to advising, the supervisor provides the student with information about the children's stage of development and the expectations that can be set for the children's activities.

The supervisory relationship is asymmetric throughout this phase, and the asymmetry becomes even more pronounced as the discussion moves from a practical reflection to a more in-depth phase. Earlier studies highlight the reflective nature of the supervisory discussions and the meaning of the supervisor's reflective questions in initiating profound reflection on the student's own learning (Foong, Bt Md nor, and Nolan 2018; Knezic et al. 2019). In the following example, the supervisor activates the student with questions to reflect on the ECEC group and pedagogical activities in relation to the student's pedagogical approach. The student would seem to need conceptual support for learning from the supervisor or from cognitive tools such as a curriculum or research (see Säljö 2004).

*Supervisor: Well, how do you think about it when there are so many basic care situations in a group of young children? So how does teaching or pedagogy show up in these basic care situations? [...]*

*Student: Well. I'm not sure, it can be the pedagogy of them in many ways, and I probably have to think about it even more from that angle. (Pair 4, Discussion 2.)*

Multi-professional teamwork comes up in only a few discussions when a student experiences challenges in managing an ECEC group. In these cases, the supervisor advises the student to make use of the other members of the team to support management of the group. The student's ability to discuss teamwork appears to be low, so that teamwork as a topic does not expand or deepen and the discussion quickly turns to other themes. The lack of coverage of this topic is somewhat surprising, as the overall pedagogical responsibility of the teacher in a multi-professional team has been emphasised in Finnish ECEC in recent years (Puroila, Kupila, and Pekkarinen 2021). Based on our data, multi-professional teamwork appears to be a demanding topic since the ECEC teacher's overall pedagogical responsibility is still unstructured in early childhood education (see Ukkonen-Mikkola 2018; Ukkonen-Mikkola and Varpanen 2020). According to our interpretation, the unstructuredness is reflected in the fact that there is little talk of teamwork in supervisory discussions.

## Closing phase

During the Closing phase of the practicum period, the discussion starts with **the confidential reflection discourse** which brings to mind the reflective discourse. Later the discussion shifts to **the contextual reflection discourse** when reflection continues as the student's reflection focusing more broadly on the environment of ECEC and the student's understanding of their personal pedagogical approach. Towards the end of the

discussions, we identified **the future-oriented discourse** as the supervisor builds a future image for the student of working in the profession.

**The confidential reflection discourse** starts in the usual way with a question from the supervisor, and the conversation resembles the Reflective phase. However, compared to the previous phase, it is easier for the student to rely on a familiar supervisor and talk about their own experiences, which act as a trigger for reflection. A confidential and reciprocal relationship has developed between the student and the supervising teacher (see Liinamaa 2014), which is still characterised by the supervisor's expert status in supporting the student's reflection. The elements of symmetry and asymmetry are simultaneously identifiable in the supervisory relationship.

In **the contextual reflection discourse** the supervisor guides the student to consider the goals of the teaching practice. The students' reflection continues in this discourse but more broadly. In the following example, the initial question leads to an in-depth independent reflection by the student, which includes reflection on multi-professional teamwork, personal growth in teaching and ECEC leadership. In this discourse the students appear as authors of their own learning and leave the supervisor in a side role (see Lipponen and Kumpulainen 2011).

Supervisor: *But then that's about those goals... So what about them?*

[...]

Student: *And then there was one more goal that the vision of one's own teaching would somehow be strengthened, such as reflection skills. This is of course a short time and that is a pretty big goal, but I think that what I am and how I want to act and what things are important to me has still been strengthened here. (Pair 2, Discussion 3.)*

**The future-oriented discourse** includes encouraging the student teacher to trust their own competence and discussion about the student teacher moving into the profession. The role of the student in teaching practice changes as the student progresses through the programme and in this final practicum we identified collegial tones (see Balduzzi and Lazzari 2015; Onnismäa, Tahkokallio, and Kalliala 2015; Ukkonen-Mikkola 2018). The supervising ECEC teacher praises the student teacher's personal features and sees them as a fully competent and trustworthy colleague. As an indicator of the student teacher's competence, the supervising teacher sees the children's acceptance.

At the end of the supervisory discussion, the student also gives feedback on supervision itself. The student especially appreciates the supervisor's approach to the student as an equal. In addition, the student appreciates the experience of their own agency – the opportunity to progress during teaching practice in accordance with their personal aims and to be trusted. All these perspectives highlight the importance of understanding the supervisory relationship and its power relations (see Vehviläinen and Souto 2021).

## Discussion and conclusions

Our research shows that the supervisory conversation script includes three separate phases: (1) The Launching phase: confidence building and orienting oneself towards a common process, (2) The Reflective phase: reflective discussion based on shared

experience, and (3) The Closing phase: student reflection in relation to the teaching practice experience and orienting the student to life in the workforce. Our results support previous studies on the phases of supervision (see Liinamaa 2014; Vehviläinen 2014).

Asymmetry is present throughout the supervisory relationship but is strongest at the beginning and is more balanced towards the end of the teaching practice. The supervisor is responsible for the progress of the discussion and the student follows the instructions. This finding strengthens the concept of supervisory relationships being asymmetric (Vehviläinen and Souto 2021). When supervising, the supervisor acts as a co-educator of the university, which inevitably creates asymmetry in the relationship. Based on their role, the supervisor should consciously include talking about the goals of the teaching practice and promote the student's growth as a teacher in the supervision discussions. During the practicum period, the relationship between supervisor and student teacher develops towards a more reciprocal relationship; they can be interpreted as 'fellow travellers' (see Kupila, Ukkonen-Mikkola, and Rantala 2017). The dynamics of the supervisory relationship change when discussing student learning, as the student is an author of their own learning (see Lipponen and Kumpulainen 2011).

Our study contributes to a theoretical understanding of the role of supervisors and supervisory discussions when it comes to enhancing the learning of student teachers. Furthermore, our research highlights the discursive nature of the profession and the pedagogy of ECEC within a sociocultural learning frame (see Säljö 2004). Based on our research, in the cultural script of supervisory discussions, the meaning of the ECEC teacher's profession is constructed using two key elements: (1) a good relationship with children and (2) developmental psychological and pedagogical expertise. Research and curricula as cognitive tools are not included in the discussions, even though these form the backbone of teacher training. Further, the aims of the practicum period and learning tasks set by the university rarely appeared in the discussion. In our case, it seems that the boundary work between ECEC centres and the university is partly limited (Ukkonen-Mikkola et al. 2021). The practice of the ECEC centres dominates the script, and the role of educational theory remains very small. In this boundary space, it could be possible to create new knowledge in collaboration across institutional boundaries (Edwards 2010; Ukkonen-Mikkola and Varpanen 2020). This finding brings out the importance of and the need for further development of cooperation between ECEC teacher training and working life.

There are some limitations and challenges concerning the validity of this study. One challenge is the limited number of informants and the implementation of the data collection in the area of one university. In addition, there was variation in the amount of discussion from the participants. Finally, the data were heterogeneous and the interpretation was challenging, even in the analyses implemented between researchers.

Despite the limitations and challenges, our article contributes especially to practices concerning ECEC student teachers' supervisory discussions. We have created the idea of a supervisory script and recognised the phases and discourses appearing in supervisory discussions. These phases and discourses support supervisors and students in understanding the practicum process. Practically, our findings highlight the meaning of the training period to supervisors. Strengthening supervisory skills through training would ensure more consistent quality of supervision. Additionally, our study provides an example of an authentic data gathering method, which makes it possible to use genuine data. Our study also points to some practical implications for supervisory discussion.

Still, many questions concerning the supervisory relationship remain unanswered. Further studies should find out the meaning of the training provided for the supervisors. Furthermore, the point of view of students could be investigated. It has been shown that practicum periods are necessary for the professional development of ECEC student teachers and support their eventual engagement in ECEC work. Teaching practice and the supervision included in it should be developed in a close relationship with the ECEC centres, using educational knowledge as a basis for development.

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