To Improve Instruction

Recent years have witnessed much effort directed at changing education—changes in teaching, changes in organizational patterns, changes in curricula, changes in media. Hopefully, the changes are not in name only but will result in improved instruction. That some fail surprises no one; that some succeed and even surpass expectations is exciting and encouraging. An in-service program of the Educational Development Cooperative \(^1\) is one such exciting and encouraging plan for change. The goal is nothing less than improvement of instruction, supervision, and evaluation.

This program seeking simultaneous improvement of instruction, supervision, and evaluation assumes: (a) having explicit goals allows the integration of teaching and supervisory roles; (b) supervising requires ability to describe exactly the competencies needed for teaching; (c) skills can best be acquired as needed; and (d) the evaluation cycle provides a means for ordering the process of supervisory and instructional improvement. In the paragraphs that follow, the EDC program will be described step by step as it unfolds in an actual in-service training situation.

Development of Skill List

The training program begins when an EDC staff member meets with a district superintendent, assistant superintendent of instruction, and principals to identify goals, objectives, and skills which they believe are important. By doing this the behavior necessary for success in that district can be deduced and described. For example, one district valued and rated teachers on "instructional skill"; but "instructional skill" was undefined. Teachers could not know exactly what teaching skills were valued. Therefore, the group worked to identify what was meant and an aspect of instructional skill was specified: "a lesson plan shall include an explicit objective, teacher-student activities, and desired performance." So a list of specific and desired teacher skills or competencies is formulated.

\(^1\) EDC is an interdistrict organization composed of 62 elementary and secondary school districts in south Cook and north Will Counties, Illinois. It is funded locally and by a Title III ESEA grant.
Workshop Orientation

Then the workshop composed of six to eight teachers plus the teachers', principals and immediate supervisors begins. The list of behaviors necessary for instructional success is reviewed by the group. It is presented as a list of competencies (or behaviors) which teachers in that district must acquire to be considered successful. It specifies skills or ways of managing students, subject matter, time, space, and equipment needed in the repertoire of the teacher, supervisor, or principal. Teachers may, and do, add to the list. When the list is complete, it is apparent that teaching actual lessons, incorporating the described behaviors, is to become the focus of the workshop.

Orientation continues—the steps required for planning a specific lesson to be taught the next day to a regular class are reviewed. As the teacher, supervisor, and principal create the lesson plan, the supervisor and principal will share experiences and make recommendations so that the plan specifies behavioral objectives, teacher activities designed to achieve objectives, complementary student activities, the information necessary to describe the class before, during, and after the lesson, and desired standards.

As the orientation session ends, discussion centers around the nature of supervision and instruction, teachers as decision makers, and the change process.

Planning Cycle

At this point, a teacher, supervisor, and principal actually plan a lesson. The supervisor and principal share their experiences and make recommendations with regard to the lesson, but the teacher decides what to incorporate. Clear understanding of the instructional objectives and of ways to achieve them is sought by the three co-workers. With clear under-
standings regarding objectives and teacher-student activities, the sorts of information (feedback) needed to describe what occurs during the teaching of the lesson can be decided. "Feedback" is anticipated; indeed, it is planned for.

As the lesson is planned, the complementary nature of teaching and supervision becomes evident. The planning process requires that the teacher and supervisor exchange ideas, solve problems, and secure mutual understandings about objectives, activities necessary to achieve them, information necessary to describe the class before, during, and after instruction, desired standards, and the relevance of the list of district instructional competencies to the particular lesson.

Teaching and Taping

The next day the teacher teaches the lesson as planned; the supervisor arranges for recording the class on video tape and collecting any other information according to agreement. A critique follows during which the supervisor relays his observations to the teacher. Together they view part or all of the video tape. Then reactions of the workshop group are sought; this in turn leads naturally into planning another lesson and recycling the process.

As a result of the critique, skills needing improvement have been noted by the teacher and supervisor. Usually these are the same desired skills or behaviors listed during the orientation stage of the workshop. Acquiring these is paramount; therefore, use of desired behaviors is planned in subsequent lessons. After planning, teaching, taping, and critiquing, the cycle can be shortened. Planning occurs again but taping and feedback focus on the appropriate five or ten minutes when the selected skill is needed and used in the classroom. In this manner the training program concentrates on increasing instructional competencies one at a time.

The in-service program thus far described concentrates on classroom teaching activities. However, supervisory activities usually require attention, too. To date, supervisors have found that they must learn to gather information skillfully in order to provide the needed feedback to teachers. Sessions to help supervisors accomplish this are incorporated into the workshop.

Is This Evaluation?

Essentially, a process of evaluation has been described. Mutual development of objectives (what we are trying to accomplish), teacher-student activities (treatment, or how it is to be done), data collection (what information we need to collect to describe the state of affairs), instrumentation (how it shall be measured), and standards (is it significant) provide the basis of evaluation. When the cycle is experienced and reexperienced, evaluation occurs and reoccurs. Hopefully, by participating and, in fact, working at it there will be increased understanding of the process of evaluation. Though not simply accomplished, a reasonable process has been described engaging principals, supervisors, and teachers.
The following exemplifies a lesson plan and the mutual agreements of a teacher, principal, and supervisor.

- **NINTH GRADE ENGLISH**

**Objectives**
1. To understand eight selected vocabulary words in the story
2. To comprehend the theme in *The Call of the Wild*.

**Activities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Activities</th>
<th>Student Activities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Review the story to date.</td>
<td>1. Teacher-student discussion.</td>
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<td>2. Introduce the eight story vocabu-</td>
<td>2. Students define them.</td>
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<td>lary words in text.</td>
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<td>3. Instruct the students to write</td>
<td>3. Students write them down.</td>
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<td>them in their notebooks.</td>
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<td>4. Call attention to the unique spell-</td>
<td>4. Discuss and relate them to their</td>
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<td>ings in dialect passages.</td>
<td>home or peer talk.</td>
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<td>5. Call for student volunteer to read.</td>
<td>5. Student reads.</td>
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<td>6. Every two paragraphs, discuss the</td>
<td>6. Discuss.</td>
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<td>progress and student reactions to the story.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Call attention to vocabulary words.</td>
<td>7. Students define them in their own</td>
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<tr>
<td>Secure student interpretations of</td>
<td>words and relate to story context.</td>
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<td>words, synonyms, and antonyms.</td>
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**Teacher's Concerns**
1. Tenor of class
2. Involvement of class in the activities.

**Recommendations Teacher Accepted**

In a discussion, press dialogue with a specific child; state questions in a manner requiring more than a single word response. Elaborate on response.

**Agreements Regarding Supervisor’s Responsibilities**

1. Videotape the class
2. Record incidents of noninvolvement in activities
3. Record classroom responses on CERLI Matrix.² (Particularly concerned about Teacher Seek Thinking and Student Inform Thinking.)

**Standards**

1. 90 percent involvement of the class in the discussion
2. Teacher questions of 50 percent seek thinking
3. Student responses of 50 percent inform thinking
4. 90 percent student accuracy in interpreting vocabulary words in their context.

The foregoing plan was developed by the teacher, department chairman, and principal in approximately 30 minutes. The teacher understood and approved the plan. Perhaps the objectives could have been more operational, activities more explicit, and recommendations extended. But to smother the teacher would have been, in essence, to impose upon her the supervisor’s plan—a pitfall to avoid.

²A 4x4 grid used to tally verbal content of students or teachers regarding thinking, recall, management, and feeling according to who informs, seeks, accepts, or rejects.
Supervisors agreed that to meet their responsibilities, as outlined, they had to increase their competencies in interaction analysis. Sessions were planned to acquaint them with "The CVC System" of behavior classification. Further, it was necessary to decide what noninvolved behavior actually is. After categories of noninvolved behavior were established, it was agreed that incidents of noninvolvement were to be recorded by the supervisor.

As the teacher taught her ninth grade class, each person attended to the task of observing, teaching, or recording. The supervisor observed the class and recorded the involvement of the children. The principal arranged to have the class videotaped and later reviewed the tape in order to classify classroom interaction.

During the subsequent "feedback" session, the workshop leader reviewed objectives, activities, teacher concerns, information required, and standards. The teacher described her instruction according to her own perceptions. The principal reported the information regarding involvement and vocabulary interpretation. Each piece of information was related to the appropriate objective and activity, and differences regarding other interpretations were listed. Finally, segments of the video-tape recording were reviewed for resolving differences regarding interpretations. The focus was on the plan as presented.

Apparently supervisors and principals can develop sufficient skills to sustain the training program described. The program may be modified to minimize observation time and demands for information collection and analysis. Desired skills or behaviors serve as objectives of the program, and the evaluation process provides the vehicle for improving teaching skills one at a time in the classroom setting.

Other considerations could be raised with respect to instruction, supervision, and evaluation. Underlying the program is the rationale that organizations consist of complementary roles and functions. In an educational organization every role has to some degree administrative, supervisory, instructional, and evaluative functions. These complementary roles and functions need to be understood and experienced as they contribute to institutional goals and individual achievement. In this respect the previously mentioned program attempts to be straightforward regarding the potential that evaluation holds for the improvement of instruction and supervision.
