

Supervisor Effectiveness? A Research Résumé

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A MAJOR problem facing school administrators today is the use of school personnel in the most efficient and effective manner. One segment of the school staff being studied is the group generally referred to as supervisors or consultants. The continued existence of the supervisor as an instructional leader is at issue (9: vii).

A search through the literature in past years for studies dealing with the effectiveness of supervisors in improving instruction reveals a paucity of reports. Recent years have produced many new studies. The majority of these have been doctoral dissertations investigating the effectiveness of various types of in-service education programs. This paper is an attempt to review and synthesize the studies of recent date to suggest guidelines for staffing practices for improving supervision.

Close Working Consultant Relationship

Several studies relate to the question of whether the presence of a supervisor in close working relationship with teachers makes a difference.

Coody (3) and Harris tested various supervisory approaches in the use of highly developed demonstrations in order to determine whether certain techniques have more impact than others in effecting changes in teaching.

The impact of the demonstration teaching was measured using a control group; a second group which simply observed the demonstration teaching without supervision of any other kind; a third group which participated in a briefing immediately prior to the demonstrations, with a group discussion following the demonstrations; and a fourth group which participated in briefings before the demonstration teaching sessions, then had individual consultations with the project associate. Findings indicated significant change in all groups. However, the teachers receiving both pre-briefings and individual follow-up consultations changed more in attitudes toward teaching practices than those subjects experiencing only the demonstrations.

A related study involving a mathematics in-service program for intermediate grade level teachers is reported by Boyd (1), DeVault (5), and Houston (8). The purpose

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of this study was to evaluate the relative effectiveness of television and face-to-face lecture-discussion, when supplemented or not by classroom consultant service.

Two consultants visited each of the 47 teachers in the two groups receiving consultant services from four to six times. The role of the consultants was to assist the classroom teacher in finding effective ways of relating new ideas to actual classroom instruction procedures. The services of the consultants included assistance in analyzing instructional problems, developing activities or programs leading to the possible solution of identified problems, and in assisting in clarifying new concepts.

DeVault reported that consultant services as a supplement to the television presentations and the face-to-face lecture-discussions made a significant contribution in some but not all cases. The consultant services resulted in more favorable reactions from the teachers in the television groups; in greater mathematics achievement in some

classes; and significantly greater positive change in pupil interest in mathematics.

Coffey (2) reports on a four-week summer in-service training program in elementary school science in which five university-based science consultants worked with teachers as they worked with children, providing clinical supervision for individual teachers and conducting feedback seminars. Observation of the teachers prior to the workshop, and again six months following it, using the Flanders system of interaction analysis, indicated significant changes in several verbal categories, plus increased silence used for laboratory activity. Scores on four standardized tests indicated no significant change in teachers' knowledge as measured by three of the tests, although one test did indicate change at the .01 level of significance.

Tollett (14) describes a study conducted to determine if a continuing consultant program as it was operated by an educational cooperative had an effect on the organiza-

tional climate of the schools in the cooperative. The faculties of 11 schools with continuing consultants and 11 control schools completed pretest and post-test questionnaires. He found that the continuing consultant program made no significant changes in the organizational climate of the schools involved. Teachers and principals did indicate, however, that consultants were useful to them in various ways.

We see varying degrees of influence being found in those situations where supervisors emphasize a close face-to-face consultative relationship with classroom teachers. Coody, DeVault *et al.*, and Coffey all found that consultations conducted by supervisors resulted in significantly more changes on the part of teachers than did simple training presentations alone. Tollett's study indicates that supervisors serving as continuing consultants are perceived by teachers as being effective in aiding teachers in thinking about classroom activities, but not so in influencing the organizational climate of the school.

It does appear that supervisors working on a face-to-face, one-to-one basis with teachers are effective in producing instructional change when such consultations are *part* of a larger program of interventions designed to stimulate new practice. Consultative services as part of an isolated training program are of dubious value.

In-Service Training Programs

As stated earlier, most studies involving the effectiveness of supervisors have been undertaken from the standpoint of evaluating the results of in-service education programs planned and conducted by supervisors.

In the aforementioned study reported by Boyd (1), DeVault (5), and Houston (8), teachers volunteered to participate in the in-service program. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the relative effectiveness of methods of in-service education. Television and face-to-face lecture-discussion methods were compared. However, no differences between television and face-to-face methods of presentation were discernible.

In the Coody (3) study previously re-

ferred to, a group of second and third grade teachers participated in an in-service program in which selected teachers presented carefully planned demonstration lessons emphasizing a variety of approaches to individualizing instruction.

Five instruments were utilized to measure the effectiveness of the in-service program with respect to teacher practices. A test of understandings concerning individualizing teaching of primary grade children was also used. The findings indicated that the subjects in all groups changed significantly. The subjects who received both pre-briefings and individual or group follow-up conferences changed more in attitudes toward teaching practices than did subjects in other groups. The demonstrations received consistently high ratings from the participants, supporting a widely held view that demonstration teaching is a favorite in-service activity.

Hogan (7) studied the influence of an in-service workshop on teachers' ability to modify positively the self-concepts of educationally and economically disadvantaged students. Teachers participated in a two-week summer workshop to help them develop techniques to enhance the self-concepts of their pupils when they returned to the classroom. Findings indicated that the change in the self-concepts of the two groups of students did not differ significantly.

Coffey (2) reports on an in-service training program in elementary school science for teachers in grades one, two, and three. The specific objective was the achievement of relative performance skills by the teachers as a result of the training program. The school-within-a-school concept was used for the four-week summer school science program. Children attended a two-hour science core in the morning. Five university-based science consultants provided "clinical supervision," including afternoon seminars. Seventeen teachers who participated in the in-service workshop served as the experimental group, while 19 who had not participated served as the control group. All 36 teachers were observed prior to the in-service workshop, and again six months after the

summer training program. In only four categories were significant differences found between the pre- and post-test scores of the experimental group in terms of the interaction analysis data, whereas there were no significant changes in teacher knowledge of science as measured by standardized tests.

Another teacher training program utilizing television is described by Corle (4). The purpose of this study was to determine whether changes in the mathematics teaching behavior of intermediate grade teachers, reported while they were taking a 15-week course in teaching mathematics, differed from the changes made by other teachers who were not taking the course. WPSR-TV, the educational television station of Pennsylvania State University, broadcast an in-service course for teachers of elementary grades. The course emphasized new methods and new content for elementary school mathematics. The course was presented in 45 half-hour telecasts, two each week for lectures and demonstrations and the third one for questions and answers. The correspondence department provided textbooks and a study guide.

The teachers completed 15 assignments, each consisting of two lessons per week from the study guide. The assignments were returned to the correspondence department for correction. The midterm and final exams were proctored by local school supervisors, who returned the papers to correspondence officials for correction. Seven trained observers made 30 visits to each of the 32 teachers in the study. Seven of the visits were made prior to the study and 23 after the study began. Analysis of the observation reports regarding changes in teaching strategies indicated that there were no significant differences either among teachers or between the groups. On knowledge of mathematics tests, the experimental teachers significantly outgained the control teachers.

These several studies indicate change in substantive knowledge using a wide variety of in-service activities. However, Hogan's study shows greater difficulty in producing change in pupils through in-service training of their teachers. Similarly, studies by Coffey

and Corle suggest difficulties in producing change in classroom behaviors. Precise interpretations of these diverse findings must await further study. However, a pattern may well emerge.

When in-service programs involve a variety of activities, are closely related to the classroom life of the teacher, and involve appropriate interpersonal interactions, a variety of outcomes seem to result—cognitive, psychomotor, and affective. However, those training programs using only simple consultative or didactic procedures, and conducted on college campuses, away from the realities of classroom life, seem to produce rather limited and unpredictable outcomes.

Supervisor Acceptance

However supervisors work to improve instruction, some minimum level of acceptance of such staff persons is essential. How well supervisors are accepted and under what conditions can be partially determined by studies already completed.

Yates' (15) study of adopting and non-adopting school districts in Texas reveals the importance that superintendents seem to attach to supervisors. Highly significant differences were found between districts adopting innovative special education programs and those not adopting such programs, based on their perceptions of the importance of supportive personnel, including supervisors.

Another source of evidence that superintendents do accept the need for and importance of supervisors on their staffs is derived from a Texas survey by Gee¹ indicating that school systems are employing 2½ times as many supervisors as are authorized by state minimum standards. Nationally, supervisory positions were reported to be increasing in number at a rate well beyond increases in pupil populations and teaching staffs during the period 1965-1968 (11), with some leveling off in recent years (12).

Russell (13) reports teacher attitudes

¹ Roger Gee, Assistant Superintendent for Instruction, Victoria, Texas, Schools, completed a survey of superintendents in Texas regarding supervisor staffing. To date, this is unpublished.

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toward supervisors in Louisiana that are positively associated with the amount of face-to-face contact with supervisors. Negative attitudes seemed to be associated with lack of firsthand experience by teachers with supervisors. A study by Farrell (6) shows elementary school teachers in Pennsylvania ranking empathetic and understanding supervisors as one of the three factors most highly valued. Marrs (10), reporting on teacher satisfaction with various aspects of an intensive in-service training program, found most satisfaction was expressed with the assistance of project "field consultants" and other supervisory staff.

Summary

Although conclusions drawn from these studies must necessarily be tentative, the practitioner may gain from them some reasonably clear guidelines to follow in developing supervisory programs. In question-and-answer form, the guidelines are as follows:

● *Are supervisors accepted by teachers as valuable members of the instructional staff?*

Yes, supervisors are highly valued, when teachers have close contact with them in project or other task-oriented situations.

● *Are supervisors getting results through planning and directing in-service training activities?*

Yes, especially in the area of greater knowledge gains by teachers. Changes in teacher behavior seem to result under skillful supervisory planning of in-service activities closely associated with working situations.

● *Are supervisors effective in improving instruction when they serve in a counseling or consultative capacity to individual teachers?*

Yes, if these consultations are task oriented and are part of a larger program of activities for change.

A whole host of questions about supervisor productivity remain to be considered. Organizational arrangements for effective supervisor interaction are another important area of study. The specific competencies which make supervisors more and less effective are also of great importance.

For the present, however, it appears clear that supervisors can and do improve instruction when these guidelines are followed in their deployment.

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