How many times have you lived through this bad dream? The central office and the building administrators have adopted an "innovative" instructional approach. As the news is announced to the faculty, a feeling of panic sweeps the staff members. Their security and confidence in an established approach to instruction are threatened as they now face changing to something which they do not understand and for which they do not have instructional skills. The timetable for beginning the innovative departure allows only a cursory in-service effort, and the new program begins with the teachers in a "prevent defense." Poor morale and a lack of skills and confidence give the innovation far less than a fair chance to succeed. Over a period of time, the innovation appears to have been a poor decision and is dropped. The wry smiles of veteran staff members indicate "we've outlasted another one," and another opportunity for instructional improvement goes down the drain.

Such all too familiar stories reflect the frustrations experienced by educators in attempting to change the substance and shape of the educational establishment to meet existing and evolving instructional needs. This lamentable condition faces an increasing challenge. Supervision must now seek more effective ways to interrelate authority and responsibility so that professional accountability may become a systematic means to bring about educational improvement, as opposed to a punitive means to chastise shortcomings in American school districts.

Involvement of Supervisors

The specific problem appears to be that supervision has not probed the expected potential of most innovative efforts to improve the broad level of instruction on a systematic continuum. The resultant attempts at innovation have "grown like Topsy" rather than being introduced after adequate preplanning and arrangements of conditions within which the innovation's success may be confidently predicted. The need for this supervisory objective is stated in Gwynn's tasks for supervision: "Supervision is an expert technical service primarily aimed at studying and improving cooperatively all factors which affect the quality of instruction."  

The need for supervision to involve all factors in such cooperative decision making remains largely unfulfilled as most school districts consider possible innovations. Initial failure of these efforts centers about an unwillingness to delegate sufficient authority to involve a broad professional base in planning how innovative departures can be most effectively implemented. Such efforts must include identification of the kinds and amount of necessary in-service experiences before the staff enters into a specific innovation.

Likewise, requirements for new classroom procedures and instructional skills should be carefully specified. These efforts must tap the appropriate leadership skills of

all staff members. Lucio and McNeil stress that “Supervision must recognize and encourage leadership throughout the instructional spectrum.”

Developing this leadership requires a cooperative consideration of instructional decision making which brings together a cadre of the instructional staff with designated supervisory personnel. Frequently the classroom teacher group has been excluded from this process, with such decisions largely made by administrators and boards of education. Thus teachers have often been charged to implement these decisions without understanding the rationale for change or how they were to implement the innovation. While they might nod approval of the “innovation,” teachers would enter and close their classroom doors and teach in their pre-innovation style.

In most cases, this was all they knew how to do. No in-service preparation to implement the innovation developed, and gradually the innovation proved to be a failure. Eventually the innovation was discarded, teachers breathed a sigh of relief, and their experience with innovations was again negatively reinforced. While a plethora of innovations have thus passed through American schools and fallen into educational disrepute in recent decades, we cannot identify whether or not they would have made any significant differences had they been carefully approached in terms of planning, implementation, and evaluation.

The Service Posture

On the other hand, we can observe that, in school districts that have developed successful, local innovative efforts, the responsiveness and supportive posture of supervisory services and personnel have been dominant factors. Likewise, the broadening of the decision-making base to include realistic teacher participation has been a common ingredient. A further constant factor has been the amount of time devoted to planning transitional means to the innovative departure, including both the identification of new instructional skills for the program and necessary in-service staff development experiences. In such instances, teachers have been deeply involved in identifying and developing the substance of these preparatory experiences as well as an ongoing approach to further staff development activities once the innovation has been instituted.

These situations provide us the best estimate of how professional accountability can be developed as teachers assume responsibility for planning as well as evaluating and validating the outcomes of the projected

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innovation. This supports the three aspects of this recommendation: Unless teachers are involved in the decision-making process to: (a) identify and develop the innovative departure; (b) project what kinds of staff development experiences must be provided through in-service and other activities fundamental for staff readiness; and (c) gain the authority to which they can be responsible in moving into the innovative program, then professional, staff accountability will continue to be ineffective and unattainable.

Of the current crop of innovations, the rush to open space seems in many areas to violate the foregoing conditions. All too frequently, the school's decision to develop an open space arrangement has nothing to do with an open-access approach to learning. While it can support open-access curricular efforts, there is no evidence that open space in and of itself will have any impact upon a traditional, subject-centered approach. Responsible supervision in local schools should carefully scrutinize this fact.

Unfortunately, the bypassing of supervisory responsibility can be seen in a great number of school districts where architectural and other noninstructional factors have predicated the bonding and building of open space school plants. Properly, the objectives toward which the local program is moving should specify whatever different physical facilities are most appropriate. However, in a majority of these situations teachers are required to adjust their program emphasis to the dictates of open space in the new buildings.

The author has observed many instances in which the staff has been neither solicited in planning the open space nor involved in any in-service experiences to prepare the staff for the new facility. With no preparations to help staff to anticipate and adjust to the inevitable problems of acoustic and visual distractability, one can observe the desperate attempts of teachers to arrange bookcases, shelves, and file cabinets to try to recreate the "egg-crate" physical setting of their former school plant.

This does not impugn the potential of open space to support an open-access curriculum. However, if the teaching style of a faculty and programs of that school have not been moving toward that of open-access curriculum, such environmental shifts will produce more instructional chaos and confusion than any positive gains. Again the responsibility of supervision to support the definition of the objectives of such an architectural departure from the basis of the instructional program has been largely overlooked.

The dilemma of the open-space debacle points to the need of supervisors to relate form and substance properly. That is to say, the development of the physical setting of the school must be undertaken only after the instructional necessities required by the shift in the curriculum have been specified and agreed upon by the professional staff of the school.

Schools present a large reversal of these two steps to the point that our curricular efforts are too often subverted and frustrated by inappropriate and inadequate physical settings. Our track record in this respect is about as successful as transporting hot soup in brown paper bags!

The economic press faced by our schools cannot be minimized. We are particularly vulnerable to public ire where school districts plan new schools apart from the kinds of programs which they are to house and support. The ineffectiveness of such school plants to support their curricular programs does not justify the radical departures sold to school boards by architectural biases. The folly of these efforts can be contrasted against instances in which the staff has been carefully involved in planning the development of new facilities designed to house evolving innovative programs. In these cases the results have produced far more functional instructional environments with less costly capital expenditures.

It is important to stress that the professional staff working alone cannot achieve such desired results. Architects must be used as consultants to suggest alternative physical approaches to accommodate the concern for program. With such information on both applicability and cost of the alternatives, the
staff can make effective choices and recommendations to the school board and the community. This is, of course, a striking departure from the majority of instances in which architects and school boards do “their thing,” with token—if any—input from the staff. Of greatest advantage, however, is that the projected innovative goals of the instructional program will not be frustrated or unduly subverted by the limitations of the school plant.

**Supervisory Guidelines**

As these examples have illustrated, the success of this approach to innovation has been largely minimized through fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants efforts. The following guidelines are suggested to help correct the kinds of supervisory irresponsibility discussed here.

1. Supervision must realize that its greatest potential for success lies in the definition and organization of supervision as a supportive service to instructional improvement. Supervisory personnel and the functions to which they ascribe will have both line and staff functions. However, organization of local supervisory personnel must be focused primarily upon working with the instructional staff to identify curricular prerogatives and needs. In such a setting the realistic planning of innovations may be undertaken.

2. An effective program of systematic curriculum planning on a district-wide basis must work to identify both objectives and means to move toward definitive instructional improvement. Supervisory personnel and the functions to which they ascribe will have both line and staff functions. However, organization of local supervisory personnel must be focused primarily upon working with the instructional staff to identify curricular prerogatives and needs. In such a setting the realistic planning of innovations may be undertaken.

3. The broadening of the decision-making base to include effective teacher participation must be assured. The success of the processes involved in the previous step depends upon such teacher participation.

4. A realistic approach to staff development must be supported by supervisory services. Once the specific innovative departure has been defined, the development of ongoing curriculum planning activities and of necessary in-service programs for staff development becomes imperative. Without such experiences the staff cannot develop skills and readiness to implement the projected innovation.

5. A careful assessment of physical facilities necessary for the projected innovation is crucial. If new facilities are not possible, renovation or adaptation of existing facilities must be considered. If economic factors preclude this step for the present, means to adapt programs to such temporary strictures must be carefully planned with the staff. If new facilities are to be built, the needs of evolving program priorities must be the keystone of this planning and must be given to architects as essentials to be accommodated in their suggestions.

These five steps represent a beginning means to construct a responsible, responsive frame of reference for supervisory services in approaching educational innovations. Such a posture can largely prevent many of the wasteful and ineffectual stabbings at innovation described earlier. A reversal of this legacy of waste of the potential of innovative means is not an unfair expectation. Efforts in this direction to define realistic accountability expectations for supervisors are not only timely but reasonable.

Most important is that instructional programs and educational theory have too long been the scapegoat of the public and educators, while abrogation of supervisory responsibility with hasty, poorly planned approaches to innovations has been the unseen but real culprit. To ignore this trauma could well result in nonprofessional sources assuming the instructional responsibility of supervisors as a growing public press for accountability swells. To allow this to happen would confirm the worst fears of those of us who continue to recommend professional control of professional decision making in our public schools.

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