

# Toward a Redefinition of Supervision

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**E**DUCATIONAL supervision now stands at a threshold of decision. The judgment to be made is whether to base supervisory authority on position in the line relationship of school staffs or opt instead for authority based on competence and plan. If supervisors elect to operate from an authority base, effective supervision faces a bleak future.

School instructional personnel will no longer subject themselves to externally imposed authority. The alternative—that of authority based on competence and plan—offers hope and vitality. Instructional personnel respond enthusiastically when their competencies and ideas are valued and uti-

lized. Teachers realized long ago that no one person, or even several persons, operating as supervisors can function effectively in all areas. For effective supervision we must turn to group processes that will allow individual members of the group to share in the needed leadership.

In parallel development to the idea of supervision based on competency and plan, there is an emerging concept of supervision versus administration. Supervision is being viewed as behavior characterized by action with people and as an interchangeable role among the members of a group. Administrative behavior is characterized by actions with materials, ideas, and tractive problems.<sup>1</sup> The important part of these two definitions is that supervision is an interchangeable role and that it deals directly with people. If one is working in a group situation, what could be more effective than to be concerned with people and the shared leadership role within the group that may be assumed by any of its members regardless of their official titles?

What I am suggesting is that any member of the group organization can exhibit supervisory behavior. In practical terms, what does this mean? It proposes that a

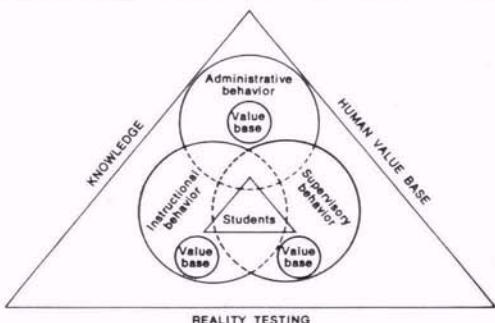


Figure 1. Relationship Among Types of School Staff Behavior

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Sergiovanni and Robert Starratt. *Emerging Patterns of Supervision: Human Perspectives*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1971.

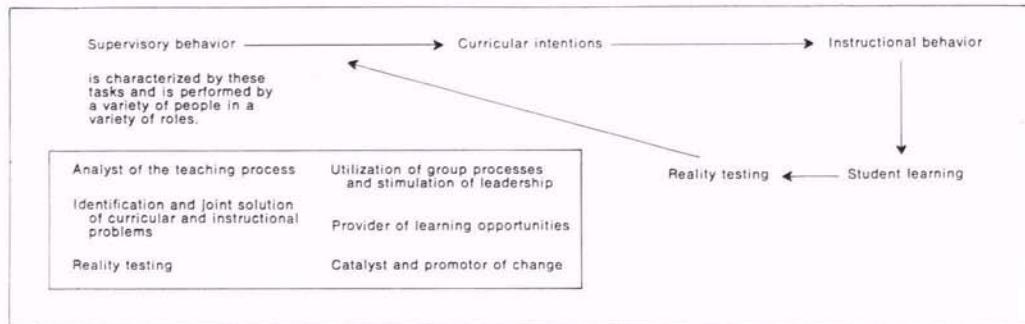


Figure 2. How Supervision Can Help Student Development

teacher can act in a manner normally associated only with the supervisory position. To extend this idea further, I can see community people, principals, special consultants, librarians, and, yes, even students functioning as supervisors. If we are going to support individual student growth as a function of our schools, then we clearly must also allow the staff of the schools to function in a like manner.

Figure 1 details the relationship among several of the various types of school staff behavior. The diagram indicates that school personnel function to some extent in several realms of behavior, but still spend the majority of time in the area of greatest competency. Of the three sides of the triangle, two are self-explanatory (knowledge and human value base); and the third side of the triangle, that of reality testing, implies the examination of stated intentions to see if they are congruent with what is happening in reality. In effect, are you doing what you said you wanted to do? <sup>2</sup>

In addition, anyone operating in any of the three arenas shown must have formulated his/her own personal value base. No one can function adequately until he has examined himself and clarified a personal set of values, attitudes, and beliefs to guide his decisions.

Briefly, I propose a redefinition of super-

vision which holds: (a) that supervisory behavior be based on competence and plan and operate as a group process, and (b) that supervisory behavior be viewed as an interchangeable role and that any member of a group can exhibit supervisory behavior. How does this redefinition relate to the continuing problem of effecting student learning? Figure 2 illustrates how this concept of supervision copes with the problem of assisting student development in the classroom.

Utilizing the idea of supervision as an interchangeable role makes possible the situation in which one teacher is seen helping another teacher analyze his/her teaching methods. A student likewise may be used to help a teacher determine if his instructional behavior is congruent with the stated curricular intentions. Community members may also often act as catalysts. All of these are tasks of supervision. Obviously, not all can be effectively performed by one person who holds the position and title of supervisor.

The ideas presented here are not new to educational supervision. Many schools have been redefining supervision along these lines. This discussion has intended simply to bring these ideas to the surface for examination. It will have succeeded if practitioners begin to see supervision as behavior based on competency and plan rather than on the traditional position authority base.

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Hawthorne. "Reality and Congruency Testing: A Supervision Model." Presented at the Curriculum Research Institute, sponsored by ASCD and the Ohio ASCD, Cincinnati, Ohio, January 23-25, 1972.

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