

SUPERVISOR COMPETENCE AND STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING INSTRUCTION

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Supervisors of instruction, whatever their titles, must lead more aggressively in the improvement of instruction. They must "demonstrate competencies more adequately, enter into collaborative arrangements that are genuinely cooperative, and become involved in building instructional evaluation systems to guide the improvement process."

LEADERSHIP in education comes from many sources—teachers, parents, administrators, politicians, supervisors, professional associations, and business people to name but a few. But the crucial questions about the sources and forms of leadership for this last quarter of the 20th century may well be more clearly defined, more highly focused than in the past quarter. The questions about leadership concern instruction, the improvement of instruction, and instructional change that is of high quality.

All across the country, I sense a growing conviction that supervisors of instruction are essential in leading the nation's schools toward better education. Behind us are frantic years of jumping from one innovative panacea to another in search of instant progress. The disillusionment with many of

the past efforts at improvement of instruction is much less a criticism of supervisory practices than it is a sign of our times. But even so, there is a need for leadership that has greater vision and more competence than in the past. The need is not for a new role description so much as it is a need for new plays and stage settings alike.

In brief historical perspective, the past 25 years can be helpful as we think about the quarter century ahead. Three eras might be capsuled as follows:

1. 1950-1960—Emphasis on human relations skills (13), avoidance of conflict, lack of directionality (9), and uncritical response to teachers' expressions of need

2. 1955-1965—Population explosion, crash programs of teacher preparation, permanent employment of men and women to teach with little selection or evaluation, rapidly expanding schools and districts to outrageous sizes, and emphasis upon growth with little attention to quality

3. 1960-1975—Growing demands for change in instructional practices, frenzied demands for newer and better programs, appeals for meeting special pupil needs, in-

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sistence upon opportunity for all children with little tolerance for failure.

These three sets of events were more or less sequential in nature; and each one tended to promote, stimulate, and reinforce the next one. Having made strong commitments to humane, nondirective, service-oriented supervision, the tidal wave of events caused by the population explosion left many of us as supervisors floundering, struggling for survival, inundated by teacher incompetence, overextended, overworked, and inappropriately tooled.

The third wave of events has come and gone and a whole host of supervisors are standing in the ebb tide of the 1960's wondering where to go and how to proceed. The fast moving events of the past 25 years have allowed too little time for careful thought leading to new insights. Morris Cogan (4) is urging us to forget all strategies except that of clinical supervision. Blumberg (2) joins with Sergiovanni (11) in urging a kind of "advisory" supervision. John Lovell (14) has revised Wiles' classic book with emphasis upon "collaborative" supervision. Fenwick English (5) sides with Borg (3), Flanders (6), and Wilhelms (15) in seeking a self-supervision strategy in response to teacher frustration and growing militancy. The NEA offers the new salvation in the form of "teacher power" and proposes to "take over" in-service education as a safe first step in making teachers the supreme influence in all educational matters.

Three Steps Ahead

To assume more vigorous leadership and to guide more steadfastly than in the past, how do supervisors of instruction proceed? Instruction is essentially a human enterprise, and, of course, improvements come about primarily through people whether we focus on curriculum or materials development, staffing or in-service education, or public relations. But supervisory practices must extend well beyond good human relations. There is the need for uniquely defined roles, backed by specific competence to per-

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form, a structure for collaborative efforts, and finally, an evaluative thrust that yields priorities.

Competencies for Instructional Improvement

Instructional improvement has long been recognized as the unique role for supervisors of instruction. Competencies required for this unique and demanding form of educational leadership are numerous, but an essential array has been clearly identified and carefully defined. Figure 1 outlines 24 professional supervisory competencies which have been fairly well substantiated.

Supervisors have continued to argue over the semantics of their titles more than they have about the issues of instructional innovations. They have sometimes been more eager to be accepted than to be effective agents of change. They have been content to focus upon improvements in a particular subject or skill rather than strive for fundamental changes in schooling. Even so, we have shared with administrators, teachers, parents, and policymakers an unprecedented quarter of a century of striving for instructional change. We have gained a bit and learned a lot about how to bring about lasting, constructive change (8). The mastery of an array of professional supervisory competencies is a first essential step in assuming leadership for improving education.

Building Collaborative Relationships

Supervisors of instruction sometimes abdicate leadership when frustrations persist. Then, too, we may be too subservient to teacher or administrator whim or even opt for authoritarian alternatives. A fourth alter-

native open to those with competence to offer is a genuinely cooperative, collaborative approach. This is not simple service-orientation! It calls for relationships with principals and teachers that are based on mutual respect, understanding of differentiated responsibilities, clearly defined goals, and realistic expectations.

In building a genuinely cooperative relationship the archaic notions of the lone supervisor, without status, disguised as just another teacher will not suffice. This is an organized society in which lone individuals are doomed to be ineffectual. Supervisors must work in teams and task forces in which collaborative, task-oriented efforts are carefully designed to make full use of the diversity of competencies required to promote fundamental changes in instruction. Such teams or task forces provide a sharper focus for collaborative endeavors, but also concentrate human energies to generate the thrust for significant change. Team supervision also makes more realistic demands upon supervisors to demonstrate unique competence.

Honest, Constructive Evaluation

There are many issues and problems associated with instructional evaluation. Not the least of these are to be found in the area of teacher evaluation. The growing concerns for accountability in education are inevitably pressuring school boards, adminis-

trators, and supervisors toward teacher evaluation of substance. Supervisors are being involved increasingly, despite their protestations.

The long supported notion that teachers make the critical difference in the lives of children and youth in schools remains unshaken by many years of research on teaching and learning. It follows, then, that an essential focus for improving instruction

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must be on teachers, teaching, and the teaching-learning process. Curricula, materials, physical arrangements, and subject content are all important but much less so. If the central focus is the teacher, how can we ignore teacher evaluation as a responsibility of supervisors of instruction?

The traditional stance of supervisors has been one of accepting no responsibility for teacher evaluation. This has been a defensive stance. Most teacher evaluation practices are rightly viewed as inconsequential, ineffective, and destructive of teacher trust. But this defensive stance is no longer justifiable. The costs are too great. The pressures

<p>A. <i>Developing Curriculum *</i> A-1 Setting instructional goals A-2 Designing instructional units A-3 Developing and adapting curricula</p> <p>B. <i>Developing Learning Resources</i> B-1 Evaluating and selecting learning materials B-2 Producing learning materials B-3 Evaluating the utilization of learning resources</p> <p>C. <i>Staffing for Instruction</i> C-1 Developing a staffing plan C-2 Recruiting and selecting personnel C-3 Assigning personnel</p> <p>D. <i>Organizing for Instruction</i> D-1 Revising existing structures D-2 Assimilating programs D-3 Monitoring new arrangements</p>	<p>E. <i>Utilizing Supporting Services</i> E-1 Analyzing and securing services E-2 Orienting and utilizing specialized personnel E-3 Scheduling services E-4 Evaluating the utilization of services</p> <p>F. <i>Providing In-Service Education</i> F-1 Supervising in a clinical mode F-2 Planning for individual growth F-3 Designing in-service training sessions F-4 Conducting in-service training sessions F-5 Training for leadership roles</p> <p>G. <i>Relating to Public</i> G-1 Informing the public G-2 Involving the public G-3 Utilizing public opinion</p>
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* Source: Special Education Supervisor Training Project. *Professional Supervisory Competencies. Document #7.* Austin: University of Texas, 1975.

Figure 1. Twenty-four Critical Professional Supervisory Competency Titles*

for better accountability where it really counts are too urgent. Furthermore, supervisors have too much to offer and to gain in helping solve this crucial problem. In fact, supervisory effectiveness has been seriously hampered by the absence of genuinely objective, constructive evaluation systems in our schools.

I think it important to emphasize that I am not advocating that supervisors either take over or eagerly involve themselves in the useless teacher evaluation efforts so widely practiced at present. So long as superintendents, principals, and school boards persist in using rating sheets, superficial observations, and mutually congratulatory follow-up conferences, supervisors are better off being out of the ritual act.

Alternatives to present practices, however, are available. Cooperative supervision can extend to cooperative evaluation in which teachers are deeply involved with peers, principals, and supervisors in observing and analyzing their own behavior. Constructive teacher outcomes from such practices include leads for improving one's own teaching, a new respect for one's own capabilities as a teacher, a new tolerance for critical appraisal, and a higher set of performance standards toward which to strive.

An evaluation system that is objective, systematic, collaborative, and on-going, with emphasis on the improvement process, cannot function without the specialized skills and perspectives of supervisors. Supervisors cannot afford to remain aloof from sound teacher evaluation because it offers opportunities to make differences that count in the lives of *both* teacher and child. Furthermore, in such evaluation, supervisors gain new perspectives and broader understandings about the instructional programs they try to improve.

The time seems unusually right for supervisors of instruction, whatever their titles might be, to assert themselves as leaders in the instructional improvement process. The past years of supervisory efforts since World War II have provided both perspective and maturity upon which professional supervisory practice for the next quarter century can well be based. Initial steps in more aggressively leading the improvement of instruction process call for supervisors to demonstrate competencies more adequately, enter into collaborative arrangements that are genuinely cooperative, and become involved in building instructional evaluation systems to guide the improvement process.

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