



Photo: Joe Di Dio, NEA.

The Administrator as Instructional Supervisor

Mildred Ness

Principals can consult with teachers as well as evaluate them; clinical supervision provides a way.

Last year ASCD published a report¹ from the working committee on "Roles and Responsibilities of Supervisors" of which I was a member. I learned a great deal from my colleagues on the committee about the history and practices of supervision, but I take issue with the committee's recommendation for creating two distinct supervisory roles: consultative and administrative.

¹A. W. Sturges, "Instructional Supervisors: A Dichotomy," *Educational Leadership* 36 (May 1979): 586-88.

"Rather than create separate and distinct functions, we need to integrate the consultative mode into the administrative role to provide renewal and stimulation toward change."

"Our study," the report stated, "reveals a conflict; teachers want direct assistance to improve the learning opportunities of children, but they see supervisors in administrative roles not directly related to improving instruction."

The full report explores the plethora of duties ascribed to instructional supervisors and the inconsistency—from one district to another—in expectations, responsibilities, and practices of personnel assigned to this role. To resolve this dilemma, the report suggests that a *consultative* supervisor provide direct and indirect service to teachers in a totally supportive, helping relationship, while an *administrative* supervisor be "responsible for federal programs, evaluating teachers for tenure and salary increments, and quality control at the district level."

The consultative supervisor would have no authority to evaluate a teacher for appointment or dismissal; this responsibility would belong only to the administrator.

Implications of this Role Separation

The implication of role separation is that evaluation is not a consultative, helping process. Conversely, the teacher's response to and use of consultation and assistance need not be part of the final (or annual) appraisal.

There is an assumption, both implied and stated, that the authority to evaluate personnel carries with it fear of being judged, and this fear stands in the way of helping teachers. There is also a belief that the administrator who is charged with evaluation of staff for the purpose of tenure and/or salary increment is too threatening to the teacher to be in a position to assist in the diagnosis of teaching strategies, improvement of classroom methodology, or effectiveness of instruction. Finally, there is a presumption that the teacher is too concerned with the impression he or she must make during an observation to expose any weaknesses or need for improvement in teaching performance.

These beliefs and assumptions stem from following the traditional (and common) appraisal practice of evaluating a teacher on the basis of one or two observations a year during which one looks at a whole spectrum of teacher competencies and performs a summative task. Measuring summatively is like mark-

ing a report card; the teacher is compared to other teachers known by the evaluator and is rated on a comparative scale. Clearly an experienced teacher knows what is expected in terms of preparation for a lesson, appearance of the room, response to students, questioning techniques, and control, and can perform remarkably well for the one, two, three, or even more observations required by contract. Like having company for dinner, the classroom and students are prepared for the visitor and deliver an A-one show.

Process Shows Little Improvement

What does the evaluator hope will happen as a result of this experience? What are the teacher's expectations? Little or no growth occurs as a result of a formal observation and instruction does not improve as a result of summative evaluations. Although not expressed to the supervisor, most tenured teachers expect an excellent, or at least very good, rating and do not react positively to criticism.

A crucial problem in summative evaluation is that it is far too broad, all-encompassing, and infrequent to help teachers bring a heightened level of awareness to how they interact with children, how the information they are presenting is received, or how well students in the room are involved in a task. Summative evaluation is often superficial; there is no provision for teacher and supervisor to get at real needs and develop a process for change and growth.

Need to Stimulate Self-Growth

More than ever before in our schools, we need to stimulate self-growth in personnel. The drop in enrollment throughout our districts has reduced the number of probationary teachers and increased the percentage of older, tenured staff. There is less new blood, fewer young, eager, idealistic teachers to stimulate tired and less enthusiastic colleagues. Many supervisors and teachers are complacent, believe they are competent, and feel they do not need to search for ways to continue to grow professionally.

Think in terms of a building staff. How many teachers are actually *incompetent*, at the point of dismissal or denial of increment? How many, on the other hand, are doing the job adequately or satisfactorily, or even very well, but could perform better?

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How is the building administrator using the evaluation process to insure that the adequate or competent teacher is gaining new skills and taking a fresh look at the effectiveness of his or her methodology?

What Evaluation Should Be

Complacency and resignation need not be the status quo. Supervisors can help both teachers and themselves if they act to prevent a division of functions that limits the administrator to a managerial role. An administrator who accepts the premise that authority hinders a helping relationship with teachers or that fear of appraisal stands in the way of working in a consultative role forfeits the opportunity to perform as an instructional leader.

Evaluation is not to be feared; it is a logical, accountable way to reach mutually desired goals. Evaluation should be participatory, diagnostic, cooperative, and should be based on a mutual commitment to change and growth. It must be an ongoing process, formative rather than summative. It should be person-oriented (a characteristic the report ascribes to the consultative role), and depend upon interaction among people, not upon a unilateral decision at a point in time. The evaluating administrator needs to integrate and use all the characteristics of consulting, helping, supporting, and diagnosing in the process of account-

ing for teacher competency. In the vast majority of cases this poses no threat to the teacher, especially when teacher and administrator have worked and related together for several years.

This in no way denies the need for consultants in instructional supervision. Many people with expertise in curriculum, program writing, program implementation, quality control, motivation for change, response to community needs, and many other functions that support instruction are needed in a school district. But in reality, very few *helping* positions are supported by boards of education today; personnel presently active in central office supervisory positions are not permitted the "luxury" of helping individual teachers in the classroom.

Rather than create separate and distinct functions, we need to integrate the consultative mode into the administrative role to provide renewal and stimulation toward change. One evaluation model that is gaining widespread interest is the clinical supervision process. In clinical supervision, the teacher is helped to identify and concentrate on a limited number of specific skills, the supervisor focuses on a manageable task for data collection, and together they evaluate results. In this working model there is accountability in the form of a mandate for growth that brings to both participants a fresh perspective and renewed interest. Both teacher and supervisor have a challenge; the teacher is expected to make a difference that will improve student learning, and the supervisor is responsible for helping the teacher make that change.

In some recent workshops on clinical supervision, surveys of participants revealed that the greatest discrepancy between what actually happens in supervision and what *should* happen is in the degree to which both teachers and supervisors look forward to classroom visits. In reality, they do not. Ideally, they should. I believe that we perpetuate this discrepancy by insisting that administrators are authority figures to be feared and that evaluations are classroom observations to be tolerated or endured because that's the way it has always been. The time is ripe for a change, and the process for implementing that change is available. *E7*



Mildred Ness is Principal, Lincoln Park School, No. 44, Rochester, New York.

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