Overview

Supervisors, like teachers, seldom live up to expectations—others' or their own. They want to be considerate but they're seen as indifferent. They try to be helpful but they're considered a hindrance. They strive to be just but they're viewed as unfair.

A few days ago I read about a new principal who was transferred in mid-year “for her health.” The newspaper reporter and concerned parents—who supported the principal—couldn’t find out the real reasons, but among other things the principal had insisted that teachers follow a district rule requiring them to stay in the building until 4:00 p.m. A representative of the teacher association characterized this and other actions as “violating teachers’ rights,” although no grievances were filed.

The point is not to judge the situation without knowing the facts, but to illustrate the delicate relationship between supervisors and the supervised. Good supervisors are deeply concerned about the satisfaction and growth of those they work with, but they also are responsible to students, parents, and citizens for what teachers do.

One of the cherished images of some ASCD members is the non-threatening” supervisor teachers trust because he or she doesn’t evaluate them. This highly skilled professional counsels a few people at a time, giving support, feedback, and judicious guidance in response to teachers' requests. Desirable though it may be, that dream is unlikely to become reality. Most schools couldn't afford it in the past, and they certainly can't now. With increasingly tight budgets, many school districts are declaring supervisors expendable.

Not all supervisors, of course; schools still have principals, but there are fewer consultants, coordinators, resource teachers, and the like. As a result, most official supervision must be done by line administrators expected to be helpers and evaluators.

Karolyn Snyder observes that clinical supervision originated in the human relations era, but now we’re in the age of accountability. School systems stress management by objectives, performance standards, and teacher evaluation. Accordingly, clinical supervision, an approach supposed to depend on a non-evaluative collegial relationship, is in danger of being transformed into “a refined teacher inspection technology.” Snyder outlines a comprehensive teacher development system that integrates authentic clinical supervision with systematic planning and assessment.

The prospect of evaluation can be inhibiting, but it's not the only reason the helping relationship is sometimes uncomfortable. In a provocative discourse, Carl Pickhardt contends that helping is a form of power. If he is right, supervisors are a threat to those they help whether or not they have the power to evaluate. Another factor affecting the success of supervision is teachers' opinions of supervisors' competence. Two articles in this issue suggest ways to sharpen supervisory skills. Richard Kindsvatter and William Wilen have devised a form for analyzing teacher-supervisor conferences. John Mangieri and David McWilliams explain how supervisors and principals (or any two people) can resolve their differences through planning.

When staff ratios make it impossible for principals and central office people to give as much personal help to teachers as they would like, they can multiply their efforts by organizing self-improvement programs and peer supervision. University staff members may be able to help.

Leading off a second set of articles, former U.S. Commissioner of Education Ernest Boyer asserts the need for more collaboration between universities and schools. As head of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Boyer currently is coaxing high school teachers and academic professors to get together. Education professors are more likely to be involved with schools, but even these relationships are not always fruitful, so the successful projects reported by Joseph Caruso and by Hilma Hagberg and Decker Walker are instructive.

An example of what collaboration can yield is the Annehurst Curriculum Classification System, described by Catherine Cornbleth. Annehurst principal Troy Mills tells about the partnership from the school's point of view and Jack Frymier, the college collaborator, reflects on the results in a conversation with O. L. Davis.

Projects like the one at Annehurst are excellent because teachers, professors, and supervisors work and learn together. That's the kind of relationship that should characterize staff development and supervision. Sometimes, though, supervisors' responsibility for results puts them in conflict with individual staff members. When that happens, they can't expect to be loved.

Upcoming Events:

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ASCD Upcoming Events:
May 14-16, 1981: Affiliated Unit Presidents Conference, Omaha.