

Quality Supervision and Organization for Quality Teaching

When more school districts begin to focus efforts on changing supervision and school organization, and not just teaching, then we will see real, lasting improvements in learning.

The evidence is strong that effective teaching methods alone constitute only one part of the formula for improving learning; two other essential elements are the use of effective administrative and supervisory practices and the presence of sound organizational development. Based on firsthand observations in some 50 school districts during the past five years, review of the literature, and discussions with colleagues across the country, I offer the following generalizations about how districts are trying to bring about improved learning.

- A great number of school districts have attempted large-scale staff development efforts with teachers as the primary target and administrators/supervisors as a secondary audience.

- Only a few districts have made concerted efforts to improve teaching, supervision, and organization in a manner that is likely to produce the desired results.

There is no doubt that school districts are devoting more time and money to staff development. What is in doubt is the productivity of such efforts and the adequacy of their scope. Not much of what should happen in schools will occur if we simply exchange one set of static and circumscribed practices for a different set. If the pattern continues, we will have only minor and temporary improvements. If we expect to see gains in

student performance that continue to grow, we must give equal and simultaneous attention to sound organizational development, teacher performance, and administrator/supervisor performance.

Recommendations for Organizational Development

First, some suggestions for district-level personnel.

1. *Develop a core set of central educational purposes using views of teachers, administrators, and, to the extent possible, community members and students.* The core purposes should be few in number, stated in common language, and revised annually. They should not attempt to include all the educational goals of each school; space should be provided for additional goals that meet the unique needs and interests of individual schools.

2. *Focus on developing increased self-direction, self-responsibility, and self-esteem as the basic climate for district and school operation.* As you formulate plans for all aspects of school operation, ask, "How will they contribute to increasing the self-direction, self-responsibility, and self-esteem of the administrators, teachers, and students who will be affected?" The research on "sense of efficacy" of teachers and "inner locus of control" of students says that people who be-

lieve that they have both the capability and opportunity to affect what happens to them are likely to be high achievers (Rose and Medway 1981). Dependent students, teachers, and administrators want to be told what to do. Self-directing people assume the initiative and take responsibility for their goals.

3. *Regularly review achievement of the core goals and the additional goals at both the district and school level.* The review/evaluation needs to involve all the parties who formulated the goals and should include both so-called "objective" and subjective data. Consider investing money in operations-based research, which provides a lively avenue to explore questions or resolve conflicts about key school practices.

4. *Base a major portion of staff development and curriculum development efforts on results of achievement goals.* Efforts tied to review of goal achievement tend to be remedial, so allow time and money for staff and curriculum activities that explore new ideas as well. Exploratory work in curriculum and staff development can stimulate creativity, open up new alternatives, and lead to what should be going on.

5. *Establish high expectations for achievement, and consider major changes in school practices as goals and plans for achieving or revising*

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expectations are developed. “High expectations for achievement” refers not only to student learning but to teaching performance and supervisory performance as well. McLaughlin and Marsh’s (1978) review of staff development projects across the country indicates that teachers and administrators are at their best when they are parties to major change that occurs in a relatively short time. This is contrary to the traditional wisdom among educators. The key phrase, however, is when the people to be affected *are parties to the change*. That is, they jointly decide what is to be done, how it is to be done, and then participate in doing it.

6. *Provide a system of small, ongoing support teams, in which each teacher and supervisor can participate.* Groups of two to four people are probably most effective, and they should be provided with the time and opportunities to meet, observe each other, and give mutual feedback. The concepts of “coaching” partners, “mentors” and “instructional resource teams” all fit this criterion.

Recommendations for Teachers

There is now a wide base of knowledge for teachers in improving classroom climate for learning, upgrading teaching methods, aligning and coordinating the curriculum, and evaluating pupil progress. Teachers need the support of supervisors and administrators in order to implement the following proposals.

1. *Expand your repertoire of teaching methods, styles, and modalities in order to give attention to all major approaches that may assist in improving learning.* In addition to becoming adept at using these different approaches, teachers should also learn to recognize which ones students prefer. Students’ preferences may be shaped by gender, race, ethnicity, social class, and other social-cultural forces. Teachers do not need to accommodate each student’s preferences and strengths but should teach them to recognize their own strengths and preferences and thus expand their repertoires for learning.



Teacher graphically describes her plans to the principal.

2. *Teach students to learn in diverse ways.* To instruct students to learn in different ways, teachers must first expand their own knowledge base and then teach students how to incorporate additional ways of learning.

3. *Ask your supervisors and the school organization to provide opportunities for each teacher to work for individual growth as well as for curriculum development for the school and district.* Sustained attention to both personal and organizational development is preferable to working on just one or the other.

Recommendations for Supervisors

Supervisors can bring about improved learning in four ways.

1. *Develop an array of supervisory styles to fit the variety of situations encountered.* No single style is best for all settings. Glickman's (1981) developmental supervision, which meets teachers' needs at different developmental stages is one helpful way to view the issue. When considering which style to use, ask two questions: (a) what style will work with this teacher in this setting at this time? and (b) how can use of this style lead the teacher to more self-direction and self-responsibility? What "works" may not lead to increased self-direction in every instance; however, the pattern of supervision with each teacher should do so. If it does not work, new supervisory practices, or a new teacher, are needed.

2. *Become acquainted with the major families of teaching methods, alternative modalities of learning, and styles of teaching and learning that affect student achievement.* There are at least four major families of effective teaching strategies (Joyce and Weil 1980). Madeline Hunter's "elements of effective instruction" are related to strategies from one of the four families. "Modalities" of learning and teaching refer to uses of audio, visual, or kinesthetic/tactile learning experiences preferred by teachers for teaching and by students for learning. Two styles of teaching and learning with great practical utility, based on practice and research, are "field-dependent, field independent," originally developed by Ramirez and Castaneda (1974), and "coping styles," developed



Involving students in the community increases their learning. Here student (on right) who chairs an Advisory Committee explains their recommendations to a member of the City Recreation Commission.

by Spaulding and Spaulding (1982). The authors provide ways to identify the styles and suggest how to use that knowledge to improve learning.

There is an inevitable, strong inclination for teachers to teach as they were taught and for supervisors to supervise as they were supervised. The most effective supervisors know enough to help teachers identify their own teaching patterns and to assist them in broadening their repertoire by acquiring additional methods, modalities, and styles.

3. *Employ supervisory processes that foster increased self-direction and self-responsibility within each teacher.* One commendable example is the so-called "clinical supervision" approach originally developed by Cogan and Goldhammer, and more recently revised by Acheson and Gall (1980). An essential step in this process is the use of a preobservation conference during which the teacher and supervisor jointly determine specific purposes of the observation and effective data gathering techniques. If a preobservation conference is not held, the supervisor unilaterally makes the decisions, and the teacher is relegated to a dependent role during the observation.

Another critical step (following the observation and postobservation conference) is for the supervisor to ask

the teacher for feedback on the supervision processes. What has been helpful in this set of processes? What has not? What can I (the supervisor) do to make them more helpful? Supervisors who conduct postconference evaluations report enthusiasm (and surprise) from teachers. A common teacher reaction is, "You mean you're willing to hear my point of view on how you supervise?" Supervisors also indicate that the climate of their relationships with teachers improves significantly as a result.

Skeptics will properly point out that use of practices to foster self-direction may not work with marginal teachers and usually do not work with incompetent teachers. That's true. Use the recommended approaches with the 90 to 95 percent of teachers who are satisfactory in their performance, and use directive approaches, as needed, for the other 5 to 10 percent who are not.

4. *Work with other people in the school and district to provide opportunities for your own professional growth and that of teachers.* Sometimes supervisors use their own new skills and knowledge as the basis for conducting teacher evaluations before they have provided inservice training in the new areas for teachers. Obviously, supervisors must help teachers



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Using What We Know

The essential ingredients to produce improved learning include concurrent changes in teaching, administration/supervision, and school organization. With sustained effort, all districts can promote excellence in teaching and learning.

The cost of doing what is needed will probably require 4 to 6 percent of a district's operating budget for staff development, curriculum development, operations-based research, and organizational development. Average companies spend this amount to carry out similar types of activities, and innovative businesses spend up to 15 percent of operating budgets on research and development. Education also should spend money on the activities that experience and research tell us will achieve our goals. □

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Delmo Della-Dora is Professor, Department of Teacher Education, California State University, Hayward, CA 94542.

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