

CLINICAL TEACHER DEVELOPMENT REVISITED

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Training designed to prepare clinical supervisors to conduct conferences for the purpose of improving instruction often emphasizes the development of classroom observation skills and deemphasizes skills needed for conferring with teachers. Until supervisors realize how and why they behave as they do in conferences, chances for changing such behaviors seem remote. Elsewhere we described a metatheory of human behavior, outlined a training process designed to help supervisors apply the metatheory via a clinical or in-class process of teacher development, and described in part what happened when 13 supervisors—graduate students training to be elementary or secondary school principals—tried to use the clinical process.¹ Here, we summarize briefly the results of that study and discuss reanalyses of the data yielded when a verbal interaction analysis system was applied to tape recordings of supervisory conferences with inservice elementary and high school teachers. Results from these reanalyses suggest directions for training and improving the practice of supervisors in preobservation and postobservation conferences with teachers.

BACKGROUND

Helping teachers perform to the fullest of their capabilities is, at least in part, a matter of tailoring supervisory environments that complement or supplement teachers' personal characteristics and fit the tasks teachers must accomplish.² To organize this way of thinking about and practicing teacher education, we use the equation $B = (f) P, E, T$. This equation means that teaching behavior (B) is a function of the person (P) who serves as teacher, the environment (E) designed to support the teacher, and the task (T) the teacher must accomplish.

The component of the equation over which supervisors of instruction probably exert most control is the environment (E). When the environment

¹Robert F McNergney, Patricia Francis, Stephanie Hinson, and Peggy Sumpfle, "Translating a Metatheory of Teacher Development into Practice," *Journal of Teacher Education* 34 (September-October 1983) 53-57.

²Robert F McNergney and C. A. Carrier, *Teacher Development* (New York: Macmillan, 1981).

is defined as a clinical process—a series of steps that include planning, conferring with teachers prior to classroom observation, observing in classrooms, and conferring with teachers after observation—supervisors may encounter a variety of problems that require the application of different skills.

Some of the more important supervisory skills are verbal in nature. Soliciting teachers' ideas about their instructional plans, probing teacher thinking with questions, providing objective feedback from observation in a nonthreatening manner, and the like all demand that supervisors behave with some reasonable sense of the potential impact of their words on teachers. When training is organized around a clinical process, supervisors begin by developing verbal skills needed for conducting conferences and by sharpening classroom observation skills. As the training progresses, it is designed to increase supervisors' repertoires of skills; for as teachers and tasks change, environments—defined in large measure by supervisors' words and phrases—may also need to change.

PROCEDURES AND INITIAL RESULTS

Our first description of supervisors' applications of the clinical process during training consisted of two kinds of data: self-reports and analyses of the verbal interactions of supervisors and teachers during conferences. The supervisors in the study (13 graduate students training to be elementary and secondary school principals) were given two opportunities to apply the clinical process with teachers—one midway through training, the other near the end of training.

The supervisors' self-reports indicated that they had problems overcoming their own feelings of nervousness and difficulties organizing and involving teachers in conferences.³ We analyzed verbal interactions during supervisor-teacher conferences by using Blumberg's low-inference category system summarized in Figure 1.⁴ Our results suggested that clinical episodes were dominated by a pattern of teachers giving information, opinions, or suggestions, followed by supervisors giving information and then either offering support to teachers or asking them for more information.

In these early analyses of verbal behavior, we combined data from pre- and postobservation conferences, and thus masked any potential differences between supervisors' and teachers' behaviors in these two types of conferences. We also obscured any differences that might have existed in their behaviors over time. The following analyses investigate these previously unexplored possibilities.

Our data consisted of percentages of time spent by supervisors and teachers in selected categories of verbal behavior as demonstrated in two separate clinical episodes (pre- and postobservation conferences for session one and for session two). To examine behaviors in particular types of confer-

³Ibid. Comprehensive descriptions appear in this source.

⁴Arthur Blumberg, *Supervisors and Teachers. A Private Cold War* (Berkeley, Calif. McCutchan, 1974).

Figure 1. Summary of Blumberg Interaction Analysis Categories

Supervisor Talk

- 1 Support-inducing communications behavior
 - 2 Praise
 - 3 Accepts or uses teacher's ideas
 - 4 Asks for information
 - 5 Gives information
 - 6 Asks for opinions
 - 7 Asks for suggestions
 - 8 Gives opinions
 - 9 Gives suggestions
 - 10 Criticism
-

Teacher Talk

- 11 Asks for information, opinions, or suggestions
 - 12 Gives information, opinions, or suggestions
 - 13 Positive social-emotional behavior
 - 14 Negative social-emotional behavior
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- 15 Silence or confusion
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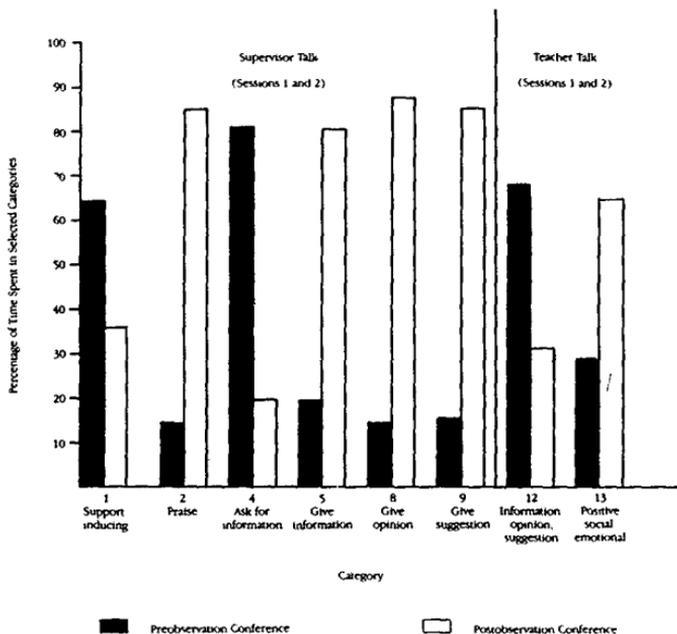
Adapted from Arthur Blumberg, 'A System for Analyzing Supervisor-Teacher Interaction,' in *Mirrors for Behavior*, III, ed. Anita Simon and E. Gil Boyer (Philadelphia: Research for Better Schools, Inc., 1970), pp. 34 1-2 to 34 1-4

ences, we pooled results from the two preconferences and those from the two postobservation conferences and compared percentages of time spent in selected categories. To determine if verbal behaviors of supervisors and teachers differed within a particular episode, we examined pre- and postobservation conference behaviors within each episode. We also compared preobservation conference behavior in session one with that in session two, and did the same with postobservation conference behavior in order to investigate the stability of behavior in a particular type of conference. Three questions guided our analyses.

1 *Are the behaviors of supervisors and teachers in preobservation conferences different from their behaviors in postobservation conferences?* Figure 2 shows that the behaviors of supervisors and teachers in preobservation conferences differ quite markedly from their behaviors in postobservation conferences. For example, supervisors made nearly twice as many support-inducing comments in preobservation conference situations as they did in postobservation conferences (64 percent vs. 36 percent). The disparity between supervisor behavior in pre- and postobservation conferences is more pronounced when examining requests for information. Supervisors asked teachers for information four times as often in preobservation conferences as they did in postobservation conferences.

Other types of behaviors, as noted in Figure 2, tended to appear more often in postobservation conferences. Of the time supervisors spent praising teachers, 85 percent was done in postobservation conferences compared with only 15 percent in preobservation conferences. The same general pattern held for supervisor behaviors of giving information, opinions, and suggestions. Teachers' behaviors, too, differed between types of conferences. Of the time

Figure 2. Comparison of Supervisor and Teacher Behaviors During Pre- and Postobservation Conferences

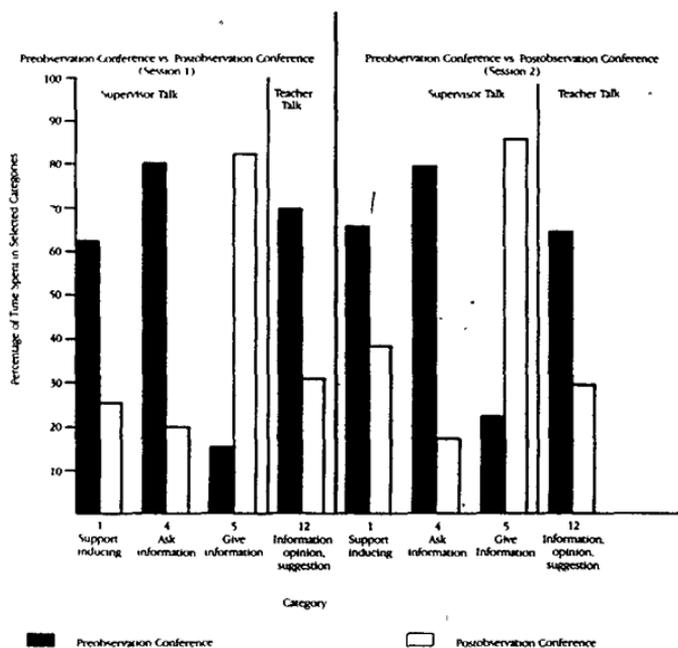


teachers devoted to giving information, opinions, or suggestions, more was spent in preobservation conferences (68 percent vs 32 percent in postobservation conferences). On the other hand, most of the teachers' positive social-emotional comments were made in postobservation conferences (65 percent vs. 30 percent in preobservation conferences).

2. *Do behaviors of supervisors and teachers in preobservation conferences differ from their behaviors in postobservation conferences within particular episodes?* Figure 3 shows that supervisors' and teachers' behaviors in particular episodes, regardless of whether we examine pre- or postobservation conference interactions, are remarkable only by their degree of sameness. Teachers behaved the same in sessions one and two with regard to asking for information, opinions, or suggestions. Though not shown in Figure 3, supervisors in session one spent no more time in preobservation conferences than they did in postobservation conferences accepting teachers' ideas, asking for opinions and making suggestions, or giving opinions and suggestions.

Supervisors, however, spent more time in preobservation conferences than in postobservation conferences making support-inducing comments and

Figure 3. Behaviors of Supervisors and Teachers in Preobservation Conferences Compared with Their Behaviors in Postobservation Conferences Within Particular Episodes

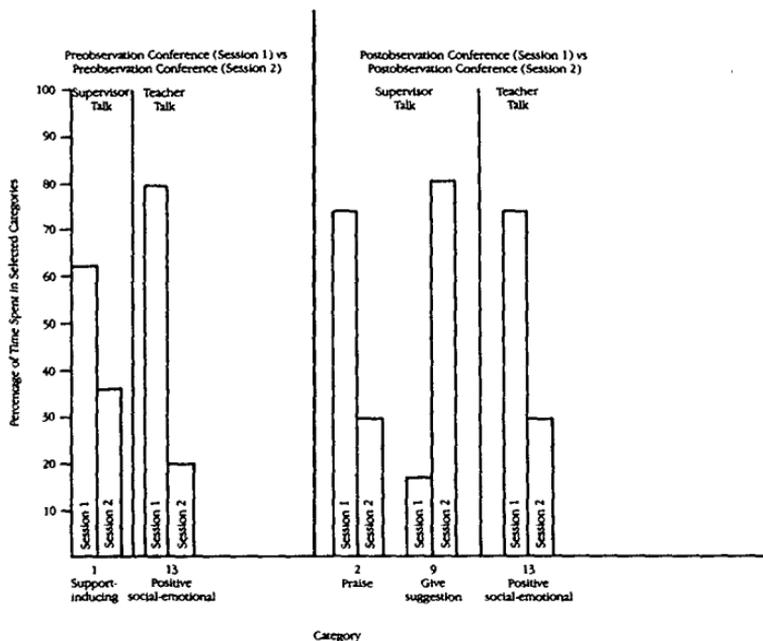


asking for information Teachers in sessions one and two spent more than twice as much time giving information, opinions, or suggestions in preobservation conferences than they did in postobservation conferences.

3 *Are preobservation and postobservation conference behaviors of supervisors and teachers stable?* Yes, except for support-inducing comments made by supervisors in preobservation conferences and positive social-emotional comments made by teachers in preobservation conferences. Both supervisors and teachers spent considerably less time in these categories in later sessions than in earlier sessions. An examination of Figure 4 reveals that supervisors spent almost twice as much time in their first preobservation conference making supportive comments as they did in their second preobservation conference.

In addition, in postobservation conferences, the only supervisory behaviors that changed over time were those of praising and giving suggestions. Supervisor praise dropped dramatically in the second session (71 percent vs 29 percent). This finding must be interpreted with some caution because the raw data suggest that the average changes over time may have been affected

Figure 4. Stability of Pre- and Postobservation Conference Behaviors of Supervisors and Teachers



greatly by a few subjects who praised excessively. In contrast, supervisors' suggestions were more plentiful in the second postobservation conference than in the first (17 percent vs. 83 percent), indicating a possible shift from concern about the psychological well-being of the teacher to concern about the tasks of teaching. Teachers' positive social-emotional behavior also went down from first to second postobservation conference (also 71 percent to 29 percent). Before we draw any hard-and-fast conclusions about the stability of supervisor and teacher behaviors in conferences, it would seem wise to examine such behaviors over a longer period of time. The decrements in praise and support-inducing comments noted here may have been only natural consequences of increased familiarity and lower anxiety of supervisors and teachers as they progressed from session one to session two.

DISCUSSION

Supervisors seem to exhibit a fairly traditional approach of working with teachers, even when encouraged to do otherwise. They lend moral support

in preobservation conferences and ask questions, but not many, and they give lots of information, opinions, suggestions, and praise in postobservation conferences. Admittedly, the supervisors we observed were relatively inexperienced, and thus somewhat cautious (as evidenced also in their self-reports).

Supervisors are understandably cautious. Even during training, when faced with prospects of applying their knowledge and skills with teachers, they may be reluctant to try new things. If they are going to stretch teachers to experiment with challenging techniques in the classroom, however, it seems supervisors must also be stretched in their training.

To remove some of the threats associated with trying new supervisory techniques we have begun to simulate decision making in supervisory situations.⁵ Our early efforts at developing a simulation have resulted in what we call the Teacher Development Decision Exercises (TeDDEx). TeDDEx presents supervisors with problems they might be expected to face on the job and requires them to make decisions about: (1) teachers' needs and abilities, (2) objectives that might be reasonable for teachers to pursue in their teaching, (3) instrumentation for assessing teachers' performances in classrooms, and (4) strategies for conducting pre- and postobservation conferences with teachers. Initially in paper-and-pencil form, TeDDEx is now computer-based, allowing us to examine supervisory decisions in ways previously not possible. For example, the computer can record when and where supervisors turn for information as they make particular decisions. Such a decision trail may suggest why supervisors behave as they do.

Why is it important to understand how and why supervisors and teachers interact as they do in supervisory conferences? Developing teachers' instructional capabilities via a clinical process is a matter of teaching adults. If the teachers of adults, or in this case supervisors, are unaware of their actions during conferences, there are few opportunities to judge the quality of their performances let alone improve them. Supervisors concerned about helping teachers do the best possible job must be able to fit their own skills to the needs and abilities of their clients. This can mean that a supervisor must take the lead in a conference by providing direct, corrective feedback to an inexperienced, tremulous teacher. It can also mean that a supervisor must probe and encourage the creativity of an experienced, confident teacher. Only when supervisors understand what occurs in conferences will they know whether or not they are meeting the needs of teachers. Moreover, people who are responsible for training and evaluating supervisors can't train others to use a clinical approach with teachers without being reasonably clear about what "using a clinical approach" means.

Providing some idea of what to expect in terms of supervisor-teacher verbal interactions only begins to afford such meaning. Something other than the Blumberg system might yield other, more useful information about super-

⁵Robert F. McNergney and Stephanie Hinson, "Assessing Professional Decision-making Abilities," *Education and Communication Technology* (in press).

visor-teacher interactions. For example, Weller's Multidimensional Observational System for the Analysis of Interactions in Clinical Supervision (MOSAICS) provides information on the "pedagogical moves" that structure the flow and substance of discourse during supervisor-teacher conferences.⁶ Zeichner and Liston reported on the use of a system that examines levels of thinking (logic) exhibited in conferences and the relationship of activities in conferences to program goals (or what they refer to as the "substance" of conferences).⁷ Their approach seems reasonable in that the dialogue of conferences, which are conducted under the auspices of some preservice and inservice programs, should be expected to be influenced by program goals or objectives.

We noticed informally in this study that when supervisors failed in preobservation conferences to discuss the kind of observational data they planned to collect—data that were often observable indications of particular teacher competencies—discussion in postobservation conferences tended to revolve around teachers' perceptions of how students reacted to the lessons. As Harootunian and Yarger pointed out, teachers often assess their professional self-worth in terms of how their students seem to respond rather than how they themselves perform.⁸ While this tendency is reasonable and to a certain degree useful when trying to understand and improve teaching—for one "reality" of teaching exists in the minds of those who are "taught"—it may also be dysfunctional.

Supervisors must provide "mirrors" in which teachers can view their own behaviors in classrooms. When supervisors fail to alert teachers that data on teaching will be collected, teachers may miss opportunities to "try on" various teaching techniques and strategies, and thus miss opportunities to see themselves in the data supervisors provide. If teaching is even a mere fraction of conscious, active decision making, this oversight only serves to diminish the connection between teachers' thoughts and their behaviors.

As the public demands greater accountability from teachers, it will become increasingly important to hold supervisors of teachers accountable for their work. By critically examining supervisory behavior in conference situations, we may begin to do so, we also may be in a position to provide instructive feedback on supervisory performance.

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⁶Richard H. Weller, *Verbal Communication in Instructional Supervision: An Observational System for and Research Study of Clinical Supervision in Groups* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1971)

⁷Kenneth Zeichner and Daniel Liston, "Varieties of Discourse in Supervisory Conferences," paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, New Orleans, April 1984

⁸Berg Harootunian and Gwen P. Yarger, *Teachers' Conceptions of Their Own Success* (Washington, D.C.: ERIC Clearinghouse on Teacher Education, 1981)

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