THE ROLE OF DISTRICT SUPERVISORS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PEER COACHING

PETER P. GRIMMETT, University of British Columbia

Why do teachers not share information with one another? Why are they apparently given to norms of isolationism and defensiveness instead of the more desirable norms of collegiality and experimentation? Do teachers shrink from the hallmark of professional behavior because they have nothing to say? Or are teachers mired in an unrewarding, denigrating workplace? Dombart's practitioner's view from the inside does not equivocate on these questions:

The paradox of education as a profession is that it attracts people with visions into a system designed to frustrate those visions. Love of subject and children impelled these people into the profession, and it is precisely what is driving them out of it or underground. Experienced teachers do not talk about visions; it is too painful. Like soldiers at the front, we have learned to assume a flippant and hardened attitude. So it is not that we are either shiftless or stupid that keeps us silent about visions. It is that we are tired—tired of being powerless pawns in a system that treats us either with indifference or disdain. Take a look at the working world of the insider. You will find that it is not an atmosphere that nourishes visions. Though we teachers are numerous, we are virtually powerless. We affect none of the key elements in our working lives.

The critical question then becomes not whether school personnel know much of value but under what conditions they will reveal the extraordinary insights about student learning that they carry around with them as they execute their daily tasks.

Peer coaching was devised to help teachers help one another foster student achievement and development. To use Sizer's terminology, it is a way

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of "empowering Horace." It attempts to place teachers in control of their workplace through dyadic encounters with experienced yet sympathetic colleagues. The purpose is to provide for experimentation in the teaching process. Ultimately, peer coaching is designed to release in teachers a dialogue around the rich knowledge they appear otherwise to withhold.

How then do district supervisors implement this process of observation and exchange? This paper reports part of a Canadian study that looked at a district's attempt at implementing a network for peer coaching among its principals and teachers. The specific focus here will not be on the peer-coaching program itself but rather on the role played by central office executives in its implementation.

THE CONTEXT

The Cragleaf School District of British Columbia, Canada, has two district-level supervisors (assistant superintendents) who attempted to establish a system of peer coaching at the school and classroom levels. In 1982, the assistant superintendents drew up an implementation plan for a three-year time frame beginning during the 1983–84 school year. During the first year, the district supervisors would work with eight selected principals (one-third of the district's total) and three volunteer teachers from each of the eight schools. The second year, 1984–85, would see a repeat of the first one but with eight new school principals and teachers added. The third year, 1985–86, would follow a similar pattern. In the selection process, careful attention was paid to ensuring that the number of secondary schools relative to elementary schools in the project proportionally represented the elementary-secondary school balance in the district.

The primary objective of the district’s plan was to establish a network for peer coaching among both principals in the district and teachers within schools. The ultimate aim was to have, by the end of the 1985–86 school year, a network of 24 principals and at least 72 teachers involved in peer coaching. The three volunteer teachers in each of the district's 24 schools would form a nucleus for this collegial enterprise. In other words, the teachers, once they had become confident and grounded in peer coaching, were expected to branch out and begin coaching with a member of the school's teaching staff who was not yet involved in the project. Thus, the teachers would extend the process by mirroring the treatment they had received from their principals.

First, the district undertook a major staff-development initiative that involved all participants in the project in each year, eight principals and three volunteer

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teachers from their respective schools. The endeavor consisted of 20 hours of instruction in teacher effectiveness training (TET, a euphemism for Instructional Theory into Practice, or ITIP) and peer coaching. Carol Cummings of Edmunds, Washington, was the primary resource person for these 20 hours that took place over two days in November and two days in January in each of the three years of the project. After February in each year, the principals and teachers would then begin to practice some of the techniques they had learned.

The attempt at peer coaching was designed to take place in three phases. In Phase 1, the principal entered into a coaching experience with each of the three teachers. The principal was expected to demonstrate the peer-coaching techniques, giving the teachers supportive feedback on the implementation of specific teaching skills. A district supervisor would, in turn, practice peer-coaching techniques with the principals and provide them with feedback on their conferencing with the teacher. Phase 2 would begin once the principal and teachers became comfortable with and grounded in the conference process. The teachers would then begin coaching their peers (i.e., the two colleague teachers who had attended the workshops on TET and peer coaching), and the principal would assume the role played by the district supervisor during Phase 1. Phase 3 was expected to begin during the second year of the project. In this phase, each of the teachers would begin conferencing with a previously uninvolved colleague; the principal and original teachers would share the role of monitoring the conferences and "coaching the coach."

THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The primary purpose of the large study (conducted at the end of the second year) was to investigate the extent to which district level initiatives can enable principals and teachers to work together as peer coaches. A secondary purpose was to examine the specific roles played by the district supervisors in implementing a peer-coaching network. The secondary purpose of the larger study is the focus of this paper.6

THE STUDY'S FRAMEWORK:
TWO APPROACHES TO SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Little's study of the norms and work conditions conducive to school improvement highlights four conditions that, when present, cultivate norms of collegiality and experimentation in schools. Teachers engage in frequent, continuous and increasingly concrete and precise talk about teaching practice (as distinct from teacher characteristics and failings, the social lives of teachers.

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6ibid
District Supervisors and Peer Coaching

Teachers and administrators frequently observe each other teaching, and provide each other with useful (if potentially frightening) evaluations of their teaching. Only such observation and feedback can provide shared referents for the shared language of teaching, and both demand and provide the precision and concreteness which makes the talk about teaching useful.

Teachers and administrators plan, design, research, evaluate and prepare teaching materials together. The most prescient observations remain academic ("just theory") without the machinery to act on them.

Teachers and administrators teach each other the practice of teaching [Little's italics].

The effects of school improvement are clear. What is not so clear in the literature is how districts and schools can attain them. Two broad approaches seem to be deemed effective by their respective supporters. A debate now exists over the merits of the so-called DESSI model and action-oriented, problem-solving approaches as the basis for bringing about educational change and professional renewal in schools. Table 1 compares these two approaches.

The first of these approaches, the DESSI model, originally presented in a network study of Dissemination Efforts Supporting School Improvement and later articulated in a number of published sources, assumes that teacher commitment is not essential before implementation but rather that it more likely follows after teachers are pressured into action. The role of the central office is an important one because district personnel provide for the "enforced, stabilized use" of a program that has been demonstrated in field-testing situations to be technically challenging and well designed. In short, it is a

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Table 1. Two Contrasting Approaches to School Improvement: The DESSI Model and the School-Based, Problem-Solving Approach

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>DESSI model</th>
<th>School-based, problem-solving approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initiation</td>
<td>Central office officials identify exemplary practice—an “education program that works”</td>
<td>Principal and teachers (sometimes with central office officials) together assess needs and problems in the educational program at school. School-based practitioners’ views are respected.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>Central office officials employ a credible practitioner to demonstrate the exemplary practice chosen. No latitude is given to teacher to “blunt” or change program practices. “Mutual adaptation” model is disallowed</td>
<td>Principal and teachers research the needs and problems identified as a cooperative team. They generate alternatives, attempt to understand the needs and problems fully, choose the best solution, and develop a “school action plan.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incorporation</td>
<td>Teachers are required to emulate and replicate the exemplary practice. Emulation produces mastery of a well-designed program. Replication brings about commitment to a technically challenging program. Sustained support and stability of leadership at the central office and school level is vital</td>
<td>Principal and teacher teams explain the action plan to others (central office, teachers, students, parents). Task force groups are established to work on specific aspects of the action plan. Commitment to the improvement effort comes from shared (high) expectations and a sense of community/belonging/caring, which positively affects the school ethos.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

program that works,¹³ an “innovation package” providing “solid solutions to real classroom problems” [which] have been developed through both research and practice.”¹⁴

Through a central office initiative, the exemplary practices of the program are demonstrated to teachers and administrators in the district by a highly credible, charismatic practitioner. Teachers are expected to emulate the practices demonstrated with no latitude being given for them to “blunt” or downsize the program. Through emulation and replication of exemplary practice, teachers develop mastery of and commitment to a well-designed, technically challenging program. Throughout the process, the central office personnel ensure that there is sustained support and stability of program leadership

¹³Education Programs that Work, 7th ed (San Francisco: Far West Regional Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, 1980).
The explanation posited by the DESSI model for how school improvement comes about gives district personnel a critical role to play. Where programs are validated, structured, and focused, the Network researchers suggest that district decision making, combined with intense technical assistance, promotes implementation at the school level. As Huberman and Crandall say:

The central office administrator, who is usually responsible for curriculum and special projects, puts pressure on users to adopt or develop the practice. Such strong arming can, and often does, lower users' initial commitment. When, however, substantial assistance is supplied, it tends both to increase users' level of technical mastery and subsequently their commitment. The general picture is one of administrative decisiveness, accompanied by enough assistance to increase user skill, ownership and stable use.

The problem-solving approach is articulated by several scholars and educators. Essentially, its starting point is the school, not the district. A local committee or task force is established (by central office personnel, the school administrator, the school-based teachers, or all parties together) to undertake a needs assessment of the school's educational program. A problem or need is identified and defined by the local group with the effect that school-based practitioners' definition of a locally perceived need or problem is respected. The task force then researches the problem, retrieving all the information it can before generating a host of alternative solutions for the diagnosed need. Thus, teachers are practicing cooperative learning, since they decide as a team on a strategy for addressing the problem identified, and as a team they gather the kind of information that enables them collectively and individually to understand the problem more fully. Once they have reached this stage, the task force then chooses from among the many alternatives the solution that potentially addresses the problem most effectively, and action plans are then drawn up.

The advantage to this approach is the heavy emphasis on a process of early teacher involvement around problems derived from practice that results in action. Teachers then tend to own the solution or action plan generated and can explain it to other colleagues, students, and parents. Therefore, everyone is informed and eventually involved in implementing a new policy.

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or action plan that in turn produces among teachers and students alike a sense of expectation. The high expectations and feelings of caring initiated by this problem-solving approach inevitably impinge on the ethos or culture of the school. Because teacher commitment is high, this approach more likely results in long-term school improvement.

An interesting feature of the debate in the literature is that while proponents of either side call for a mixed approach—that is, top-down and bottom-up to school improvement, they generally see the approach they do not espouse as being single-faceted. For example, Cuban argues strongly that top-down strategies result in tighter coupling between district central offices and schools and lead to an increase in standardization, narrowness, and short-sightedness. He sees several unanticipated trade-offs that schools are forced to make because of this approach. For instance, by adopting the focus of raising the test scores of all students, schools frequently ignore the challenge of educating the more gifted students for whom the ceiling of achievement tests is too low for them to demonstrate real progress. Huberman, on the other hand, suggests that when teachers are allowed to adapt a program to their specific situational needs (as Berman and McLaughlin suggested is the case in the Rand study), the result is not greater commitment but a program that no longer represents innovative practice. He comes out strongly, then, against so-called bottom-up approaches to school improvement.

Despite this contrast, certain general strategies appear to be common to both approaches. Each recommends the need for an implementation plan, whether at the district or school level or both, the need for ongoing staff development is clearly articulated, and developing a focus on instruction and academic goals is considered a key factor in school improvement.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The school-effectiveness literature highlights the role played by the principal in program improvement and professional development. At the same time, district support for improvement efforts through the provision of resources and training opportunities is considered critical. Fullan suggests that "the district administrator is the single most important individual for setting the expectations and tone of the pattern of change within the local district." But what strategies do district administrators and supervisors use in setting expec-

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tations and tone? How do they foster the implementation of new ideas and activities in schools?

Our knowledge about the critical nature of the roles played by district personnel appears to lag behind our understanding of how these roles are enacted. While some liken principals to "accelerators in cars being driven by central office administrators," others see the principal as the primary force in school improvement, characterizing the district roles as secondary and largely supportive. The practical relevance of this study, then, is that it explicates and analyzes the roles played by district personnel in a complex implementation process. The theoretical significance is that it sheds light on the current debate over the merits of the DESSI model and the problem-solving approaches as the basis for bringing about educational change and professional renewal in schools.

METHOD

The study used a semi-structured interview of half of the participants involved in the first two years of the project ($n = 29$), together with an examination of documents about the project made available by central office officials and school-based principals. From the analysis of interview data, certain themes or response patterns emerged that were then compared with categories derived from the document analysis. This comparison provided the basis for interpreting the role of central office executives in implementing the peer-coaching project.

LIMITATIONS

Two limitations should be noted. First, because this report is based on a case study of an implementation process, the findings may not be generalizable beyond the context of the project. Further, the analysis of roles played by district supervisors in the project could also be characterized as an investigation of the roles undertaken in the broader context of change processes at work in the school system as a whole.

Second, the scope of the study was delimited to collecting interview and documentary data. No classroom observation was undertaken. It was not possible, then, to establish, beyond subjects’ self-reports, the extent to which

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peer coaching made a difference in classroom practice and student learning. Further, since data were gathered at the end of the second year of the implementation phase (using Fullan's 1983 terms, initiation took place between 1981 and 1983, implementation between 1983 and 1986, and incorporation is still under way), the findings can shed light only on how the district initiated and implemented the peer-coaching project. No findings are yet available on the extent to which peer coaching has become an integral component of the Cragleaf district's infrastructure.

FINDINGS

A major finding emerged from the data analysis that is consistent with the literature on peer interaction. Principals and teachers generally acclaimed the benefits of peer coaching for their professional confidence, competence, and collegiality while also admitting that time constraints, peer incompatibility, professional threat, and interpersonal defensiveness had, in most cases, essentially rendered their participation in the peer-coaching process minimal. Out of the eight schools represented in the sample, only in one school did peer coaching become a structured component of the principal's and teachers' regular activities. There, the innovation had already begun to spread to include the teachers who had previously not attended the district workshops.

This apparent discrepancy between practitioners' talking persuasively to researchers about the advantages of peer interaction and their reported failure to structure opportunities for practice and feedback suggests that many regard improvement efforts as initiatives they must support overtly (if only at the level of subtle lip service) to safeguard their image as "professionals." Such sophistry is, perhaps, a social reality in education, but this phenomenon can become a major barrier to bringing about the kind of quality change that affects student learning in classrooms. (For a detailed description of specific findings on content, contextual, and process-related factors in the project's implementation, see the final report of the study.)

This sophistry also surrounded the participants' articulation of the role played by the district supervisors. The participants identified key district personnel (the two supervisors and a director of instruction) as the prime

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movers in the project and acknowledged their project-initiating and project-sustaining roles. But the participants leveled at the district personnel the kind of criticism that would suggest they held misgivings about how the district personnel initiated and sustained the project.

The Initiation of the Project

Table 2 shows that 17 respondents believed the district initiated the project; 7 did not know how initiation had occurred, and 5 attributed credit to school-based personnel. Of these 17, 11 had consistent versions of how the district began the peer-coaching project; 5 of the 17 did not know any details of the initiation process but credited the district; 4 respondents (all from the same school where successful implementation occurred) observed that the idea and impetus to begin a peer-coaching project came from a teacher in their school. These 4 also believed that when the teacher approached the district about the idea, the administrators agreed to follow the idea up because it was consistent with their goals for a district-wide school-improvement effort.

The Prime Movers in the Project and Their Actions

Table 3 names the actors perceived by the study sample to be the prime movers in initiating and implementing the peer-coaching project. About 4 percent of the total responses depicted central office personnel as the prime movers. Of these, the two assistant superintendents and the director of instruction were clearly recognized for playing an influential role. The responses also indicate, however, that this role was shared to a degree by three principals and one teacher. All the school-based practitioners named by respondents were members of the original steering committee formed by the two district supervisors.

Table 4 depicts the actions that the respondents associated with the prime movers identified in the project. The main actions had to do with making the necessary organizational arrangements for the project, notably organizing workshops and using the steering group to provide input and feedback from principals and teachers. At the same time, the district personnel were per-

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Table 2. Initiation of the Project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of response</th>
<th>Sample composition</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Board office</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Principals E S</td>
<td>Teachers E S</td>
<td>Total E S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District initiated</td>
<td>2 3 5 6</td>
<td>7 9</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal initiated</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher initiated</td>
<td>1 3 4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>1 6 7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: E = elementary school, S = secondary school
Table 3. Prime Movers of the Project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of response</th>
<th>Principals</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Board office</th>
<th>Total responses (n = 65)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District supervisors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant superintendent 1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant superintendent 2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District consultants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping teacher</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of instruction</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal 1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal 2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal 3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: E = elementary school, S = secondary school

Received to be highly committed to the project, working enthusiastically at encouraging teachers and principals to become involved. In 11 cases, the actions associated with the identified prime movers were not addressed. Some lingering misgivings in some participants' minds may explain this deficiency or may simply indicate that the participants could not think of any concrete actions to support their characterizations. Specific responses about the district supervisors' role suggest that both of these explanations could be plausible.

Table 4. Actions of the Prime Movers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of response</th>
<th>Principals</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Board office</th>
<th>Total responses (n = 34)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational arrangements</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organized a committee of interested members</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organized workshops</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Got the endorsement of the professional associations</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did research on TET for the benefit of teachers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Got input and feedback from principals and teachers through steering committee</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment and enthusiasm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spread their enthusiasm</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt strongly about it</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraged involvement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actions not addressed</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: E = elementary school, S = secondary school
Perceptions of the District Supervisors' Role

Table 5 shows the participants' perceptions of the district supervisors' role. Many of the actions identified in Table 4 contributed to project-initiating and project-sustaining roles when the supervisors adopted a persuasive stance toward advocating the project. Drawing up plans for the project, sounding out opinion-leaders for their support, and coordinating the important steering committee contributed to the project-initiating role. Organizing the workshops and participating in them enthusiastically, facilitating opportunities for practice by providing limited release time, and generally making information about the project available to school-based personnel constituted a project sustaining role. At the same time, the participants perceived the district supervisors as using a low-key, “soft sell” approach to encourage and cajole teachers’ involvement. One teacher remarked, “We were encouraged, not told.” Another added, “I don’t see them going out of their way to jam it down people’s throats.” The visibility of the district supervisors in schools before the project’s initiation and during implementation at the workshops contributed considerably to the basic perception that the assistant superintendents played important roles in the peer-coaching project.

However, when asked to comment on any disadvantages or constraints of the project, the participants offered views that appeared to conflict with responses directly focusing on the district’s role. Indeed, almost all respondents held the district primarily accountable for the lack of successful implementation in seven of the eight schools studied. The teachers in the one reportedly successful school attributed credit for the project’s success not to the district but to the vision, decisive leadership, indefatigable energy, and active involvement of their principal. Remarkably, participants who had been

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of response</th>
<th>Sample composition</th>
<th>Total responses (n = 64)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Principals</td>
<td>Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project-initiating role</td>
<td>Leaders</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Initiators</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Planners and organizers</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coordinators</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project-sustaining role</td>
<td>Facilitators</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Monitors feedback</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enthusiastic participants</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Committed supporters</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strategy/advocacy</td>
<td>Persuasive/non-authoritarian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: E = elementary school, S = secondary school
unable to identify specific actions as evidence for their global statements about the district supervisors' initiating and supportive roles appeared to have little difficulty in articulating shortcomings in the district effort. Also, those who had previously identified concrete actions undertaken by the district supervisors still made some trenchant criticisms of the supervisors' approach. With unusual consistency, 24 of the 29 participants noted most of the following lacunae and shortcomings in the district effort.

- A lack of communication to the teachers of the project's initial intent and subsequent strategy.
- A lack of refresher courses and follow-up sessions for teachers to keep their knowledge and awareness updated.
- The non-availability of resources to all schools—equipment, money, release time, necessary information, and sustained help from a resource person.
- The perceived unfairness of criteria for selecting the first set of schools. The participants noted that schools were selected to be part of the first year complement on the basis of school size and previous exposure and experience with certain staff-development initiatives. These criteria eliminated small schools with limited staff resources that were enthusiastic about the project. Several teachers also suggested that the initial workshops should have been open to the entire staff instead of a privileged few.
- The expedient appointment of a less-than-acceptable principal as the district resource person or helping teacher, which made some principals and teachers distraught.
- Restricting the availability of the expertise and advice of the external resource person and other workshop presenters to the schools in the first year complement. (This restriction may, however, have been more the result of the principals', not the district's, actions.)
- The imposition of subtle coercion on some teachers to join the project, which affected their perceptions of it.
- Inadequate monitoring and field-based work by the district supervisors during the implementation phase.

Summary Comment

The findings on the district supervisors' role appear to parallel the sophistication found in the larger study surrounding the participants' views of the peer-coaching project. While commending the project-initiating, project-sustaining, and strategic advocacy roles played by the supervisors, the participants also criticized the planning, coordination, technical assistance, and project-monitoring roles that would seem to be an integral part of initiating and sustaining a project of this magnitude. Apparently, the practitioners believed they must present the most positive picture of a somewhat flawed project before honestly dealing with their serious criticisms. Yet the finding that successful imple-
Dissemination had taken place in only one of the eight schools is not surprising, since change takes a long time to materialize and the data were gathered after the second year of a three-year project. Perhaps the pressure on practitioners at the school and district levels to be more effective is so acute that such dissimulation becomes an unanticipated outcome of the so-called effectiveness movement.

What would appear far more important than giving the impression of some impact—Berman characterized this phenomenon as the development of a policy image—\textsuperscript{24} is the presence of the kind of personal and professional security that enables all involved to learn from the events that took place. This security was evident in the district supervisors on two occasions, when the original invitation was extended for the study to be conducted and when presented with the findings of the preliminary analysis highlighting the project’s ambiguity that tended not to reflect favorably on the roles they had played. Ignoring the possibility of halting the analysis at that point, they encouraged further analysis of the interview and documentary data to extrapolate conclusions relevant to future practice and significant for expanding the knowledge of the district’s role in school improvement.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The organizers for this section are derived from the participants’ criticisms of the district’s role in the project. These organizers of planning, staff-development coordination, technical assistance and support, and project monitoring then guide further analysis of the interview data in the light of documentary data consisting of plans, memorandums, letters, and meeting agendas and minutes.

Planning

This aspect of the district supervisors’ role has three broad features: planning for appropriate program selection and advocacy, planning for appropriate clarification of roles for central office and school-based personnel, and planning for implementation at the school level.

Planning for program selection and advocacy Where the approach to implementation and school improvement is more school based and given to problem solving, this type of planning is not immediately required by district officials. But where the emphasis is on central office initiative around a particular, research-validated program (the DESSI approach), this kind of planning is essential. The evidence from this study suggests that the latter was indeed the case for the district as a whole. A program given by an external

\textsuperscript{24}Paul Berman, Toward an Implementation Paradigm, in Improving Schools, ed Rolf Lehming and Michael Kane (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1981)
resource person in TET and peer coaching was selected as the focus for innovation. The critical question this subsection addresses is how such a choice was made and how the district planned for program selection.

A study in progress looking at the question of how programs for staff development are selected at the district level and translated to meet local needs has found that central office officials typically make decisions without concern for the specifics of the local situation. In other words, programs that are available to the educational community (such as the ones in *Education Programs That Work*) are recommended by key influencers at the district level and then imposed in a top-down fashion. On the important question of to what extent the content of externally derived programs was translated to meet local needs, Edwards found, in the two districts studied (one of which was Cragleaf), little or no evidence of such translation. Therefore, the program was imposed in Cragleaf in much the same way as it had been used in Napa Valley, California, for example.

These findings raise an important question. How did the district personnel in Cragleaf scan the various offerings of instructional programs available to the educational community to come to some decision to adopt the TET/peer-coaching program? The data in this study suggest that little scanning took place. Rather, the supervisors selected the external resource person’s program of peer coaching because it was an extension of the already established teacher-effectiveness program in the district. Most of the district’s teachers and principals were assumed to be familiar with the language and general approach of the model. This assumption turned out to be overly optimistic. From the evidence, then, it appears that the district did not systematically scan the available program alternatives before making a decision to adopt.

Once the decision was made, however, shrewd steps were undertaken to ensure its acceptance and advocacy in the district. A steering committee with representatives from the central office and volunteer principals and teachers was formed to plan the continued implementation of the district’s teaching-effectiveness program, and this committee endorsed the peer coaching project as a key part of its overall plan. The members of this committee were carefully chosen to ensure that they were opinion-leaders in their respective domains and also committed to professional development programs as a viable form of inservice education. Thus, the district supervisors were able to “sell” the program to the steering committee and to create a nucleus of influencers who could be relied on to undertake the role of project advocacy.

The plan formulated by the steering committee for district-wide implementation was, however, their plan. An important aspect of the district supervisors’ role had to do with how this plan was communicated to all personnel

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in the district and translated into action for implementation. Both supervisors believed they used every opportunity to communicate the intents of the plan for implementation, yet many of the teachers interviewed suggested that they were not aware of this effort. One explanation may be that the supervisors tended to rely on the formal organizational channels in the district to communicate the plan. That is, they set out to "sell" the principals on the projects and expected that the school based administrators, in turn, would clearly inform the teachers about the project's goals. (The district supervisors did, indeed, send signals to teachers about the project's importance to the district but mostly by memorandums, presence at workshops, and presentations, organization, and facilitation rather than by direct contact with teachers in schools.) This decision to work more directly with principals than with teachers probably represents an important oversight in the district supervisors' strategy, many of the school administrators were unclear of the role they were expected to play.

Planning for clarification of roles for district supervisors and principals. Planning for the clarification of the roles expected of principals during implementation can only proceed smoothly if there is first a clear conception of what the district supervisors and central office personnel will do. From the data, it appears that the two supervisors in question had carefully planned their roles. They held conferences with each of the eight principals engaged in the project in each year to discuss conferencing with teachers. This elaborate scheme of "coaching the coach" or "meta-coaching" did not work out, however, particularly during the second year; one of the supervisors got caught up in a time-consuming community survey for the provincial Ministry of Education, and both supervisors were involved in dealing with the effects of a provincially imposed program of financial cutbacks. While a clarification of role for the district supervisors was evident, planning for its operation and for contingencies when their energies were diverted elsewhere was not so apparent. Indeed, it is not at all clear whether the supervisors clarified and actively developed the capacity of their central office colleagues (i.e., consultants, district-relieving principal) to support the project and its implementation. In other words, it was not altogether clear how the district supervisors and central office staff were to enact the subtle combination of pressure and support for principal and teacher involvement.

The data suggest that little detailed planning took place on this count. Although there were plans for the district supervisors to interact regularly with principals about peer conferencing and coaching, there were no plans for other central office staff to take their place if a crisis arose that made it impossible for the district supervisors to keep to the project's schedule. Nor was there much evidence that the supervisors interacted regularly with other district staff to improve their own abilities as facilitators at the school level.

In contrast to what Huberman and Crandall suggest, the supervisors planned the external internal facilitator team arrangement around Carol Cum
mings, who worked primarily with school based principals rather than with a district-based project director charged with the responsibility of working alongside teachers in schools. For teachers, then, the local, on-site facilitator was to be the principal, not a district person, and this aspect of the planning essentially removed some of the control required by the central office to bring about “enforced stabilized use” of the chosen program.

Therefore, planning around the role expectations for principals needed to be even more tightly designed and detailed. The data, however, suggest that the district supervisors overlooked this point. Indeed, there is no clear evidence that planning for the principals’ role in the project’s implementation was actually undertaken. The principal can indeed be a key person at the school level. When a principal advocates and demonstrates a commitment to an adopted program and structures opportunities for teacher practice, feedback, and coaching, the impact at the school level (as the case of the successful elementary school and the explosion of school-effectiveness research confirm) is considerable. But how do principals provide for the necessary ongoing technical assistance and support for implementing a new program?

The straightforward answer is that the district personnel must plan for and clarify the role. In the same way that principals in this project were expected to provide technical assistance to teachers at the school level, so the district had to be expected to provide ongoing support and substantive input to principals. This role was indeed planned for, but in practice only two principals received this treatment. What is not clear is the extent to which the “conferencing about coaching” helped the two principals to gain a clearer understanding of the role they were expected to play. What is abundantly clear is that the other six principals in the study’s sample did not engage in this kind of dialogue with the district supervisors and, as a consequence, were somewhat confused about what was expected of them. Some saw the project as a means of consolidating their approach to teacher evaluation; others regarded it as a district initiative that they could take or leave. A sense of priority and urgency appeared to be lacking in these principals’ approach to the implementation of peer coaching.

The district plan called for—and included—the involvement of principals in all the workshops and presentations. But the plan did not go far enough. Not only were no contingencies drawn up for when the district supervisors were unable to fulfill their role of coaching the principals, but no clearly defined, specific role existed that principals as local, on-site project facilitators were expected to play. This lacuna had grave consequences for the program’s implementation because the district relied heavily on the principals to initiate the project at the school level. Implementation essentially became a possibility only when the principal was already a knowledgeable, resourceful, respected leader (as in the case of the successful elementary school) who knew something about the change process and planned and monitored accordingly. Ultimately, this stance reinforces school-based implementation where such a
principal exists, but it does little to foster district wide adoption. This oversight was significant in the strategy of the district supervisors, their planning for the implementation process itself also contained some lacunae.

Planning for implementation. The decision to leave the details of implementation at the school level up to the principal and local teachers held district-wide ramifications for implementation. The initiative for the peer coaching program as a district project came from the central office. It was a voluntary program for teachers, but clearly the expectation was that this project was a priority in the district. Many teachers believed it mandatory that they volunteer for the program, for the principals, it was clearly mandated from the outset. Mandated approaches work best if the district maintains strict control over program implementation to ensure that no “blunting” takes place. In this project, however, the control was handed over to the school-based principals who were, in most cases, unsure of their role. Still, this approach could have worked if the district supervisors had insisted that each principal develop a detailed plan (at the successful school, it was called a growth plan) for the program’s implementation in their schools. At the time of planning for the implementation of peer coaching, this idea was not mooted by the district supervisors. Nor was there any evidence in the original district plan for implementation of it being one of their expectations of principals.

The original plan called for the two district supervisors to work with eight different schools each year over a three year period. It was not clear how the supervisors were going to work with the first year complement during the second year of the project or how schools that had been through the workshops and training would be followed up by the district staff. The data suggest that once schools went through the training component, they were largely left to their own devices, except for two to three general supervisory visits each year or in instances where the principal initiated a contact with the district supervisors. This lack of follow-up represents a serious omission in the implementation plan; change in organizational settings is a slow process, taking anywhere from 18 months to 4 or 5 years, and post-initiation technical assistance is crucial if the program is ever to be implemented and institutionalized. Other central office staff (besides the two district supervisors) could have been assigned to follow up schools already initiated into the program.

Some provision needed to be made in the plan for district-wide monitoring. That it was not covered may be partially explained by an oversight on the part of the two supervisors. The district supervisors drew up an ambitious plan to involve all the schools in the district in peer coaching over a three-year period. But the plan was unduly ambitious, since they assigned the roles of technical assistance and district-wide monitoring solely to themselves. Without the aid of other colleagues at the central office, who were responsible for other parts of the overall teaching effectiveness program, the district supervisors were sorely pressed to fulfill these roles adequately. The district needed
to incorporate one of two things into the implementation plan. Either enlist more central office staff into the project to ensure that implementation takes place across the district, or begin with fewer schools and extend the time frame for involving all schools in the district.

Because of the stance taken by the district supervisors of viewing the school principal as the local, on-site facilitator, it would have been more feasible to have made the latter alternative part of the implementation plan. The district supervisors could realistically only work to their fullest capacity with two or three schools at a time, and they would have been wise to have planned to work with a few keen schools initially and then planned strategically for how to bring other schools into the network over time. The district supervisors appear to have attempted too much in too short a time, with the consequence that they achieved far less than they had originally planned.

The point made about strategically planning for the extension of the program to other schools raises the question of how the supervisors planned to integrate the second year complement of schools with those in the first year and how plans to integrate the volunteer nucleus of three teachers at each school would integrate the program and themselves as peer coaches into the totality of the respective school staffs. From the data, these aspects of the implementation plan were apparently either overlooked or delegated to school principals, there was some evidence of inter school rivalry and a good deal of evidence of intra-school staff divisiveness and professional jealousy. Only in one case (the school enjoying some success) were the details of this potential problem addressed, but that was at the school level. Even within that school, there were rumblings of discontent (not as strong as evidenced elsewhere) that could have been more effectively aired if the supervisors had developed district wide contingencies for dealing with program integration and its obverse consequences of professional jealousy and resentment. But much of the planning for implementation revolved around the district role of staff-development coordination.

*Staff-Development Coordination*

The coordination of staff-development initiatives to launch the peer-coaching program in the Cragleaf School District was probably the most effective aspect of the role undertaken by the central office supervisors. They invested heavily in quality front-end training. They brought in a credible practitioner whose workshops, presentations, and materials were well received by principals and teachers alike. (There was some evidence to suggest that the materials were based on too limited a view of teaching and that the conference typology was overly simple for the complexities involved in peer coaching. However, since these materials were designed to initiate principals and teachers into the process of peer coaching, thereby attempting to break down many of the psychological barriers and organizational norms that impede
professional dialogue, this criticism should be viewed more as having implications for future practice than as a commentary on the first phases of the project.) Further, they encouraged local schools to invite the external facilitator to work with their respective staffs on professional, non-instructional days. Some schools followed up in this way, and the district supervisors allocated both their support and what resources they could to the ventures.

What did not happen, however, was some coordination at the district level of refresher workshops for participants once they had gone through the initial training. Also, there were no efforts to provide follow-up staff-development opportunities for principals. While essential during the initial training, these omissions became critical during the implementation phase. Principals were expected to oversee the effective implementation of the TET/peer-coaching program, yet no opportunity for their development in this crucial role was ever provided, other than a two-day workshop on organizational development in 1984 and 1985. While principals and teachers believed the staff-development-coordination function was carried out effectively, the ongoing professional needs of principals were essentially overlooked. This oversight had serious implications for the extent of program implementation across the district. In particular, it placed a great deal of emphasis on the function of district-level technical assistance and support to school-based personnel.

**Technical Assistance and Support**

The unanticipated emphasis on district level technical assistance and support to principals and teachers proved to be unrealistic and unfeasible because of the two supervisors' schedules. Although a contingency was not provided for in the original plan, the supervisors did attempt to adapt to this pressing need. However, the appointment of a district relieving principal to the role of helping teacher in the peer-coaching project was not a satisfactory arrangement in the eyes of the participants interviewed.

The district supervisors quickly sensed these reactions as the project proceeded and changed the tasks and functions they had assigned to the helping teacher. The absence because of illness of this helping teacher for the 1984–85 school year further complicated matters. At the same time, the district supervisors attempted to fill the gap by releasing two principals (one from the successful elementary school) for 20 percent of their time to assist their colleagues. This arrangement proved awkward and, at any rate, was cancelled by budget cuts in January 1985. Therefore, the supervisors were left with an untenable dilemma. Because the external facilitator was not on site and the provision of an internal, district-level facilitator had essentially backfired, the supervisors found themselves under pressure to become more involved in giving technical assistance to principals. This role was, however, not feasible because of their other duties. They ended up working with only
two principals in a focused way, a feature that was regarded by other school personnel as discriminatory and unfair. But in both cases, the principals encouraged the contact with the supervisors. We must assume, then, that other principals were not as assertive or that they perceived the supervisors to be too busy to approach.

Logistical possibilities notwithstanding, the peer-coaching project at the school level suffered, in most cases, from a lack of substantive, technical assistance and support to principals and teachers. The telling finding of this study, however, is that participants at both the district and school levels recognized this lacuna, but because of the expedient appointment of an inappropriately skilled person for the role of helping teacher, and his subsequent illness, the hands of the district supervisors appeared to be tied.

One consequence of this state of affairs was that the role of technical assistance and project facilitation passed from the district-level down to the school-based principal. This feature of the project, more than anything else, plausibly explains why in some schools peer coaching was effectively implemented and why in others polite lip service was paid to the idea. It does not in any sense, however, exonerate the district, the onus was clearly on the supervisors to ensure that the schools received ongoing district-level technical assistance and support.

Investing in a local facilitator to provide technical assistance and support was not successful at the district level but was at the school level for the one elementary school enjoying some success. Because of the situation that had arisen at the district level, the supervisors could, through careful monitoring of the program's implementation at the school level, have suggested to principals that they appoint a teacher with expertise to act as a school-based facilitator to the peer-coaching project. This alternative would have provided a mechanism for structuring the integration of the project into the school's regular program. That the supervisors did not entertain this course of action might have something to do with how effectively they executed the role of project monitoring.

Project Monitoring

The stance taken by the district personnel on schools and the project's implementation suggests the need for a strong emphasis on gathering information about the extent of implementation in classrooms, the factors affecting the implementation process, and the kinds of outcomes of student learning, teachers' attitudes, and skill development that the TET/peer-coaching program produces. Information on all three of these dimensions is essential for district planning where a school-based approach is encouraged.

The data in the study suggest that although the supervisors did attempt to oversee the program's implementation and were perceived by most participants as playing a project-sustaining role, they did not monitor in a focused
way the various stages and tasks associated with the implementation process. This deficiency may have occurred because of a misunderstanding. One of the purposes of a peer-coaching network is to provide a structure to increase the amount and variety of informal communication and interaction. This network, in turn, serves as both a powerful form of influence on the program and also as a useful means of formative feedback to the district on the effectiveness of the instructional program. Since the district supervisors were aware of this purpose, they could possibly have been waiting for the network to establish itself before engaging in systematic attempts at gathering specific information about the educational program in general. But this decision would overlook the need to monitor the program’s implementation to provide the basis for any informal feedback and communication. If a misunderstanding occurred, then, it is because there was confusion between the goal of increased general monitoring that the project was designed to foster and the immediate need to monitor specific aspects of the implementation process.

Without specific information on the level of classroom implementation, factors affecting the process itself, and actual program outcomes, ongoing planning and adaptation becomes extremely difficult. This lack of information might explain, then, why the supervisors’ attempts at planning for the implementation of the TET/peer-coaching program worked out the way they did. In particular, it suggests a further important lacuna in the district strategy that, in the course of implementation, essentially became a school-based approach.

DISCUSSION. DESSI OR PROBLEM-SOLVING APPROACH?

The approach to implementation of school improvement taken by Cragleaf’s central office executives was essentially a hybrid. They began following the lines of the DESSI model. Although perceived by some teachers at one of the schools (the successful one) as being initiated by them, the idea of implementing the TET/peer-coaching program as a professional development initiative was first conceived by the district supervisors. They were the advocates of its becoming the basis for a district-wide program, and they undertook the necessary planning and “soundings” to ensure that the idea was sold to the board and professional associations. Indeed, one of the supervisors played an important role in the selection of TET as the basis for peer coaching.

Then, the project began because of strong central office initiative supporting a known program characterized by exemplary practices that work in classrooms. No attempt was made to encourage individual schools to undertake a diagnostic assessment of their program’s needs. Schools were not involved in a problem-solving way at the outset because the initiation stage of the process was focused on the program, not based on the school. Consequently, a credible practitioner, Carol Cummings, was chosen to present concepts and demonstrate skills that principals and teachers could, through emulation and replication, transfer to their repertoire. Thus, they would gain
technical mastery of a well-designed program and become committed to the challenge of constantly improving their skills as teachers through professionally focused dialogue and interaction. So at first, the plan followed the DESSI model.

When moving from initiation to implementation, the district's approach became ambiguous. The district would be expected to have given the clear signal at the end of the up-front training for the modeled practices to be implemented as faithfully as possible. But the district did not do so, moreover, the workshop presenter herself suggested that teachers had to translate some of the practices into their specific situations. This particular point is one on which many can agree, but it counterveils the DESSI insistence that teachers be allowed no latitude to "blunt" or change the program. Therefore, from this point on there appeared to be little district-level control over the fidelity of the program's implementation.

Perhaps the values and assumptions of the two supervisors unwittingly clashed. One was committed to TET as a program that worked and could therefore be emulated with positive results; the other saw TET as a vehicle for "teacher empowerment." On the surface, these views appear to be complementary, and indeed, both supervisors saw the other's ideas so. However, for implementation, these differing views affected the process decisions made. Where one view would be expected to insist on the "fidelity" model of implementation—that is, no latitude allowed teachers for program adaptation—the other would be more inclined toward the "adaptive" model—that is, teachers perceive they have increased professional power.

At the transition between initiation and implementation, then, the district's unconscious attempt at following the DESSI model began to break down. At the same time, while the two supervisors worked hard at providing sustained support and stability of leadership, the personnel decision on the helping-teacher role essentially undermined their credibility and the program's stability in the eyes of many participants. So on two counts—allowing latitude to teachers to adapt the program and the apparent weaknesses in the program leadership—the implementation of peer coaching in Cragleaf did not follow the DESSI model. These changes essentially rendered the project school based. The propensity of most practitioners in school-based implementation is toward a problem-solving approach. As the project entered into the implementation stage, then, it took on a school based, problem-solving mode.

In every case but one, schools had difficulty identifying the proposed program as the potential solution to their instructional program needs. Indeed, some principals suggested that they used the strategies of the problem solving approach to determine that the present time was not appropriate for stressing the peer-coaching program. In a sense, then, the school based practitioners began to do their own needs assessment and accordingly evaluated the project.
as somewhat irrelevant to their immediate situation and therefore not a high priority.

Only in the case of one school was the general evaluation of the project different. The principal and teachers at that school believed they initiated the project themselves after closely examining their needs. When the project's implementation changed (largely by default) from being district led to being school based and the principal was expected to play a crucial role, the schools in question (all except the one mentioned above) had an extremely short time to adjust to the program's underlying values before implementing its practices. Where the school enjoying some success had studied the problem as a staff for at least two years, the rest of the schools had barely two months. Given the change in implementation strategy to a school based approach, it is not surprising that little implementation took place.

Therefore, the problem in the Cragleaf project seemed to be that the implementation strategy fell between the DESSI and problem-solving approaches, ending up a confusing hybrid that created unnecessary ambiguity. To have adopted one approach or the other would have given the project greater clarity and effectiveness. But this solution also oversimplifies the complexity of program implementation.

The case of the successful elementary school suggests that a mix of approaches is possible. Where the teachers and principal in that school started out working along problem-solving lines and developing a team approach, the principal's strategy became similar to that of the DESSI model once the decision was made to entertain TET/peer coaching as a professional development initiative in the school. At that point, the principal undertook many measures to ensure that the program was well understood and faithfully emulated and replicated in the school. Not only did he give workshops to the staff but he engaged Carol Cummings to work with his teachers on more than one occasion. He established plans and accountability procedures designed to ensure that teachers emulated and gained technical mastery over the recommended practices. Throughout the entire process, he provided continuous and sustained support for the program through his leadership efforts. By turning down the supervisors' request to take on a district role, he only increased the perceived stability he gave to the program in the school.

When interviewed, the principal talked about the need to diversify the programs offered to teachers at the school. Essentially, then, after successfully implementing TET as the basis for peer coaching, he now sees the need to return to a problem-solving approach to let the teaching staff identify the particular needs and problems they wish to address. This principal's strategy, then, is an example of an apparently successful problem-solving/DESSI/problem-solving mix to school improvement.

Why, then, did the district's mix not work out similarly? The primary difference between the mixed strategies of the district supervisors and the principal in question was that the changes in the latter's approach happened
because of his conscious planning and control. By far the most telling omission on the part of the district personnel was the lack of careful, detailed planning for the project's operation. Therefore, implementation at the district level appeared to proceed in a happenstance fashion, and the mixed strategy was the result of an ambiguity grounded in clearly articulated general expectations accompanied by unclear definitions of specific tasks and functions.

The desirable mix to bring about school improvement seems to be one of decisive central office initiatives either in favor of specific programs or school-based staff development along problem-solving lines, together with ample provision of structured support and technical assistance for the program or process decided on by the district. This desirable approach can only be executed effectively when the district plans assiduously for the school-improvement process and monitors it continuously to draw up the necessary contingencies for dealing with unanticipated effects. Using one approach to the neglect of the other does not appear to account for the complex dynamic existing between the central office and schools, particularly in the mid-1980s when the teaching force is older and less mobile. The central office may need to be involved to reduce professional stagnation in the workforce, however, teachers tend to perceive themselves as developmentally and professionally mature, and the undue use of the DESSI model is inevitably equated with a district top-down strategy. Top-down pressure alienates experienced teachers, an unmonitored bottom-up strategy essentially takes a project out of the district's hands, thereby potentially squandering precious resources. What is needed is top-down pressure and support for bottom-up involvement. The DESSI model and the problem-solving approach may provide a beginning framework that district supervisors can use to plan a mixed strategy that fits their particular school-improvement situation.

CONCLUDING NOTE

The study reported here investigated the role played by district supervisors in the implementation of a peer-coaching network for principals and teachers. This investigation was carried out in the light of two contrasting approaches to school improvement, the DESSI method and school-based, problem-solving approach. Data were gathered from documents made available by central office and school personnel and by semi-structured interviews.

The larger study that this paper is based on found that successful implementation took place in only one of the eight schools sampled. The findings also suggested that an element of sophistry was at work. Principals and teachers generally acclaimed the benefits of peer coaching while admitting that their knowledge was essentially hypothetical and not based on practice and experience. This discrepancy was evident in the responses given to questions about the district supervisors' role. While commending the supervisors' project-initiating, project-sustaining, and advocacy roles, the participants also criticized
those tasks and functions that would seem necessary to initiating and sustaining such an ambitious project: the supervisors' planning, staff-development coordination, technical assistance, and project monitoring.

These tasks and functions were then used as organizers to derive conclusions and implications for future practice and knowledge about the district role in school improvement. Planning—for appropriate program selection and advocacy, for clarification of roles for central office and school-based personnel, and for implementation at the school level—was an important district activity. Staff-development coordination and technical assistance and support for implementation were also vital district functions, particularly because principals were expected to give leadership at the school level as the local, on-site facilitator and resource person. The lacuna of not nurturing the skills, knowledge, and dispositions in principals requisite to this pivotal role appeared to be a serious oversight on the part of the district supervisors. This omission stemmed, in part, from inadequate monitoring techniques that prevented the accumulation of specific information pertinent to the extent of the classroom implementation and factors affecting the process.

The paper ends with a discussion of the district's approach to this school improvement effort in the light of the DESSI/problem solving debate. The district's approach was essentially a hybrid that turned out to be less than successful. Still, based on the one successful school and its principal's leadership, a mixed approach could prove to be effective. The determinants of this success appear to be conscious planning of the mixed approach and a perceptive sense of timing when to switch from the DESSI to the problem solving approach and vice versa. Also, when the workforce is older and less mobile, this mix of top-down pressure with bottom-up strategy may help counter professional stagnation, teacher alienation, and the potential squandering of dwindling resources.

PETER P. GRIMMETT is Assistant Professor and Director of the Centre for the Study of Teacher Education, University of British Columbia, 2125 Main Mall, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada V6T 1Z5.

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