

THE LURE OF THE BUSINESS WORLD: A RESPONSE TO DUFFY'S "SUPERVISING FOR RESULTS"

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The publication of Francis Duffy's "Supervising for Results: A Case Study from the Business World" represents a benchmark for the *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision*.¹ It is the first appearance of an article that promises to show how business practices can shed light on educational practice and, more specifically, on supervisory practice. While reading this case study, I was once again reminded of the lure of comparing education to other professions, especially business. (After all, our own public paranoia—of being labeled a semi-profession and being paid as one—drives us to look to others for legitimacy.)

By pointing out the similarities in the worlds of business and education, Duffy appears to present a convincing argument that we can ignore their differences and that the practices serving one can serve the other. Although comparisons can be useful, they are, nonetheless, limited. Case studies are useful when we can learn lessons from them. Because I am concerned about the preparation and practice of both supervisors and teachers (and sometimes am an advocate for both), I'm left with contemplating what we might learn from the practices of this manager and his team of insurance agents.

The language offers one lesson. If we believe Greenfield's notion that language is power, and "those who control language control thought—and thereby themselves and others," then looking at the language of business can provide a clue to our fascination with this world.²

The language Duffy's characters use to describe their world of business has a temporary, magical quality. "production goals," "highly productive sales force," and "productivity quotas." These phrases can give educators a sense of direction, assuredness. We are lured into this world by whiffs of our

¹Francis M. Duffy, "Supervising for Results. A Case Study from the Business World," *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision* 6 (Fall 1990): 31-38.

²Thomas B. Greenfield, "Against Group Mind: An Anarchistic Theory of Education," *McGill Journal of Education* 17 (Winter 1982): 8.

long-sought-after professionalism with words such as "autonomy," "independent contractor," "self-determined schedule," and "member of a team." These words can give us a sense of pride and self-worth, of belonging. The "hook" starts to tug even deeper when we hear of bonuses, commissions, "whopping salaries" of \$200,000 or more a year, and all-expenses-paid vacations to Hawaii that include spending money for spouses. (Thoughts of money—or the beach—would turn the heads of even the most dedicated among us.)

Unfortunately, we can learn from this language a false sense of control and an illusion of certitude and predictability about our practice. Only recently have some of us begun to use a language that describes teaching practice, administration, and school reform with less certitude.³ Some have even boldly described our practices in evaluation and supervision as ritualistic and pretentious.⁴

We can learn another lesson from behaviors that have given this manager a "highly successful track record." Perhaps the lens we use to see these behaviors makes all the difference in interpretation.

The manager's notion of "help" provides one example. Commenting on how he helps his trainees to succeed, the manager says, "If you help enough people get what they want, they will help you get what you want." Does he really mean "If you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours"? Another example is his notion of building trust. By speaking "bluntly and in plain English," this manager seems predictable, he knows how to set limits and consequences for acceptable behavior, as many highly popular discipline plans recommend. Indeed, his "children" get jealous "when they see him spending more time with another agent," and when they aren't behaving, "his agents often perceive his absence as a form of punishment." As I've tried to briefly illustrate with a different lens, this manager, able to motivate many insurance agents for 16 years, has developed a highly successful and sophisticated patronage system. Not only is he successful, but he also appears powerful, as one who "walks softly and carries a big stick."

A lesson, then, for education: Coercion can make a leader successful within certain contexts. So can his followers. Social psychology provides a

³Robert E. Floden and Christopher M. Clark, "Preparing Teachers for Uncertainty," *Teachers College Record* 89 (Summer 1988): 504–524; Lee S. Shulman, "Knowledge and Teaching. Foundations of the New Reform," *Harvard Educational Review* 57 (February 1987): 1–22; Samuel B. Bacharach and Sharon C. Conley, "Uncertainty and Decision-Making in Teaching: Implications for Managing Line Professionals," in *Schooling for Tomorrow*, ed. Thomas J. Sergiovanni and John H. Moore (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1989), pp. 311–329; Carl D. Glickman, "Unlocking School Reform Uncertainty as a Condition of Professionalism," *PPhi Delta Kappan* 69 (October 1989): 120–122.

⁴Noreen B. Garman, "New Jersey's Plan for the Supervision of Instruction and In-Class Supervision. Promise or Pretense?" *Focus on Education* 31 (April 1987): 19–25; Noreen B. Garman, "Clinical Supervision. Quackery or Remedy for Professional Development," *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision* 1 (Winter 1986): 148–157; Helen M. Hazi, "Uncertainty in Practice. An Essential Notion in Preparing Reflective Instructional Leaders" (paper presented at the annual convention of the University Council for Educational Administration, Paradise Valley, Arizona, October 1989).

possible explanation for why these agents willingly follow this benevolent-appearing patriarch. They may be entrapped.

People get entrapped when they are interested in and distracted by the lure of some goal. Examples of psychological traps range from the personal to the political, making an important, long-distance phone call and being put on hold, placing money into a failing automobile; keeping a risky stock investment with the hope that someday it will pay off; and maintaining involvement in international conflicts (and wars) to avoid losing face. In entrapment, the individual or group has too much invested to quit: "The tighter one pulls, the greater the conflict between the lure of the goal and the increasing cost of remaining in pursuit of it. And the tighter one pulls, the greater the trap's bite."⁵ I wish the voices of these agents were more audible in the article, Duffy omits even one example, which makes entrapment a likely explanation.

I first heard about this manager during the fall conference of the Council of Professors of Instructional Supervision. I must confess that I listened to Duffy's presentation with fascination, at first, knowing little about the insurance world. (Ignorance sometimes disarms us, and we abandon our guard with the intrigue of worlds and ideas foreign to our own.) My fascination, however, turned into outrage when Duffy presented another management practice. This manager gets his agents into debt by encouraging them to buy big-ticket items—cars, houses, more than what the agents can afford—so that they continue to increase their productivity. I'm sorry this example is absent from the article, for it represents this manager's true colors and motivations.

But with this knowledge, I am forced to derive one more lesson from a comparison. Duffy gives me this license, because he himself has analyzed the "war stories about the manager and his team."

Attila the Hun is considered an inspiring leader by some.⁶ He took hundreds of thousands of barbaric nomads, united them, and trained them to be warriors for the expressed purpose of conquering the world. He inspired loyalty from his troops through fear and by arousing their warrior instincts, rewarding their performance through glory and pillage. Spouses followed the noble warriors from battle to battle, grateful for their new-found wealth. Booty was a payment for servitude. When Attila rode through their midst, women and children shouted his praises, too.

He was aware of the power that image held for leadership and cultivated it to further endear his troops and put fear into his enemies. He always appeared at the head of his troops, dressed in the simple garb of the Huns on a black charger called "Lightning," carrying a magical, flaming sword. He

⁵Jeffrey Z. Rubin, "Psychological Traps," *Psychology Today* 15 (March 1981): 54.

⁶Wess Roberts, *Leadership Secrets of Attila the Hun* (New York: Warner, 1985)

willingly adopted the title of "Scourge of God" to instill fear in his enemies and selected only the most vicious-looking warriors to torture his prisoners.

Attila is not a model leader for me, nor is he one I would follow. Neither is this manager. Both are opportunists who were fortunate to match the needs of their followers with their own personal ambitions for greatness. I would not want this manager "magically transplanted" into the shoes of any school administrator, as Duffy recommends. Let us only consider a final lesson—the world and supervision need fewer Attilas.

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Eisner, Elliot W., and Alan Peshkin, eds. *Qualitative Inquiry in Education The Continuing Debate*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1990. 387 pp. \$41.95/\$19.95.

Two articles written from different perspectives address each of five topics related to qualitative inquiry in education. subjectivity and objectivity (Phillips, Roman, and Apple), validity (Grumet and Wolcott), generalizability (Donmoyer and Schofield), ethics (Soltis and Smith), and uses of qualitative inquiry (Barone and Clark). Scholars and critics (Guba, Jackson, Becker, Lincoln, Miles, and Huberman, respectively) comment on each set. Several writers respond to these commentaries. The editors frame the chapters with highlights and issues in the development of qualitative inquiry in education and with a closing plea to continue the debate advanced but not settled by this book.

Jackson, Philip W. *Life in Classrooms*. New York. Teachers College Press, 1990. 183 pp. \$14.95.

This 1968 book has been reissued with a new introduction on writing the book and the author's current reflections on educational research. The daily grind of the classroom, students' feelings, and their involvement or withdrawal in the classroom are described alongside themes of teacher immediacy, informality, autonomy, and individuality. The author explores the significance of understanding life in classrooms.

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