

Response

THE STATUS OF SUPERVISION SCHOLARSHIP

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As I interviewed the scholars whose comments provide the substance of the article Arthur Blumberg refers to, I was impressed by the commitment that kept them engaged in research and scholarship in a field that "is not honored" in the university. Without exception, these scholars had other choices; most of them had many competing claims on their time, yet they persisted out of interest in supervisory practice as the means for improving the classroom life of teachers and students.

The parallels to teacher education are striking. Judge has called attention to the flight from the field of practice that is characteristic of professors of education as well as research-intensive schools of education.¹ Apparently, the closer one is to practice, the less status one has at the academy. This point may have less to do with a disdain for teaching, however, than regard for promotion and tenure guidelines in most research-intensive universities.

Despite the recent interest in teacher education that deans of schools of education are showing, primarily through the Holmes Group agenda for reform, little evidence indicates that reward structures in universities have changed substantially since Judge's report. Now it is more interesting and respectable to be doing research in schools, so teacher educators may bump into their colleagues from the academy who are suddenly eager to be seen at school.

Professors of supervision, like teacher educators, have been in schools all along. Unlike colleagues who may focus on schools as an area of research, teacher educators and professors of supervision are expected to be in the field so they can work directly and intensively with students and teachers while they continue to carry their share of the teaching load at the university and engage in productive research and scholarship.

Blumberg's question about what constitutes science is not unrelated. As professors of supervision used the predominant quantitative approaches to

¹Harry G. Judge, *American Graduate Schools of Education. A View from Abroad* (New York: Ford Foundation, 1982).

research, they were beset with the problem of significance that has plagued educational researchers more widely. Blumberg has good advice for us on this point: Supervision is grounded in practice, and scholars in supervision could contribute much to our understanding of practice, as many have, by using qualitative research methodologies.

Although many universities acknowledge the important contribution that both quantitative and qualitative studies of education make, the debate over what constitutes "real research" is not over.² This debate has been particularly troubling to those whose real interests do not lend themselves to quantitative measurement. Undoubtedly, some professors of supervision have conducted research to meet university expectations rather than to advance knowledge, thus contributing to a field that is described—even by those who love it best—as theoretically and conceptually weak.

Dewey has observed that the real source for a science of education is in the minds and experience of those who daily practice it in classrooms.³ Teachers, teacher educators, supervisors, and others whose work takes them into classrooms are in touch with the richest supply of material to study. How well researchers in education ask questions worthy of an answer may relate to how much attention they pay to teachers' and students' concerns.

Here is the crux of the problem Blumberg is wrestling with: Supervisors, like teacher educators, honor and support teachers' work. Teachers, who spend their time with children and young people, are not honored in our society. We are not yet a nation generous with children—we do not adequately provide for their care, protection, education, and health needs. As Caruso has pointed out, the closer one works with the youngest members of our society, the less likely one is to be well educated for the task.⁴

Both administrators and teachers of early childhood education programs have less education and experience than their counterparts in elementary schools and are paid less. In day care programs, women teachers are predominately supervised by women. In the elementary school, male administrators, many with experience in secondary teaching rather than in elementary schools, most often supervise women teachers. Secondary schools have a better balance between male and female teachers who are supervised by a predominately male administrative staff experienced in secondary teaching. Although we can convincingly argue that the status of teaching is diminished because of its association with women's work, as has Apple, Caruso's data

²N. L. Gage, "The Paradigm Wars and Their Aftermath," *Educational Researcher* 18 (October 1989): 4-10.

³John Dewey, *The Sources of a Science of Education* (New York: Horace Liveright, 1929).

⁴Joseph Caruso, "Early Childhood Elementary and Secondary Supervision: An Analysis" (paper presented at the fall meeting of the Council of Professors of Instructional Supervision, Pennsylvania State University, November 1989).

suggests that children are least valued in our society.⁵ The flight from the field of practice suggests a flight from children.

As long as these values hold, I doubt that we will elevate the status of teachers, teacher educators, or professors of supervision to any significant extent. Art, science, or craft has little effect here, though Blumberg's comments are thought-provoking. Unfulfilled promises of democracy that beg a social and political agenda on behalf of children are responsible.

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⁵Michael W. Apple, "Women, Gender, and Teaching," *Teachers College Record* 84 (Spring 1983): 611-628.

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