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ABSTRACT

Using some dictionary definitions, one might easily infer that supervision of teaching is a managerial/administrative function closely related to evaluation and control, implying hierarchical connotations. However, Guthrie and Reed (1991) describe teacher supervision as "a function of leadership concerned with improving, enhancing, and reinforcing classroom or teaching effectiveness" and "subsequent maximization of student academic performance." Instructional supervision is more of a collegial process than an individual act and has no need for an "instructional leader." Instructional supervision is primarily a formative process, whereas the administrative evaluation of teachers for retention or dismissal purposes is primarily a summative activity. The hallmarks of the supervisory process (collegiality, trust, and reflection) are incompatible with the characteristics of evaluation, which often involve legal mandates, role hierarchies, and concerns related to job security. This "bad marriage" of formative and summative responsibilities explains why neither is particularly done well in our schools. As Guthrie and Reed conclude, evaluation and supervision are more effective when performed by different individuals. The solution is for the principal to remain the summative evaluator and re-assign instructional supervision to the teacher, the teacher's peers, the district's supervisor specialist, and an outside program assessor/consultant. (MLH)

The "Instructional Leader" Must Go

Supervision as a term applied to education has some rather unfortunate connotations. With dictionary definitions such as "oversee," "direct," and "to have charge of," one might very easily infer that supervision of teaching is a managerial/administrative function closely related to evaluation and control. There is an implication of hierarchy in the term. When used in its educational context "supervision" has or should have a decidedly different caste.

Guthrie and Reed (1991) have succinctly described the process: "Teacher supervision is that function of leadership concerned with improving, enhancing, and reinforcing classroom or teaching effectiveness. The focus of school supervision is the improvement of instruction and, it is hoped , the subsequent maximization of student academic performance."

Seen in that light, supervision of classroom instruction is more of a collegial process than the act of an individual. There is no place in the process of supervision of instruction for an "instructional leader."

Contrary to the wishes of some, supervision of instruction must involve itself with evaluation. However, the purposes of the evaluative activities within supervision are formative rather than summative. That is to say that when a judgment (evaluation) is made regarding, for example, the efficacy of a particular instructional methodology, that judgment is made within the context of improving or enhancing (formative evaluation) the methodology, rather than whether to merely maintain or terminate it (summative evaluation).

Thus instructional supervision, with its focus on improvement and enhancement, is primarily a formative process. In contrast, the administrative evaluation of teachers for purposes of retention or dismissal is primarily a summative activity.

Therein lies the dilemma of the school administrator, generally the principal, who is charged with the responsibility for both the supervision of instruction and the evaluation of teachers. The hallmarks of the supervisory process: collegiality, trust, and reflection-on-practice, are not compatible with the characteristics of evaluation which quite often involve legal mandates, a hierarchy of roles, and concerns related to job security. This "bad marriage" of formative and summative responsibilities is one reason that neither is particularly well-done in our schools. Guthrie and Reed conclude, "Thus, evaluation and supervision are more effective when performed by different individuals."

The organizational scheme that makes the principal responsible for both functions is ill-conceived. Some principals may be particularly talented in the supervisory role; they may succeed admirably in establishing the collegial, stress-free environment that is conducive to the formative goals of program improvement, but I would suggest that the very qualities which allow them to be successful in that capacity will mitigate against their effectiveness in the role of summative evaluator. Conversely, the principal who prides him/herself on the ability to be a firm, fair, and forceful summative evaluator will likely not possess the qualities necessary to create the

best environment for risk-taking, creativity, and innovation, etc. which are more in the formative mode.

What can be done to change this ineffectual approach? First of all we must recognize that for all practical purposes summative evaluation and formative supervision are dichotomous in nature, and the processes and personnel involved in one cannot effectively be utilized in the other. A classic example of this unworkable dichotomy can be seen in the widespread misuse of the various models of clinical supervision. Originally developed by Cogan (1973), this very effective teacher training and supervisory tool has been subverted (perverted?) for summative evaluation purposes. Principals "trained" in clinical supervision utilized its procedures and terminology in the formal evaluation of their teachers. Small wonder that teachers were reluctant to share and reflect collegially with their principals on perceptions of strengths and weaknesses of a particular lesson presentation, when those same perceptions might conceivably become part of a job-threatening summative evaluation. Thus it was that clinical supervision, a perfectly valid model for formative instructional supervision, became a target for the antagonism of teachers who did not want to voluntarily contribute potentially negative material to their summative evaluations. Concomitantly, it became a source of frustration to principals who did not see positive results emerge from their efforts to engage teachers in the improvement of instruction.

Once we accept the fact that one process or one individual cannot successfully fulfill both roles, we need to determine the most effective way to divide the responsibilities. In a pragmatic sense there is a rather clear delineation. The formal evaluation of teachers is a legal process and it is mandated as an administrative function. In California for example, state legislation has established that school administrators will evaluate teachers, they (administrators) will be trained in evaluation skills, they will engage in on-going training to maintain and improve those skills, and they must receive annual certification from the local school board to conduct the evaluations. State legislation also establishes the specific criteria for the evaluation of teachers. There are no similar legal mandates related to the supervision of instruction. Certainly there are compelling reasons that such supervision should occur and that it should be done in a professional and skillful manner, but there are no specific legal requirements regarding who should do it, how it should be done, or what should be included in such supervision.

Thus the decision is quite simple; since the primary legal responsibility for the evaluation of teachers must remain with the school-level administrator/principal (some might argue that it is the evaluation role that should be taken from the principal, but such a arrangement would probably make teacher dismissal a legal impossibility since the courts traditionally view the principal as the key evaluator vis a vis teacher competency, unprofessional conduct, etc.), then it is the responsibility for the supervision of instruction that should be removed from the principal and assigned elsewhere.

Although logic calls for such a decision, other factors will conspire against it being made. Perhaps the most powerful will come from the principals themselves, many of whom labor under the misguided perception that they should function as "super teacher." This tendency is perhaps more pronounced at the elementary school level where the principal, because of school size and administrative organization, is "closer to the action" than his/her secondary school counterparts. The school principal, who believes in the mythology of the "super teacher," is very concerned that he/she be viewed as the "instructional leader" of the school. Indeed, most principals when describing the roles they perform will ascribe great importance to activities related to "serving as the instructional leader." Some have even suggested that as much as three-quarters of the principal's time should be given to the improvement of instruction (Trump, 1977). There are a number of things wrong with the notion of the principal as the instructional leader of the school:

1. Where the phenomenon of instructional leadership does exist, it does not reside with an individual. Rather it is found in a sense of shared ownership of goals and in a collective mind set to improve. Such characteristics may have developed partially because of certain behaviors of the school principal, but they could have also occurred in the absence of same.

2. The notion of "an instructional leader" is the product of the authoritarian model of school administration. It speaks of maternalistic/paternalistic conceptions of leadership and it is demeaning to teachers. The existence of instructional leadership is a sign of a healthy school organization; the existence of an instructional leader is not.

3. It is in the name of being "an instructional leader" that many principals respond to educational fads and can be found riding the latest "bandwagon." Some principals even "model" the latest methodological "de rigueur" in the misguided hope that teachers will emulate such actions in their classrooms.

4. An "instructional leader" with the power to affect one's job security is not a very positive inspiration for risk-taking, creativity, or deviating from the approaches promulgated by that leader.

5. Principals, contrary to their stated desires, don't actually accord much of their time to instructional supervision. Morris (1984) reported: "However, studies on what administrators actually do have discovered that principals spend relatively little time directly attending to teaching and learning."

To suggest that the school principal should not be considered the instructional leader or "super teacher" of the school is not meant to imply that a more generalized role of leadership for the principal is not a valuable asset for a school. Any organization can benefit from strong leadership. The effective school principal can and should fulfill many legitimate leadership functions for the school, including the vital role of the summative evaluator. In fact, if more school principals would focus their attention on the evaluation of programs and personnel rather than hiding behind the facade of "instructional leader," their schools might be better for it.

If the mantle of instructional leader is to be removed from the school principal (and as implied above it may need to be forcefully removed), to whom then should it be passed? The answer is: to no "one." Schools and teachers do not need an instructional leader; they do need instructional supervision. What is needed is a system involving four separate but integrated entities. Those entities are:

the teacher, the teacher's peers, a representative of the school district, and an "outside" program assessor/consultant (perhaps from higher education). What would each of those entities contribute to the supervision of instruction?

The teacher - It risks tautology to state that the teacher, individually and collectively, is the single most important element with respect to the improvement of instruction. Without the commitment of the teacher to the notion of improvement none will occur. The basis for any approach to the supervision of instruction is the assumption that the teacher desires and will seek improvement. The teacher who does not desire and seek such improvement should become the responsibility of the summative evaluator!

The teacher's peers - One of the more pervasive impediments to instructional improvement has been the traditional isolation of the individual teacher. While that isolation may be defended by some on the grounds of autonomy and academic freedom it is indefensible in too many other ways. At best it contributes to a lack of articulation and communication; at worst it protects inadequate programs and ineffective teaching. Teachers working together are a powerful force for improvement. Professionals reflecting on their work is an essential ingredient for effective supervision of instruction.

The district's supervisor - The school district obviously has a fundamental, vested interest in the on-going improvement of its instructional program. Issues such as program assessment, compliance, accreditation, and public confidence in the schools are but a few of the areas in which the school district has educational and ethical responsibilities for the supervision of instruction. The district should have a cadre of well-trained and well-respected subject area and/or grade-level specialists available for this function. They do not necessarily have to be administrators They might well be highly regarded teachers who are provided released time for this responsibility.

The outside program assessor/consultant - Instructional supervision, if it is to succeed, must by based upon the best available information, research, and scholarship regarding issues such as subject matter content and instructional materials, learning theory and related methodologies of instruction, and program assessment techniques.

The involvement of university faculty in such activities not only would provide a valuable and objective resource for the school district, but it would also establish much needed communication and articulation between the different institutions, as well serve as a logical extension of the university role in teacher training and induction.

There are obviously many other ways to divest the school principal of that ill-fitting mantle of "instructional leader" and to design a more logical and functional approach. The point is that both the formative supervision of instruction and the summative evaluation of programs and personnel are so critical to the success of our schools that they should not be done in a manner guaranteeing failure.

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