Supervisory Options for Teachers

INTRODUCTION

As classrooms become learning communities and teaching becomes learner-centered, students' capacity for learning and for social and moral development improves. This basic principle of Supervision II is shared by many schools and school districts. In 1994, for example, Texas adopted the following statement as the vision for teachers' roles:

The teacher is a leader of a learner-centered community, in which an atmosphere of trust and openness produces a stimulating exchange of ideas and mutual respect. The teacher is a critical thinker and problem solver who plays a variety of roles when teaching. As a coach, the teacher observes, evaluates, and changes direction and strategies whenever necessary. As a facilitator, the teacher helps students link ideas in the content areas to familiar ideas, to prior experiences, and to relevant problems. As a manager, the teacher effectively acquires, allocates, and conserves resources. By encouraging self-directed learning, and by modeling respectful behavior, the teacher effectively manages the learning environment so that optimal learning occurs.¹

Any serious attempt to make this vision a reality must include as its strategy the transformation of classrooms and schools into:

- **Reflective communities** within which not only students but teachers develop insights into their own strengths and weaknesses as learners and use this information to call upon different strategies for learning.

- **Developmental communities** within which it is acknowledged that not only students but teachers develop at different rates and at any given time are more ready to learn some things than others.

Diverse communities within which different talents and interests of not only students but teachers are recognized and acknowledged by decisions that are made about curriculum, teaching, and assessment.

Conversational communities within which high priority is given to creating an active conversation that involves the exchange of values and ideas not only among students but among teachers and between students and teachers as everyone learns together.

Caring communities within which not only students but teachers learn to be kind to each other, to respect each other, and to help each other grow as learners and as persons.

Responsible communities within which not only students but teachers come to view themselves as part of a social web of meanings and responsibilities to which they feel a moral obligation as members of the same school community.¹

Few axioms are more fundamental than the one that acknowledges the link between what happens to teachers and what happens to students. Inquiring classrooms, for example, are not likely to flourish in schools where inquiry among teachers is discouraged. A commitment to problem solving is difficult to instill in students who are taught by teachers for whom problem solving is not allowed. Where there is little discourse among teachers, discourse among students will be harder to promote and maintain. And the idea of making classrooms into learning communities for students will remain more rhetoric than real unless schools become learning communities for teachers too. Thus, for classrooms to be transformed, schools themselves must be transformed into:

Professional communities within which teachers depend on each other not only for caring and support but to learn and inquire together as members of a shared practice.

Vito Perrone believes that the teacher’s role is central to improving the quality of learning for students. For him, teacher development is key because “the quality of teachers’ understandings influences to a large degree what teachers do in classrooms.”² Good teacher-development programs and efforts, he reasoned, should be based on the assumption that “the best source for teachers to learn more about teaching and learning, child growth and development, materials and methods is through an examination of one’s own practice.”³

In this chapter, we are concerned with differences that teachers bring to and face in their work. Teachers have different strengths and weaknesses. Teacher needs and interests differ. And the problems and issues of teaching and learning that teachers find in their practice differ. A one-size-fits-all approach to supervision will not work in this context of differences. In its place, we propose that a range of options be provided and that teachers have considerable (but not exclusive) say in deciding which of these options makes sense. This range of options might be viewed as branches that come from a common stem. For a coherent system of supervision to be developed, care must be taken to provide a common framework for supervision. This framework might well include some forms of supervision for everyone and other forms that are options tailored to serve different learning needs and interests of teachers.

SOME BACKGROUND

A differentiated system of supervision makes sense. At its best, such a system is responsive to the individual needs and interests of teachers while protecting and enhancing instructional coherence. We propose that in every school a plan for supervision be developed that includes several options: clinical supervision, peer supervision, self-directed supervision, informal supervision, inquiry-based supervision, lesson study, and learning walks are examples.⁴ We recognize that these options overlap. Clinical supervision and peer supervision, for example, can look a lot like coaching. Still, there are enough differences among the options to view them separately.

Additionally, we propose that teachers play key roles in deciding which of the options make most sense to them given their needs at the time. And finally, we propose that in the implementation of the options, supervision should be viewed as a process that is equally accessible to teachers and administrators. Equal access does not mean that principals and other designated supervisors should be excluded from the process of supervision. They have important roles to play, particularly in providing the day-by-day informal supervision that may be required and in giving leadership and support to teachers who are themselves engaging in the supervisory functions. But supervisors should not monopolize the process by excluding teachers from roles as supervisors or by delegating them to token roles.

Excluding teachers denies the reality that although formal supervisors bring expertise to the process, in most schools teachers as a group command the largest share of expertise in subject matter, knowledge about the particular students being taught, and the pedagogical knowledge needed to teach those students effectively. One problem with traditional conceptions of supervision is that they equate hierarchy with expertise by assuming that supervisors as a group always know more about teaching than do teachers as a group. Differentiated supervision solves this problem by building a culture of collective responsibility for learning and improvement.

From a practical perspective, disconnecting the process of supervision from hierarchical roles reflects what often goes on in schools anyway. The research by both Emil Haller and Charles Keenan, for example, reveals that both the Canadian and


³Ibid.

American teachers they studied were very much inclined to depend upon each other when seeking help in solving problems, when searching for sources of new ideas about teaching, and when seeking other kinds of assistance. Formal supervisors counted, but not nearly as much as other teachers. Teachers held the advice of other teachers in higher regard than advice from other sources. Although not officially acknowledged, there appears to be an informal system of supervision in place in schools; the evidence suggests that this informal system among teachers may be more important and more useful to teachers than is the formal system. By disconnecting supervision from hierarchic roles and viewing it instead as a process accessible to both teachers and supervisors, educators can legitimize this informal system of supervision, maximize its benefits, and connect it to more formal approaches. Again, differentiated supervision solves the problem by helping build a culture of shared responsibility for learning and improvement.

In the sections below, an overview of the proposed options for inclusion in a differentiated approach to supervision is provided. Attention is also given to the instructional leadership responsibilities of designated supervisors.

CLINICAL SUPERVISION AS AN OPTION

In Chapter 12, we proposed that clinical supervision be viewed as a partnership in inquiry shared by teacher and supervisor that is intended to help teachers modify existing patterns of teaching in ways that make sense to them. Clinical supervision is not for everyone, nor is it a strategy that can sustain itself over a long period of time. When implemented as the cycle of supervision, the process is demanding in the time it requires from both teacher and supervisor. A danger is that continual use of this approach can result in a certain ritualism as each step is followed. Clinical supervision may be too much supervision for some teachers. That is, not all teachers will need such an intensive look at their teaching. And, finally, teachers’ needs and dispositions as well as learning styles vary. Clinical supervision may be suitable for some teachers but not for others when these differences are taken into consideration.

PEER SUPERVISION

In peer supervision, teachers agree to work together for their own professional development. Thus when teachers are working together within the clinical supervision framework, they are also engaging in peer supervision. But there are many other forms of peer supervision. Allan Glathorn defines this approach as a “moderately formalized process by which two or more teachers agree to work together for their own professional growth, usually by observing each other’s classroom, giving each other feedback about the observations, and discussing shared professional concerns.”

In some schools, teachers are organized into teams of two or three. It might be a good idea in some cases for at least one member of the team to be selected by the principal or supervisor, but there are no rigid rules for composing peer supervision teams. If not too large, a whole grade level, middle school team, or high school department might work well. Once the team is formed, team members may agree to observe each other’s classes and provide help according to the desires of the teacher being observed. They confer together, giving one another informal feedback and discussing issues of teaching that they consider important. Sometimes the emphasis on teaching might be narrowly focused on specific issues. On other occasions the emphasis might be quite unfocused in order to provide a general feel or rendition of teaching. All that is needed is for team members to meet beforehand to decide the rules and issues for the observation and for any subsequent conversations or conferences.

Glathorn describes five different forms peer supervision might take:

- Professional dialogue among teachers featuring guided discussion and focusing on teaching as a process of thinking. The purpose of professional dialogue is to enhance reflective practice.
- Curriculum development featuring teachers working together on such themes as how to operationalize the existing curriculum, adapt the curriculum to the wide variety of students and situations faced in the classroom, and enriching the existing curriculum by inventing and developing new curriculum units and materials.
- Peer supervision featuring observations of each other’s teaching followed by analysis and discussion.
- Peer coaching featuring collaborative development and practice of new teaching methods and skills in both “workshop” settings and under actual teaching conditions.
- Action research featuring the study of problems being faced and the development of feasible solutions that result in changes in one’s teaching practice.

Peer supervision extends well beyond classroom observation. It provides a setting in which teachers can informally discuss problems they face, share ideas, help one another in preparing lessons, exchange tips, and provide other support to one another. Some suggestions for implementing peer supervision are provided in Table 13-1.

Many examples of peer supervision exist, and many more can be invented by teachers and schools. Some forms of coaching, for example, look a lot like peer supervision. When a neutral party is introduced who facilitates the efforts of a group of teachers over a period of time, who may be directly involved in observing teaching.


Glathorn, op. cit.

*Glathorn describes five different forms of peer supervision that might take place: professional dialogue, curriculum development, peer supervision, peer coaching, and action research.


*Allan A. Glathorn, “Cooperative Professional Development: Peer-Centered Options for Teacher Growth,” Educational Leadership, vol. 45, no. 3 (1987), p. 32. Action research and peer supervision in the form of clinical supervision are treated in this discussion as separate options. Both might involve collaboration with one teacher; a closer, more private relationship between formal supervisor and teacher; or, as in the case of action research, an individual initiative.
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In some respects the tutorial, educational, and advisory aspects of the mentoring relationship are developmental. Initially, most novices seek assistance. They want to know what they are supposed to do, where things are, how to make requests, and what are accepted practices. They want concrete help in setting up their classrooms, establishing routines, and getting started. They want, in other words, to be tutored by an individual they trust without worrying too much about having to make an impression.

Because of its dependent nature, the tutorial relationship often represents a source of great satisfaction for the mentor. In many respects the mentor becomes the center of the novice’s life. But the purpose of mentoring is to help a novice become independent. For this to happen, the mentoring relationship needs to evolve quickly from one of tutelage to one of mutuality. This happens when novices ask less and mentors tell less and when both settle down to solving problems together. “How might I best do this?” is answered with, “What ideas do you have? That one sounds promising. Let’s try it out.” and eventually, “How do you think it’s going?”

The mentoring relationship matures when it becomes reciprocal. The novice seeks advice from the mentor and the mentor seeks to transform the relationship from mentoring to colleagueship by soliciting advice in return, by sharing problems, and by valuing the perspectives of the newcomer. Given that is known about the importance of the school’s culture, the informal norm system that exists among teachers, and the potential that exists for teachers to share talents, mentoring makes sense as a natural way to orient new teachers, give them a successful start, and invite them to become full colleagues.

Mentoring is intended to help new teachers successfully learn their roles, establish their self-images as teachers, figure out the school and its culture, understand how teaching unfolds in real classrooms, and achieve other goals that are important to the teachers being mentored. Mentoring is also intended to help new teachers improve their effectiveness in demonstrating the schools’ standards for teaching. When the latter is the goal, an outside-in approach to mentoring makes sense. Here a set of standards and indicators for teaching (perhaps from the state’s assessment system, the Danielson framework for teaching described in Chapter 10, or the district’s own sense of good teaching) is imported from outside the mentoring relationship. These standards and indicators are used to train mentors as coaches and to provide an agenda for helping teachers talk about and evaluate their work. When the former is used, an inside-out approach makes sense. Here the focus is on the problems and issues that teachers identify they are facing in their practice or that they are interested in learning more about. Both outside-in and inside-out approaches are important and need attention.

One strategy is to bring outside and inside approaches together. When dealing with standards that come from outside the mentoring relationship, try linking them to the real-time problems and issues that teachers are facing. And when dealing with the problems and issues that emerge from inside the mentoring experience, try linking them to the school’s standards for teaching. When the two are worked on separately, we begin to posture one as summative evaluation and the other as formative growth and development, creating fractures and suspicions that mentoring is little
more than an early warning system for evaluating teachers. But when the two are
outraged together, these lines begin to disappear. The emphasis shifts to helping new
teachers be successful as defined by both outside and inside criteria.

If we are going to take new teachers seriously as learners, say Sharon Feiman-
Nemser, Cynthia Carver, Sharon Schville, and Brian Yusko, we need to provide
support on the one hand, and the kind of learning that develops new teachers as
professionals able to help complex learning happen for students on the other. They
recommend an approach that brings together support, professional development,
and assessment, blurring the lines between outside and inside factors:

All three are necessary components of a comprehensive system of beginning-teacher in-
duction. Support without development leaves teacher learning to chance. It favors the
agendas of individual teachers and works against a sense of collective responsibility for
student learning. Framing induction around new-teacher development closes the gap
between initial preparation and continuing professional development. It honors the fact
that new teachers are learners and lays a foundation for the ongoing study and im-
provement of teaching. Assessment that encourages interpretation and enactment of
standards in context strengthens professional accountability, which is the most appro-
priate and powerful source of quality control in teaching.

Ellen Moir, Janet Glass, and Wendy Baron, from the New Teacher Center at the
University of California Santa Cruz, have argued that standards have important
roles to play in mentoring new teachers but that successful emphasis on standards
and other criteria outside the mentoring relationship depends upon providing a
strong support system geared to the teachers' concerns and other inside criteria as
well. Moir, Glass, and Baron seek to build both learning communities and caring
communities for new teachers. As they explain:

High professional standards are essential for all educators, and the role of any induction
program must be to help new teachers recognize the standards and put them into prac-
tice. But in these times of standards-based curricula and standards-driven reform, we
feel that standards alone do not ensure quality teaching. However, when standards are
embodied in a compassionate and responsive system of support, they can guide educa-
tional reform.

And further:

So we have embedded the California Standards for the Teaching Profession in every as-
pect of our program—in our seminars, our assessments, our collaborative log forms,
and, most important, in our language. And at the same time, we seek to create compassi-
tionate environments for new teachers in which they hear the language of inspiration
and love, of passion for teaching and dedication to community, of commitment to

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excellence and a determination that every child be afforded the birthright of a quality
education. Our children and our schools deserve no less.

While the emphasis in mentoring is on helping new teachers, mentors typically
report that the experience of mentoring is expansive for them as well. By helping a
colleague, they are forced to come to grips with their own teaching, to see their
problems more clearly, and to learn ways to overcome them. Mentoring is the kind of
relationship in which learning benefits everyone involved.

Lesson Study

The lesson study is a promising way to engage teachers in ongoing learning that is
immersed in their practice and in the practice of their colleagues. The lesson study
has a research bent to it, encourages reflections, helps teachers engage in "shop
floor" curriculum development, involves collegial study of a lesson or lessons,
while at the same time is practical for addressing issues teachers identify with and
have to face in their daily practice. Not only are new lessons invented in the lesson
study, but they are field-tested, revised, and improved as well. Old lessons get
refitted. Indeed, even packaged lessons such as those one might find in a teacher's
manual or in a professional journal can be improved by the lesson study. Further,
new, norms of collegiality are transcended as teachers come together as members of
practice.

In their international studies, James W. Stigler and James Hiebert found that
the Japanese invest heavily in teacher learning and professional development and
that they invest differently than we do with great success. The researchers noted that
in Japan great emphasis is given to classroom lessons, how they are planned, what
happens in live classrooms when specific lessons are used, and how these lessons
might be continually improved. In their words:

In Japan, classroom lessons hold a privileged place in the activities of the school. It
would be exaggerating only a little to say they are sacred. They are treated much as we
handle lectures in university courses or religious services in church. A great deal of atten-
tion is given to their development. They are planned as complete experiences—as stories
with a beginning, a middle, and an end. Their meaning is found in the connections be-
 tween the parts. If you stay only for the beginning, or leave before the end, you miss the
point. If lessons like this are going to succeed, they must be coherent. The pieces must
relate to one another in clear ways. And they must flow along, free from interruption and
related activities. . . . So the lesson must be a tightly connected, coherent story; the
teacher must build a visible record of the pieces as they unfold so connections can be
drawn between them; and the lesson cannot be sidetracked or broken by interruptions.

Because many differences in conceptions and practice have cultural anchors, we
must be cautious about wholesale borrowing of ideas for use in our schools. But
one idea, the lesson study, may be worth considering for adoption in our culture.

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8Sharon Feiman-Nemser, Cynthia Carver, Sharon Schville, and Brian Yusko, "Beyond Support: Taking New
Teachers Seriously as Learners," in Marge Scherer (ed.), A Better Beginning. Alexandria, VA: Association for
Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1999, pp. 3-12.
9Ibid., p. 10.
10Ellen Moir, Janet Glass, and Wendy Baron, "A Support Program with Heart: The Santa Cruz Project," in
11Ibid., p. 115.
12James W. Stigler and James Hiebert, The Teaching Gap: Best Ideas from the World's Teachers for Improv-
13Ibid., pp. 95-96.
At the very least, the lesson study can be used to help develop a set of guidelines and standards. These guidelines and standards then might be used to invent something similar in intent but unique for use in our own schools.

In lesson study, groups of teachers meet regularly over a period of several months to design a new, or redesign an existing, lesson. This lesson is then implemented in view of colleagues who offer "critical friend" feedback. This critique and the suggestions that accompany it are directed to the lesson itself rather than the teacher. Thus if things do not go well, it is assumed that everyone must work harder to refine or perhaps redefine the lesson, not the person. From this test, a revised lesson is crafted and tried out, followed by another critique and still more changes.

Relying on research conducted by Catherine Lewis and Ineke Tsuchida and by N. Ken Shimahara,16 Stigler and Hiebert identify the following steps in the lesson study process:

Step 1: Defining the Problem. Lesson study is, fundamentally, a problem-solving process. The first step, therefore, is to define the problem that will motivate and direct the work of the lesson-study group. The problem can start out as a general one (for example, to awaken students' interest in mathematics) or it can be more specific (for example, to improve students' understanding of how to add fractions with unlike denominators). The group will then sharpen and focus the problem until it can be addressed by a specific classroom lesson.

Step 2: Planning the Lesson. Once a learning goal has been chosen, teachers begin meeting to plan the lesson. Although one teacher will ultimately teach the lesson as part of the process, the lesson itself is seen by all involved as a group product. Often the teachers will start their planning by looking at books and articles produced by other teachers who have studied a similar problem. According to one Japanese book on how to prepare a research lesson, the useful research lesson should be designed with a hypothesis in mind: some idea to be tested and worked out within the context of classroom practice.17 The goal is not only to produce an effective lesson but also to understand why and how the lesson works to promote understanding among students. The initial plan that the group produces is often presented at a schoolwide faculty meeting in order to solicit criticism. Based on such feedback, a revision is produced, ready for implementation. This initial planning process can take as long as several months.

Step 3: Teaching the Lesson. A date is set to teach the lesson. One teacher will teach the lesson, but everyone in the group will participate fully in the preparation. The night before, the group might stay late at school, preparing materials and engaging in a dress rehearsal, complete with role-playing. On the day of the lesson, the other teachers in the group leave their classrooms to observe the lesson being taught. The teachers stand or sit in the back as the lesson begins, but when students are asked to work at their desks, the teacher-observers walk around, observing and taking careful notes on what students are doing as the lesson progresses. Sometimes the lesson is videotaped as well, for later analysis and discussion.

Step 4: Evaluating the Lesson and Reflecting on Its Effect. The group generally stays after school to meet on the day the lesson has been taught. Usually, the teacher who taught the lesson is allowed to speak first, outlining in his or her own view how the lesson worked and what the major problems were. Then other members of the group speak, usually critically, about the parts of the lesson they saw as problematic. The focus is on the lesson, not on the teacher who taught the lesson; the lesson, after all, is a group product, and all members of the group feel responsible for the outcome of their plan. They are, in effect, criticizing themselves. This is important, because it shifts the focus from a personal evaluation to a self-improvement activity.

Step 5: Revising the Lesson. On the basis of their observations and reflections, teachers in the lesson-study group revise the lesson. They might change the materials, the activities, the problems posed, the questions asked, or all these things. They often will base their changes on specific misunderstandings evidenced by students as the lesson progressed.

Step 6: Teaching the Revised Lesson. Once the revised lesson is ready, the lesson is taught again to a different class. Sometimes it is taught by the same teacher who taught the lesson the first time, but often it is taught by another member of the group. One difference is that this time all members of the school faculty are invited to attend the research lesson. This is quite dramatic in a large school, where there may be more faculty crowded into the classroom than there are students in the class.

Step 7: Evaluating and Reflecting. Again. This time, it is common for all members of the school faculty to participate in a long meeting. Sometimes an outside expert will be invited to attend as well. As before, the teacher who taught the lesson is allowed to speak first, discussing what the group was trying to accomplish, her or his own assessment of how successful the lesson was, and what parts of the lesson still need rethinking. Observers then critique the lesson and suggest changes. Not only is the lesson discussed with respect to what these students learned and understood, but also with respect to more general issues raised by the hypotheses that guided the design of the research lesson. What about teaching and learning, more generally, was learned from the lesson and its implementation?

Step 8: Sharing the Results. All this work has focused on a single lesson. But because Japan is a country with national education goals and curricular guidelines, what this group of teachers has learned will have immediate relevance for other Japanese teachers trying to teach the same concepts at the same grade level. Indeed, the teachers in one lesson-study group see the sharing of their findings as a significant part of the lesson-study process. This sharing can be done in

several ways. One is to write a report, and most lesson-study groups do produce a report that tells the story of their group's work. Often these reports are published in book form, even if only for the school's teacher resource room.18

How viable is the lesson study as an option for supervision in our schools? What adjustments might be necessary for this approach to fit our way of doing things? Try sharing the description of the lesson study provided with some teachers in your school. What are their reactions? Do they have suggestions as to how this approach might be adapted? What principles does the lesson study embody that we can use to develop workable approaches to supervision that are rich in teacher learning? Stigler and Hiebert answer this last question as follows. The lesson study

- is based on long-term continuous improvement;
- maintains a continuous focus on student learning;
- focuses on the improvement of teaching in context;
- is collaborative;
- involves teachers in the development of knowledge about teaching.19

In our view, supervision would be taking an important step in the right direction if these principles were our standard for the practice of supervision. We echo Dennis Sparks's view on this topic. Sparks, who is executive director of the National Staff Development Council, believes that we can close the "staff development gap" that exists in many schools by focusing our efforts on providing a practical model for continuous improvement of teaching that places teachers at the center of the school improvement process. He argues:

As both North American and international studies make clear, linking teacher learning to student learning and focusing on the daily improvement of instructional practice makes a difference in student achievement. While that may not be rocket science, research and practical experience are teaching us that it is the core premise that drives powerful staff development efforts.20

LOOKING AT STUDENT WORK

It is widely accepted that establishing schools as professional learning communities is key to teacher learning and to student success.21 In the opening paragraphs of this chapter, we characterized professional learning communities as schools where

teachers depend on each other for caring and support and where teachers learn and inquire together as members of a shared practice. Collaboration is a key characteristic of professional learning communities. The learning intersection is what makes professional learning communities so powerful. The learning intersection is where collaborative cultures that are created and supported by principals and other designated supervisors meet communities of practice that bubble up from teachers below.

Examining student work is a powerful way to build the kind of collaborative culture that can help schools become professional learning communities. When teachers together look at student work, they come to talk with each other about matters at the heart of teaching and learning more often and more thoughtfully. This kind of collaboration provides teachers with practical ways to reflect on, discuss, and revise their own practice.22 Whether we are talking about examples of student writing, some math problems that students are working on, a report they have just finished for a social studies class, a write-up of a science experiment, some preliminary sketches for an art project, or examples of tests or homework assignments that have recently been completed, these artifacts of teaching and learning can be powerful tools for learning, for sharing, and for changing one's teaching practice.

Examining student work together is also a way for teachers to sharpen their focus on learning standards for students. As Tina Blythe, David Allen, and Barbara Powell explain, "there are some purposes for looking at student work that virtually require collaboration and conversation—developing common standards within grade levels or departments, for example. In order to accomplish this aim, a school or a group of teachers must develop not only standards but also a shared understanding of what these standards mean and how to apply them to student work. Examining and discussing student work is virtually the only way to achieve such a goal."23

USING PROTOCOLS TO HELP

It is not easy for teachers to talk together about the assignments they give students and about the work that students do as a result. Nor is it easy for them to determine if student work measures up to accepted standards of learning. Despite the advice that we do so, separating teachers from their teaching for the purpose of studying this teaching is not easy. Teachers often worry that peer collaboration and collegial supervision might turn out to be other strategies to "evaluate" them but only in a more intrusive way. Looking closely at the work that students do, for example, provides a deeper look at teaching and learning than does examining one's teaching effectiveness score on a state teacher-evaluation instrument. That is why having some ground rules and using protocols to help guide the inquiry can help teachers be more comfortable with what is expected and how to participate in collegial supervision. Protocols help assure teachers that the focus is on the study of teaching and not the evaluation of teachers.

23Ibid., p. 4.
The lesson study described above is a good example of a form of collegial supervision that emphasizes the study of teaching. This process is built upon certain widely accepted assumptions and beliefs and is framed by steps that lay out the pathway to be followed and provide some guidelines for following them. Below, for example, are examples of questions offered by Blythe, Allen, and Powell that might help teachers as they examine student work: The questions may be used with existing protocols or to help develop new ones.

About the quality of student work:

- Is the work good enough?
- What is "good enough"?
- In what ways does this work meet or fail to meet a particular set of standards?

About teaching practice:

- What do the students' responses indicate about the effectiveness of the prompt or assignment? How might the assignment be improved?
- What kinds of instruction support high-quality student performances?

About students' understanding:

- What does this work tell us about how well the student understands the topic of the assignment?
- What initial understandings do we see beginning to emerge in this work?

About students' growth:

- How does this range of work from a single student demonstrate growth over time?
- How can I support student growth more effectively?

About students' intent:

- What issues or questions is this student focused on?
- What aspects of the assignment intrigued this student?
- Into which parts of the assignment did the student put the most effort?
- To what extent is the student challenging herself? In what ways?

The standards for authentic pedagogy proposed by Fred Newmann and Gary Wehlage\(^2\) and summarized in Table 6-1 and the criteria provided in Appendix 7-1 are examples of content protocols that can be used by participants individually or in collaboration with others to examine the assignments and tasks they give to students.\(^3\) Since there is a relationship between tasks assigned to students and the kind of work they do, examining student work involves examining assignments as well.

Try using the standards and criteria provided in Appendix 7-1 by joining with two colleagues in a series of meetings to first examine samples of the tasks you give students and then later, to examine samples of the work they do in response. Begin by asking participants to bring two examples of tasks assigned. They might choose the two from tasks assigned during the last week, or perhaps one task that they think students handled quite well and another when they were disappointed with the results. Ask participants to score the tasks using the criteria provided in Appendix 7-1. Then have them predict what they think the teacher assigning the task was trying to accomplish. Taking turns, each participant might then explore how they scored the tasks they assigned and what they were trying to accomplish. As a group, the participants might want to reflect on whether the assignments studied match the kind and level of standards they have for their students. At a subsequent meeting, have participants bring three samples of student work that represent responses to these tasks that were assigned. The group might then consider using the questions offered by Blythe, Allen, and Powell discussed above to get the conversation started about what this work means and what can be learned from studying it.

As a further example, Steve Seidel and his colleagues at Harvard University's Project Zero have developed a protocol called the Collaborative Assessment Conference. Teachers are asked to examine together samples of student work and discuss what they see in the work. Seidel and his colleagues believe that while the approach can work for a range of student work, it is particularly suited to open-ended assignments. The main purpose of the Collaborative Assessment Conference is to develop a deep understanding of students' interests and strengths and of the contexts for teaching and learning that produce the samples of student work studied. The process involves the following steps:

1. **Getting started.** The group chooses a facilitator to keep it focused. Then the presenting teacher gives out copies of the selected work or displays it so all can see it. At this point, she says nothing about the work, its context, or the student. The participants read or observe the work in silence, making notes if they like.

2. **Describing the work.** The facilitator asks, "What do you see?" Participants respond without making judgments about the quality of the work or their personal preferences. If judgments emerge, the facilitator asks the speaker to describe the evidence on which the judgment is based.

3. **Raising questions.** The facilitator asks, "What questions does this work raise for you?" Group members ask any questions about the work, the child, the assignment, the circumstances of the work, and so forth that have come up for them during the previous steps of the conference. The presenting teacher makes notes but does not yet respond.

4. **Speculating about what the student is working on.** The facilitator asks, "What do you think the child is working on?" On the basis of their reading or observation of the work, participants offer their ideas.

\(^1\)Ibid., Reprinted by permission of the publisher from Blythe, T., Allen, D., and Powell, B. S., Looking Together at Student Work, (New York: Teachers College Press, © 1999 by Teachers College, Columbia University. All rights reserved.), p. 10.


5. Hearing from the presenting teacher. At the facilitator's invitation, the presenting teacher provides her perspective on the work and what she sees in it, responding to the questions raised and adding any other relevant information. She also comments on any unexpected things that she heard in the group's responses and questions.

6. Discussing implications for teaching and learning. The group and the presenting teacher together discuss their thoughts about their own teaching, children's learning, or ways to support this student.

7. Reflecting on the conference. Putting the student work aside, the group reflects together on how they experienced the conference itself.

Many other frameworks and protocols for recording and studying student work have been developed. See Appendix 7-1 "Standards and Scoring Criteria for Assessment Tasks" for an example of protocols that can be used to assess the assignments that teachers give and the work that students do.

**SELF-DIRECTED SUPERVISION**

In self-directed supervision, teachers work alone by assuming responsibility for their own professional development. They might, for example, develop a yearly plan that includes targets or goals derived from an assessment of their own needs. This plan then might be shared with supervisors or other designated individuals. As the process unfolds, teachers should be allowed a great deal of leeway in developing the plan, but supervisors should be responsible for ensuring that the plan and selected improvement targets are both realistic and attainable. At the end of a specific period, normally a year, supervisor and teacher meet to discuss the teacher's progress in meeting professional development targets. Teachers would be expected to provide some sort of documentation, perhaps in the form of a portfolio that includes such things as time logs, reflective practice diaries, schedules, photo essays, tapes, samples of students' work, and other artifacts that illustrate progress toward goals. The yearly conference would then lead to the setting of new targets for future self-directed supervisory cycles.

There are a number of problems with approaches to supervision that rely heavily on target setting. For example, supervisors might be inclined to adhere rigidly to prespecified targets and to sometimes unnecessarily impose their own targets on teachers. Rigidly applying a target-setting format to supervision unduly focuses on the process. Teachers tend to direct their attention to prestated targets, and as a result, other areas of importance not targeted can be overlooked or neglected. Target setting is meant to help and facilitate, not to hinder the self-improvement process.

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**TABLE 13-2. Guidelines for Implementing Self-Directed Supervision.**

1. **Target setting.** On the basis of last year's observations, conferences, summary reports, clinical supervision episodes, or other means of personal assessment, teachers develop targets or goals that they would like to reach in improving their teaching. Targets should be few, rarely exceeding five or six and preferably limited to two or three. Estimated time frames should be provided for each target, which are then shared with the supervisor, along with an informal plan providing suggested activities for teacher engagement.

2. **Target-setting review.** After reviewing each target and estimated time frame, the supervisor provides the teacher with a written reaction. Further, a conference is scheduled to discuss targets and plans.

3. **Target-setting conference.** Meeting to discuss targets, time frames, and reactions, the teacher and supervisor revise targets if appropriate. It may be a good idea for the supervisor to provide a written summary of the conference to the teacher. Teacher and supervisor might well prepare this written summary together.

4. **Appraisal process.** Appraisal begins at the conclusion of the target-setting conference and continues in accordance with the agreed-upon time frame. The specific nature of the appraisal process depends on each of the targets and could include formal and informal classroom observations, an analysis of classroom artifacts, videotaping, student evaluation, interaction analysis, and other information. The teacher is responsible for collecting appraisal information and arranges this material in a portfolio for subsequent discussion with the supervisor.

5. **Summary appraisal.** The supervisor visits with the teacher to review the appraisal portfolio. As part of this process, the supervisor comments on each target, and together the teacher and supervisor plan for the next cycle of self-directed supervision.

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Note: The supervisor may be the principal, a mentor teacher, or a team of teachers with whom the teacher is working.


Self-directed approaches to supervision are ideal for teachers who prefer to work alone or who, because of scheduling or other difficulties, are unable to work cooperatively with other teachers. This option is efficient in use of time, less costly, and less demanding in its reliance on others than are other options. Furthermore, this option is particularly suited to competent, experienced teachers who are able to manage their time well. Some guidelines for implementing self-directed supervision are provided in Table 13-2.

**INQUIRY-BASED SUPERVISION**

Inquiry-based supervision in the form of action research is an option that can represent an individual initiative or a collaborative effort as pairs or teams of teachers work together to solve problems. In action research the emphasis is on the problem-solving nature of the supervisory experience. Mixing the word "research" with such
words as "action" or "supervision" may cause some initial confusion. Research, after all, is generally thought to be something mysterious, remote, statistical, and theoretical. And further, teachers and researchers have been thought to occupy separate ends of a continuum. What is a teacher–researcher anyway? Glenda Bissex believes that:

A teacher–researcher is an observer, a questioner, a learner, and, as a result, a more complete teacher.39

When action research is undertaken as an individual initiative, a teacher works closely with the supervisor in sorting out a problem and developing a strategy for its resolution and in sharing findings and conclusions. Implications for practice are then identified, and strategies for implementing these changes are then developed. When action research involves collaboration with other teachers, problems are "co-researched," findings are shared, and together, teachers ferret out implications for changes in their teaching practice. Among all the options, action research requires the highest level of reflection and promises a great deal with respect to discovering new insights and practices.

Basic to action research is the belief that individual teachers and groups of teachers can undertake research to improve their own practice. Although increasing understanding and building one's store of conceptual knowledge is an important outcome of action research, its prime purpose is to alter the teaching practices of the researchers themselves. Florence Stratmeyer and her colleagues describe action research as "a process aimed at discovering new ideas or practices as well as testing old ones, exploring or establishing relationships between causes and effects, or of systematically gaining evidence about the nature of a particular problem.40

Although usually articulated as steps, action research proceeds as a process that more accurately involves phases that are less clearly defined. Stratmeyer and her colleagues explain:

For convenience, the phases of this process are frequently described in terms of steps although in reality they are neither neat nor discrete. Instead, there is usually a flow from one to another, sometimes back and forth, without clear demarcations. These phases are quite similar to the sequence of the problem-solving process: the problem is identified and refined; hypotheses are formulated or hunches are advanced about its solution; the hypotheses are tested and evidence is collected, organized, and analyzed; and conclusions are then reached. In a controlled laboratory situation, the research process may closely parallel these so-called problem-solving steps. In the classroom situation, the process flow is usually quite different.40

41Ibid.

Millie Almy and Celia Genishi propose the following as the basic steps for action research:

Step 1: Identify the problem.
Step 2: Develop hunches about its cause and how it can be solved.
Step 3: Test one or more of the hunches.
   (a) Collect data, evidence about the situation. Some hunches held initially or tentatively may have to be rejected when more of the facts of the situation are known. Hunches that seem reasonable after careful consideration become the hypotheses of scientific investigations.
   (b) Try out the hunches in action (the tryout may be in a test tube or in a classroom).
   (c) See what happens (collect more data or evidence).
   (d) Evaluate or generalize on the basis of evidence.41

For many teachers, action research works best when they engage in the process cooperatively. Problems that emerge might be of concern schoolwide or might be of concern to only two teachers whose classrooms are located across from each other. Action research as a collegial process can result from other forms of supervision. For example, a cycle of clinical supervision might reveal pressing problems that are beyond the scope of understanding at the time. Adapting an action research stance, under this circumstance, may well be an attractive option.

INFORMAL SUPERVISION

Included in any array of options should be a provision for informal supervision. Informal supervision consists of the casual encounters that occur between supervisors and teachers and is characterized by frequent informal visits to teachers' classrooms, conversations with teachers about their work, and other informal activities.

Successful informal supervision requires that certain expectations be accepted by teachers. Otherwise it will likely be viewed as a system of informal surveillance. Principals and other supervisors need to be viewed as principal teachers who have a responsibility to be a part of all the teaching that takes place in the school. They need to be viewed as instructional partners to every teacher in every classroom for every teaching and learning situation. When informal supervision is in place, principals and supervisors become common fixtures in classrooms, coming and going as part of the natural flow of the school's daily work. But this kind of relationship is not likely to flourish unless it is reciprocal. If teachers are to invite supervisors into their classrooms as equal partners in teaching and learning, teachers must in turn be invited into the process of supervision as equal partners.

Although we list informal supervision as an option, it should perhaps be understood as one kind of supervision that is included in any range of options that a school might provide. In addition to informal supervision, teachers should be involved in at least one other approach, such as clinical, peer, self-directed, or inquiry-based supervision. In selecting additional options, supervisors should accommodate teacher preferences and honor them in nearly every case. Nonetheless, final responsibility for deciding the appropriateness of a selected option should probably be reserved for the supervisor.

LEARNING WALKS

Learning walks (or walk-throughs, as they are often called) involve visiting classrooms to study teaching practices and the learning environment which exists in classrooms and in the school itself. Particularly important is to look for artifacts of learning and other evidence that students are achieving and that the work they are engaged in is important. Unlike casual visits to classrooms, learning walks are more purposeful. In New York City, San Diego, and other school districts, learning walks have served as a way to evaluate the extent to which principals and other designated instructional leaders are implementing agreed-upon teaching frameworks in their schools and are linking learning to appropriate standards. Researcher Amy Hightower describes the learning-walk process in these schools as follows:

About twice each semester an IL [instructional leader from the central office] would visit each school in the Learning Community to see, through analysis of teachers’ practice and school and classroom environment, how principals were incorporating what they had learned at the monthly meetings. During these WalkThroughs, the IL and principal together would visit about 10-15 classrooms in two or three hours. As they walked from classroom to classroom, the pair typically discussed what they had observed. They would reconvene in the front office after the classroom visits to share what they had noticed in more depth and would agree upon next steps for the school. The Instructional Leader would follow up each visit with a letter to the principal, specifying what was observed and what areas needed improvement by the next WalkThrough.

The learning walk, as created by the Institute for Learning at the University of Pittsburgh, invites designated supervisors, informal supervisors, teachers, and others to visit several classrooms to examine student work and to talk with students and teachers. Sometimes protocols are used to help focus the classroom visit on specific elements or ideas thought to be important. Is there evidence that the content being taught is linked in some meaningful way to our standards? Do students have the opportunity to create new knowledge? Sometimes a checklist of what to look for is

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28Glattroom, Differentiated Supervision, p. 59.

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### TABLE 13-3. What to Look for in the Social Studies Classroom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>The Classroom Learning Environment</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Students are given ample opportunity to share and compare their solutions and strategies in small group settings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Teachers and students are sharing ideas, strategies, and solutions in two-way communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Time and structured tasks are provided for students to explore and discover concepts under the guidance of the teacher.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>The Role of the Teacher</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Poses thought-provoking questions and situations that challenge students’ thinking and contribute to their understanding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Allows students to pursue their own ways of thinking, but provides important information as needed to support the learning process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Provides regular opportunities for students to clarify and justify their ideas orally and in writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Encourages students to select tools that will help them to build understanding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Emphasizes activities that engage students in inquiry and problem solving about significant social studies issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Provides opportunities to integrate social studies with other areas of the curriculum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Uses a variety of instructional methods to reach all learning styles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Acts as a facilitator in the learning process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Uses standard to guide instruction.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Student Expectations**

- Aware of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills/Student Expectations.
- Engaged in interactive questioning and discussion.
- Engaged in practical applications of social studies content and skills.


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Table 13-3, “What to Look for in the Social Studies Classroom,” is an example. Observers check items they see and then provide evidence to support their checks. Those involved in the walk-through will need ample time to examine and discuss the evidence. The evidence is key, for it is the source of practical ideas that might help schools improve their teaching and learning.

### STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AS EXAMPLE

What would happen if we developed a protocol to find out why students are engaged in some schools but disengaged in others? Suppose we put together five teams of teachers and students (perhaps three teachers and two students on each team) who
would be trained to do walk-throughs to search for examples of student disengagement or lack of connections. Suppose each team focuses on questions such as the following and when connections are observed (or not observed) they provide examples:

1. Are students excited about learning? What examples of excitement or lack of excitement were observed?
2. Do students spend extra time and effort on learning?
3. Do students take responsibility for learning?
4. Do students work together, cooperate with each other, help each other?
5. Do schools define everything that will be studied and how it will be studied? Or do students have a say too? How important is this say? Do students help decide what will be assessed and how it will be assessed? Do students help decide what the standards will be and what rubrics will be used to assess their work?
6. Are students encouraged to raise questions?
7. Are students working hard enough? Being challenged?
8. Do students seem passionate about their work, responsible for their work, and involved in doing their work?
9. Are teachers and students having fun?
10. Are students required to demonstrate their learning by sharing what they know with each other and with other groups?

This cadre of 25 “critical friends” (15 teachers and 10 students) would be responsible for gathering evidence, discussing the evidence among themselves, and then sharing their findings with faculty and students. Focusing on students and their work is as important as studying teaching and studying the learning environment. And when the focus is on the extent to which students are engaged, we are tapping the heart of school improvement. In Chapter 1, for example, we provided a model of school improvement that viewed student engagement as a critical link between school-improvement efforts and advances in student achievement. This might be a good time to review the model and the three pathways, noting how important supervisory leadership is to school success.

**LEARNING WALKS IN BOSTON**

Boston uses the following six essentials to develop a framework of expectations for its schools:

- Use effective instructional practices, and create a collaborative school climate to improve student learning.
- Examine student work and data to drive instruction and professional development.
- Invest in professional development to improve instruction.

- Share leadership to sustain instructional improvement.
- Focus resources to support instructional improvement and improved student learning.
- Partner with families and community to support student learning.34

The district believes that the essentials and their components provide needed instructional coherence without unduly reducing the amount of discretion teachers have to decide what and how to teach and to provide an appropriate learning environment. Further, because the essentials and their components are made explicit, a common language is developed that can encourage teachers to reflect on these practices, to share what they know, and to help each other succeed. Boston leadership would argue that a common language and shared meanings are essential if collegiality is to develop and be sustained.

There are a number of ways the schools can gauge the extent to which the essentials are being successfully embodied in the practices of teachers and schools. One way is to use the essentials as benchmarks for learning walks. For our discussion of the six essentials, we will use only the first essential, the core essential, effective instruction, as an example to show how learning walks can be a way to establish meaningful discussions about what is going on, to assess where the district needs to go, and to marshal the district’s professional development resources. This core essential and its components are shown in Exhibit 13-1. Those conducting learning walks in classrooms would be looking for evidence that “students can explain what they are learning and why and how it connects to what they have already learned.” They would look for evidence as well for other factors, listed in the “In Classrooms” column, in Exhibit 13-1. For factors in the “Around the School” column, the learning-walk team would look for evidence such as this: “Every classroom has areas for students to read, write, and work on their own and in pairs and a common area for the whole class to meet and talk. Current, exemplary student work is posted throughout the school.” Teaching and learning expectations for the school itself are provided in the section “Expectations for Schools” that appears at the beginning of Exhibit 13-1.

After the walk, teams should be able to discuss these questions: What does what we see tell us about the extent to which we are on target? What and where are we doing especially well? Where do we need to improve? What ideas do we have for improvement? What are the implications for our coaching and other professional development efforts?

Learning walks can be planned or can take place on a more ad hoc basis. At the spur of the moment, the principal might, for example, ask one of the coaches and the librarian to cover for two teachers so that they can join the principal in a spontaneous learning walk. Whatever the strategy chosen, it seems best to narrow the focus of a learning walk to only a few issues or to one or two themes.

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Providing Instructional Leadership

We believe that teachers have critically important roles to play as instructional leaders in our schools. Indeed, unless they become instructional leaders, schools will not be able to keep up with the escalating learning demands they face. Supervisors have a key role to play in this process. Designated supervisors (principals, for example) in this configuration should be thought of as instructional leaders who are able to provide instructional leadership as needed while at the same time encouraging instructional leadership among the faculty. How should principals provide this instructional leadership? Unfortunately, there is no single recipe that will work in every situation. But we can get a good idea of what the possibilities are and what major themes are essential by paying attention to the experiences of others. In preparing for a special feature on leadership, Education Week invited principals to respond by e-mail to three questions: How would you describe what it means to be an instructional leader? Give an example of something you do that captures the role of instructional leaders. Describe the biggest obstacles to exercising instructional leadership. The 24 e-mail responses they received were combined with comments made by 115 principals who participated in a Principals’ Leadership Summit sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education. Here is what five of these principals said in response to the second question, “Give an example of something you do that captures the role of instructional leader:”

About once a quarter, I put out a “seen and noted” sheet that doesn’t name names, but praises wonderful things I’ve seen in the classrooms. I praise instructional techniques, . . . [and include] notes about how teachers are integrating technology with specific examples of several classroom projects, cross-curricular thematic units I’ve observed, peer tutoring, some excellent co-teaching going on, etc. This little newsletter helps to promote the best practices (according to my value system) that are taking place in our school.

I also start each day with a morning assembly where I get to set the climate for the day, share our educational priorities with the students, remind them of our core values on a regular basis, reward students for demonstrating those values every day, celebrate successes, and foster a sense of “we” in our school.

I review testing/screening data on each child and sign off on all intervention plans (reading sufficiency/at risk, attendance, work completion, attitude, low performance, individualized education plan, etc.). Insights are gained by checking student-goal folders, daily journals, and writing portfolios periodically, and conferencing with teaching and support staff about progress.

“Seeing kids for good reasons” means listening to a few students read from journals, books, and assignments on a daily basis. Each child receives a personal note of encouragement or congratulations on at least one report card throughout the year. I see hundreds of kids for good reasons; tens of kids in problem-solving sessions.

The most important gift that elementary teachers can give a child is a lifelong love of reading, together with the necessary skills to accomplish this significant feat. I feel that elementary leaders must have a working understanding of literacy development and its relationship to other curricular areas.

Exhibit 13-1.

I have many excellent teachers whose opinions I value. Often, I have informal discussions with one or two to gather their thoughts on particular issues. I use them as a sounding board to discuss new district initiatives, current trends, and possible modifications. I listen very carefully to their ideas. They’re the experts!

Also, I encourage my master teachers to become actively engaged in district activities—developing curriculum, presenting at professional development workshops, becoming trainers, etc.

Instructional leadership in my building means being in the classroom as much as you possibly can. I try to make a concerted effort to be in at least five classrooms a day and come in unannounced. It’s being in the know, and being able to get up in a classroom and say, “I saw in your classroom the other day”... I also am probably the best at finding money under a rock to send teachers to a state conference or a national conference.

Principals should be right in the middle of instruction. Any time my teachers are involved in a new program, I go through the training with them.

Clearly, the instructional leadership described above and found as one goes from school to school differs, reflecting the different personalities and dispositions of supervisors on the one hand, and differences in the problems, issues, and intents that define supervisory situations on the other. But overriding these differences in need and circumstances is a common commitment to teaching and learning, to helping teachers learn more about teaching and learning, and to discovering how the practice of teaching in the school can continually improve. This common focus is an important marker for instructional leadership. But is it enough?

The Components of Instructional Leadership

The critical incidents provided by the five principals above suggest that practicing instructional leadership successfully requires focusing on teaching and learning in a way that ensures an emphasis on three themes: subject-matter content, principles of learning, and teaching processes. In today’s supervision, the teaching processes seem to have dominated, often resulting in a neglect of attention to subject matter and learning principles. This neglect can lead to a vacuous brand of instructional leadership. Just because students are involved, a caring environment is provided, and other hands-on are ready, lessons are opened and closed on time, the teacher follows his or her objectives on the board, cooperative learning is used, and wait time is right does not necessarily mean academic performance will improve if lessons are content-poor and if learning principles are ignored. Yet most observation schedules emphasize recording the presence or absence of teacher behaviors and not what is going on in classrooms regarding matters of subject matter standards, content adequacy, and learning intents. Supervisors, argue Barbara Nelson and Annette Sassi, “need to be able to discern the central intellectual ideas of the lesson and to pay attention to how they are being developed within the classroom’s structures and practices.” At the same time, getting content and learning principles right but failing the teaching-processes test is not likely to be much better for students. All three need attention if we are going to have successful instructional leadership.

Many principals have found ways to bring the three components of instructional leadership together in effective ways. Carmen Farina, formerly a principal in New York City’s School District 2, and now Deputy Chancellor for Teaching and Learning, serves as a good example. She created something called the participatory lesson that she used to supervise untenured members of her faculty at P.S. 6 and tenured teachers who volunteered to participate. Participatory lessons give the principal an opportunity to visit each classroom and to participate as a co-teacher in a lesson the teacher develops. The day before the visit, Mrs. Farina received a lesson plan from the teacher that spelled out the subject, goals, teaching and learning methods, and materials that would be used. A group of students was identified for Mrs. Farina to work with. The lesson plan also provided background for the lesson context and for following up on the lesson. In 1999, according to Carmen Farina, “all lessons were done in the area of literacy and through this process, I was able to keep up with the latest TC (Teachers College, Columbia University) vocabulary and process, so that I was more informed and helpful in moving teachers school-wide with their literacy initiative.” Further details are provided in Appendix 13-1, which outlines the participatory lesson. The appendix appears in the form of a letter to 13 teachers providing directions; the lesson plan provided by one of the teachers; and a follow-up letter to that teacher from Carmen Farina. The letter shows how critical the three components (content, principles of learning, and process) are to instructional leadership.

Other supervisory initiatives at P.S. 6 included “conversations” with all teachers and the development of a portfolio by all tenured teachers. The conversation is an important event at P.S. 6. Teacher and principal sit together for a “do not disturb” meeting to share concerns, exchange views, and provide suggestions. “The conversation covers curriculum issues, the entire class roster and specifies the intervention strategies to be undertaken for the ‘at risk’ student, both academically and emotionally. These conversations are then transformed to letters for file and become a permanent record of that conversation to be referred to at different times of the year.” As a result, ideas expressed, goals set, and agreements reached become a contract between the principal and the teacher for the entire year. What would Carmen Farina’s advice be for principals who really want to be instructional leaders? Here are two

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15 Ibid.
thoughts: "To stimulate change, principals must be aware of what is happening in every classroom every day." And, "to convince teachers of good teaching strategies, I am first and foremost a teacher myself. I go into classrooms and demonstrate the process as well as elicit the products. Change never ends."

BECOMING A TEACHER LEADER

Any strategy that relies on an array of professional development approaches will be placed at risk without the school’s making a strong investment in teacher leadership. Teacher leaders need to know what they are doing, why they are doing it, and where they can go for help. But too often these critical resources are not provided in an adequate way.

Starting a new supervisory program involving teacher leaders has its difficulties. Whether we are talking about adding content coaches, change or capacity coaches, clinical supervision facilitators, peer supervision facilitators, reflective practice coaches, or teaching and learning specialists, the challenges are steep. Teacher leaders and those who support them have to work hard to avoid drifting back to the familiar. Many teachers who become instructionally focused teacher leaders wind up taking on too many administrative responsibilities. In many schools they become junior vice-principals, occupied with important things but not instructionally focused things.

Successfully introducing a new teacher role is hard. One problem is, How do we help both teachers and teacher leaders get ready for a role that will have to be treated and created continually as teachers and teacher leaders learn together and practice together? Whatever the readiness strategy, it will need to give attention to purpose, planning, practice, participation, and more practice. There will be little chance of success without some clarity of purpose, some definition of what the school is trying to accomplish, what purposes should be at the center of the work of teacher leaders, what kinds of planning will be needed to help guide what teacher leaders do and how they do it. As these questions are answered, ways to implement programs and strategies will have to be invented. How can we begin to practice ourselves what we want teachers to practice with students? Are we able and willing to invite teachers to participate with us from the beginning? Will they be able to help us shape our purposes and design our practices?

We noted in Chapter 12 that teacher leaders need training in content. They and the teachers they work with will have to know what is worth changing and what is worth learning. Teacher leaders also need training in process. How do we do the things worth doing? How do we learn to lead? How do we learn to facilitate? How do we model for teachers and how do they model for us so that we can become stronger communities of practice? And finally, teacher leaders need training in culture. How do we help teacher leaders develop the idea frameworks and norms they need to help sustain change over time? While training in content and training in process seem obvious enough, training in culture is too often neglected—a problem we hope to solve in Chapters 15 and 16. Suffice it to say at this point, it is doubtful if teacher leaders will succeed without the encouragement and support of principals and other designated supervisors.

SUMMARY

Leadership density is critical to success. Teacher leadership contributes to the development of leadership density in the school. Leadership density refers to the total number of leadership available from teachers, support staff, and others on behalf of the school and its work. Leadership density is evidenced by the number of different people in a variety of overlapping roles throughout the school.

As Smylie, Conley, and Marks suggest, the same tasks and functions are performed by different roles. Supervisory functions and tasks and teacher-learning functions and tasks are good examples, for they are an important part of many roles, beginning with the teacher in the classroom and stretching all the way through the central office to the superintendent. Responsibility for these tasks and functions is distributed across these roles, and the development of leadership density is the consequence. Leadership density contributes to the development of instructional coherence as purposes and values, goal achievement and commitments, become established deep into the school. Leadership density helps institutionalize these characteristics as part of the school’s culture.

Clinical supervision and coaching are broad strategies for improvement that overlap each other. They take a broad variety of forms, including lesson study, peer supervision, mentoring, looking at student work, and studying the assignments that teachers give. Despite their differences, all these approaches to supervision share certain important features:

- They are focused on teaching and learning that is classroom-based.
- They are expressions of formative supervision.
- They involve the teacher as co-supervisor.
- They avoid scripting by encouraging leaders to create their practice in use.
- They blur the line between teaching and learning to teach better.
- They contribute to the development of a web of communities of practice in the school.

Dennis Sparks of the National Staff Development Council believes that for schools to meet the challenges they face, teachers need to accept collective responsibility for student achievement. Further, their efforts need to be supported by state-of-the-art professional development. This professional development needs to (1) focus on both deepening the content knowledge of teachers and their teaching skills; (2) include opportunities for teachers to engage in reflective practice and to research their practice together; (3) be embedded in the work of the classroom; and (4) be sustained over time and focus on a sense of collegiality that brings together the school as a collaborative culture and its teachers as members of communities of practice.}


Ibid., p. 32.

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Supervision highlights the power of leadership. Supervision is critical to the success of the deep and expansive kind of leadership we advocate. In many ways supervision and leadership are the same thing. After all, as Trice and Beyer point out, in many societies the word culture is not central to their language system and thus must be talked about in alternative ways. For example, the Japanese, Chinese, and Korean languages lack a word that corresponds to our use of the word leader. The closest they come is the word coach. To them, a leader is a coach.44

— Heifetz and Linsky elevate the meaning of leadership so that it plays a key role in the school’s lifeworld—the way schools construct meaning and use this meaning to give purpose. “By making the lives of people around you better, leadership provides meaning in life. It creates purpose. We believe that every human being has something unique to offer, and that a larger sense of purpose comes from using that gift to help your organization, family, or community thrive.”45

Part of purposing is to create meaning, and the creation of meaning strengthens purpose.

The chapters in this section of the book have been concerned with professional development, supervision, and teacher evaluation. The three themes are considered to be at the heart of instructional leadership. The next and final chapter in this section focuses more narrowly on the problems and issues affecting our thinking about and practices of teacher evaluation. To help tie our deliberations together, we provide, in Appendix 13–2, a set of questions for assessing a school’s progress in addressing professional development, supervision, and staff evaluation. These questions were developed by Judith Warren Little, an expert on the relationship between professional development and professional community and their subsequent effects on school improvement.

SOME REFLECTIONS

1. With which supervisory options do you believe teachers will be most comfortable? Why? With which supervisory options do you feel teachers will be least comfortable? Why?

2. Time is always an issue. What ideas do you have about making time for the heavy demands of professional development?

3. Plan three informal learning walks in your school. Use the protocols outlined in Table 13–3. Use the ideas from the discussion of learning walks in Boston. And use the protocols provided that help in the analysis of student work.
