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The Craft of Teacher Supervision

The principal of a successful school is not the instructional leader but the coordinator of teachers as instructional leaders.

Glickman, 1991, p. 7

During the past few years, many school districts have, in varying degrees, decentralized operations to implement forms of school-based shared decision making in their efforts to restructure schools. Hand in hand with such efforts has been a nascent move to empower and professionalize teachers, notably in the areas of instructional supervision and staff development. In addition, "supervision," as the external imposition of bureaucratic, rational authority, has been challenged by many who work to professionalize teaching.

As a result, many of today's successful schools are fast becoming centers of shared inquiry and decision making; teachers are moving toward a collective—not an individual—practice of teaching. They are

collaborating with each other and with supervisors in a "kind of mutual nudging in the profoundly cooperative search for answers" to instructional problems (Dowling & Sheppard, 1976, p. 5). Instructional leadership is being shared with teachers, and in its best forms it is being cast as coaching, reflection, collegial investigation, study teams, explorations into uncertain matters, and problem solving. Alternatives, not directives or criticism, are the focus, and administrators and teachers work together as a "community of learners" engaged in professional and moral (even noble) service to students.

In this age of democratization, when bureaucratic authority is being dismantled, we must examine the notion of collaboration as it relates to the practice of leadership and, in particular, to instructional supervision. *Clearly, there is a compelling need for practicing and aspiring administrators and supervisors to search for ways to encourage collegiality and to significantly improve instructional supervision in today's changing schools.*

Unfortunately, there are no published comprehensive descriptions of how instructional supervision is actually practiced in schools and how teachers are affected by such supervision. What exists are exploratory studies of the supervisory conference (Dungan, 1993; Roberts, 1991a), research on the micropolitics of supervisor-teacher interaction in public schools (e.g., Blase & Blase, 1996; Blase & Blase, 2002), as well as related studies of precepting in medical schools (Blase & Hekelman, 1996; Hekelman & Blase, 1996). Moreover, such studies of supervision have generated only scant data-based descriptions of the critical aspects of the supervisor's role in implementing the supervision process (Holland, 1989; Short, 1995).

Our Study

Which characteristics (e.g., strategies, behaviors, attitudes, and goals) of school principals[1] influence, positively and negatively, teachers' classroom instruction? What is it about supervisor-teacher interaction—with a specific emphasis on the talk that occurs in instructional supervisory conferences—that enables teachers to learn and apply such learnings to classroom instruction? Our study of both positive and negative principal behaviors with regard to instruction—the basis of this book—sheds light on these and other critical questions so far unaddressed by empirical research.

In addition to offering many clues about the various paths to successful instructional supervision, we also *describe the benefits of developing reflective, collaborative, problem-solving contexts for dialogue about instruction.* Along these lines, we examine and describe a specialized form of teacher thinking—reflection—that arises from a teacher's questions about perplexing classroom experiences and that leads to purposeful inquiry and problem resolution (Dewey, 1933). Indeed, we confirm that in effective principal-teacher interaction about instruction, processes such as inquiry, reflection, exploration, and experimentation prevail; teachers build repertoires of flexible alternatives rather than collecting rigid teaching procedures and methods (Schön, 1987).

The study we describe in this book was based on two broad premises: (1) Spoken language has a powerful impact on teachers' instructional behavior and (2) facilitative, supportive actions by principals as instructional leaders have powerful effects on classroom instruction. These premises are derived from Hymes's notion of "conversational competence" (1971), which posits that by studying interaction (with specific emphasis on communicative competence), we can better understand instructional interactions (such as those between principals and teachers) and conference dialogue in varied contexts. Indeed, as the context of supervision shifts from oversight and evaluation to collaboration and reflection (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2001), the elements of such understandings can be applied to discussions among peer teachers, coaches, and mentors.

Our Study Sample

Hymes (1982) contends that the study of activity occurring in various contexts is useful for demystifying and explicating experiences such as instructional supervision and, in particular, the dialogue that occurs between instructional supervisors (e.g., a principal, another administrator, or a lead teacher) and teachers. We agree; our study has yielded new knowledge about the supervisor-teacher relationship that goes well beyond the solid but singular research of three decades ago. We did this by closely examining teachers' reports of instructionally oriented situations as they naturally occurred in a variety of school settings, an approach that has been recommended by researchers and theorists in the field for some time, but seldom used (Blumberg, 1980).

Data for this book were collected from more than 800 teachers working in public elementary, middle, and high schools in the Southeastern, Midwestern, and Northwestern United States. Teachers completed open-ended questionnaires on which they wrote detailed descriptions of principals' positive and negative characteristics and exactly how such characteristics affected them and their performance in the classroom. (See Resource for a more complete discussion.)

Research Question

The primary question driving our study was, What positive and negative characteristics of school principals (e.g., strategies, behaviors, attitudes, goals) and principal-teacher interactions (e.g., informal conversations, discussions centered on instructional matters, discussion regarding requests for assistance or materials, discussions about formal or informal procedures and policies) influence (positively or adversely) teachers' classroom instruction? We wanted to illuminate the following:

- What are teachers' perceptions of principals' characteristics that influence their instructional work?
- What are the effects of these perceptions on teachers' instructional performance?
- Are collaborative characteristics such as mutual respect, tolerance, acceptance, commitment, courage, sharing, and teaming in evidence in interaction between principal-supervisors and teachers?
- Are the essential aspects of supervisory practice that enhance teaching/learning (e.g., reflective conversations, the implementation of improvement plans within individual classrooms) addressed or neglected in formal or informal conferences?
- What must principals learn in order to have instructional and, in particular, communicative competence?
- What are the logic, etiquette, and social and cultural values associated with successful instructional conferences?
- How do our findings compare with the findings of recent studies focusing on topics like teacher control and principal and teacher conceptual levels (Grimmett, 1984)?

In this book we examine the extant research on instructional supervisory behavior and its effects and consider the developmental aspects of instructional supervisory practice. Our findings about principals' speech and behaviors capture the diversity and complexity of supervisory acts—a topic of study commonly ignored by researchers. Most certainly, this book is the first in-depth, empirical report of the actual experiences of teachers in instructionally oriented interactions (cf. Herbert & Tankersley, 1993). As such, it explores in detail teachers' perspectives on principals' instructionally oriented behaviors and interactions and their impacts on a range of dimensions of classroom instruction.

From our study, we conclude, among other things, that even successful instructional leaders, that is, those who primarily had positive goals and attitudes and used positive strategies, often met with only mixed success in their attempts to initiate and sustain a robust reflective orientation in teachers regarding both their day-to-day teaching and professional growth. Others have suggested that this is partly because principals often lack requisite communication skills (Pugach & Johnson, 1990) and the knowledge essential for planning, change, and instructional improvement (e.g., facilitation, direct observation, conferring, staff development, modeling, and teaching/learning). This volume illuminates some of these relevant issues.

The Instructional Supervision Legacy: From Control to Collaboration

In 1993, Cogan, Anderson, and Krajewski classified supervision approaches that have appeared in the professional literature between 1850 and 1990:

1. Scientific management
2. Democratic interaction approach
3. Cooperative supervision
4. Supervision as curriculum development
5. Clinical supervision
6. Group dynamics and peer emphasis
7. Coaching and instructional supervision

Krajewski (1996) describes contemporary approaches as *almost collaborative;* almost—not truly—collaborative, the author suggests,

because power differentials still exist between principals and teachers, given the principals' evaluation responsibilities (power to judge) and change-agent role. Krajewski predicts that by the year 2015 supervision will consist of *structured options* (i.e., based on some standards and expectations, but also based on teachers' individual needs and goals, much like a student's Individualized Education Plan, or IEP).

However, the array of approaches to supervision noted above indicates that substantial disagreement about its essential nature has existed for more than 140 years. The *practice* of supervision is another matter. Despite the fact that many approaches to supervision are collaborative in nature, the practice of supervision has often been one of inspection, oversight, and judgment. Glanz (1995) concluded that today's supervision is nothing better than a "bureaucratic legacy of fault finding, inspectional supervision" and used terms like *snooper-vision, protective political behavior,* and *a private cold war* (p. 107) to characterize the field. Sergiovanni (1992) referred to supervision as a "nonevent—a ritual they [supervisors and teachers] participate in according to well-established scripts without much consequence" (p. 203). More recently, Gordon (1997) stated, "In the present, control supervision [not collegiality and empowerment] still dominates professional practice" (p. 117).

We believe that although the idea of collegial supervision, in various forms, has existed for most of this century, advanced forms of collegiality are rarely found in practice. Indeed, democratic, cooperative, clinical, human resource–based, developmental, and transformational supervision, among others, have been widely advocated (Gordon, 1997) based on the principles of equality (not hierarchy), reflection, and growth (not compliance). For instance, Pajak (1993) noted that the goal (and, at times, the *emerging* practice) of supervision focuses on "helping teachers discover and construct professional knowledge and skills," in contrast with the established practice of "reinforcing specific prescribed teacher behavior and skills" (p. 318). He also noted that in much contemporary thinking, learning is viewed as contextual and complex, teaching is based on reflective judgment, and schools are seen as democratic teaching and learning communities.

Likewise, Schön's (1988) definition of instructional supervision emphasizes collegial supervision and specifically focuses on support, guidance, and encouragement of *reflective teaching;*

and Glickman (1992) described ideal supervision as a *collaborative* endeavor enacted in a supportive environment that leads to an all-school action plan. To promote collegial forms of supervision, McBride and Skau (1995) have proposed that practitioners develop a *supervisory platform*—a combination of supervisory beliefs and educational philosophy—that includes building *trust, empowering* teachers, and fostering *reflection.* They note, "The process of reflection, undertaken in an environment based on trust and seeking the empowerment of participants, constitutes a powerful potential for improved [supervisory and teaching] practice" (p. 277).

Relatedly, Reitzug and Cross (1993) have discussed an *inquiry-oriented* practice of supervision (i.e., "critical collaboration") that encourages teacher voice and acknowledges the contextuality and complexity of teaching. Here, the principal's role is one of facilitating a teacher's thinking about practice. More broadly, Smyth (1997) has suggested that supervision advance a discursive, collaborative, and critical study of the *micropolitics of the classroom* interaction; relinquish its technocratic surveillance of teachers; and work toward a just and democratic world. He recommends giving teachers more, rather than less, control over their teaching.

Research on Instructional Supervision

"A Review of Studies in the First 10 Volumes of the *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision*" (Short, 1995) indicated that only 82 articles in the area of supervision had been published. These articles addressed conceptions of supervision, supervision theory, legal issues in supervision, the work of supervisors in various roles, evaluation of supervisory practices, the supervisory conference, Schön's reflective practice, reflective practice and supervision, supervisory history, supervision research (inquiry approaches), and supervision research (areas requiring inquiry) (p. 88). In spite of the periodical's considerable contribution to the field, Short concludes that the *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision*—the primary source of published scholarly work in supervision in North America—has featured a dearth of research on supervision. Several authors have made the case for more research into the effects of supervision on teacher behavior, how

supervision relates to teaching, supervisor characteristics, and conditions necessary for effective supervision.

Administration and supervision textbooks have been no more successful than the *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision* with regard to the quality and quantity of materials and research that they include. In fact, Glanz (1995) found that few administration textbooks address the area of supervision at all. One exception is Sergiovanni and Starratt's (1993) text, wherein supervision is seen as a moral enterprise in which teachers work together as colleagues—using peer supervision, mentoring, and action research—to better understand practice.

By examining writings on both *supervision* (a subset of instructional leadership) and *instructional leadership*, we will see the *connections* between the actions a principal takes and the professional growth of teachers, teacher commitment, involvement, and innovativeness, on one hand, and increases in student learning, on the other hand. Observe below, for example, that the writers we cite consistently emphasize teachers' *professional growth* in their descriptions of supervision.

Regarding Supervision

Glickman (1985) defined the five tasks of supervision that have direct impact on instructional improvement as direct assistance, group development, staff development, curriculum development, and action research. The integration of these tasks, Glickman says, unites teachers' needs with the school's goals.

In research with a team of doctoral students at the University of Georgia, Pajak (1989) defined supervision in practice as follows (listed in order of importance as ranked by practitioners):

1. Communication
2. Staff development (professional growth)
3. Instructional program (improvement)
4. Planning and change (collaborative work)
5. Motivating and organizing (shared vision)
6. Observation and conferencing
7. Curriculum

8. Problem solving and decision making
9. Service to teachers (support for teaching and learning)
10. Personal development (reflection on beliefs, abilities, actions)
11. Community relations
12. Research and program evaluation (assessing outcomes and encouraging experimentation; Pajak, 1989, p. 73)

Taken together, Glickman and Pajak's descriptions of supervision succinctly conceptualize and illuminate the responsibilities and activities of what we broadly refer to as instructional leadership.

Regarding Instructional Leadership

Although school principals have long believed that instructional leadership (often conceived of as a blend of supervision, staff development, and curriculum development) facilitates school improvement (Smith & Andrews, 1989), until recently little knowledge of what behaviors comprise *good* instructional leadership has been available in the literature. Sheppard (1996) synthesized the research on instructional leadership behaviors, especially those linked to student achievement outcomes and, in contrast to most research, used a broad perspective of instructional leadership defined as interactions between leaders and followers wherein *the followers' beliefs and perceptions are viewed as important* (Hallinger & Murphy, 1987). Sheppard's findings contradict those of others who found that routine instructional leadership behaviors often negatively affect teachers, increase teacher docility, and reduce teacher innovation and creativity. Sheppard confirmed a *positive* and strong relationship between effective instructional leadership behaviors exhibited by principals and *teacher commitment, professional involvement, and innovativeness*. Principal behaviors connected to teachers' professional growth and performance were as follows:

- Framing school goals[+]
- Communicating school goals
- Supervising and evaluating instruction
- Coordinating the curriculum

- Monitoring student progress
- Protecting instructional time
- Maintaining high visibility*
- Providing incentives for teachers
- Promoting professional development+*
- Providing incentives for learning

Key: * = Most influential behaviors, elementary school; + = most influential behaviors, high school (Sheppard, 1996, pp. 327, 339)

Specifically, Sheppard learned that *promoting teachers' professional development* was the most influential instructional leadership behavior at both the elementary and high school levels and that only three to five principal behaviors accounted for most of the influence on teachers' commitment, involvement, and innovativeness. (This suggests that principals who emphasize even a small number of critical instructional leadership behaviors can expect good results with teachers.) As might be expected, Sheppard explained that a school's unique context inevitably influences the effectiveness of the model of instructional leadership employed.

Other research highlights the importance of principals' instructional leadership to teachers' responses. For example, Leithwood (1994) linked principals' transformational instructional leadership to improvement in teachers' classroom behaviors, attitudes, and effectiveness. Unfortunately though, even transformational principals and teachers have great difficulty achieving true vision sharing and the deep commitment to improvement necessary to enhance student learning (Sergiovanni, 1995). Blase (1993) wrote, "The critical process of dynamic, open, and democratic interaction between leaders and others . . . is noticeably absent, and the decisional authority and responsibility of others are limited significantly" (p. 159). Indeed, recent research exposes the lack of conceptual work that relates leadership to student achievement in preparation programs (Gonzalez, Glasman, & Glasman, 2002).

Thus, although there exists an emerging knowledge base about the behaviors and potential of instructional leadership, the extant literature provides few clues on how principals and teachers together can achieve shared vision and commitment—a foundation necessary for school improvement.

Teacher Empowerment Related to Supervision and Instructional Leadership

Some researchers have studied the relationship between instructional leadership and teacher empowerment. To illustrate, from an intensive case study of instructional leadership, Reitzug (1994) constructed a taxonomy of empowering principal behavior that includes the following:

- **Support:** Creating a supportive environment for critique of instruction by educators
- **Facilitation:** Stimulating critique of instruction by educators
- **Possibility:** Making it possible to give educators voice by publishing and acting on results of critique

Reitzug's study was based on Prawat's (1991) framework for epistemological and political empowerment, which consists of two categories—"conversations with self" and "conversations with settings" (p. 738)—wherein teachers develop inquiry skills, critical reflection skills, and even sociopolitical insights through internal dialogue. Prawat argued that nurturing alternative modes of professional interaction is *key* to empowerment and instructional improvement. Reitzug demonstrated this; he found that principal behavior consisting of providing staff development, modeling inquiry, asking questions, encouraging risk taking, requiring justification of practices, and critique-by-wandering-around led to greater levels of teacher empowerment in the classroom. These *instructional leadership* behaviors are similar to those we found in research focusing on the practices of empowering instructional principals (Blase & Blase, 1997, 2001; Blase, Blase, Anderson, & Dungan, 1995; Blase & Blase, 1997).

School Reform Related to Instructional Supervision and Leadership

In addition to establishing clear connections between instructional leadership and teacher performance, research has also linked instructional leadership to efforts to improve schools. In a recent report to the educational community, Clark and Clark (1996) indicated that three instructional leadership processes undergirded six contemporary reform initiatives, including Foxfire, Accelerated Schools, The League of Professional Schools, Impact II, The

Coalition of Essential Schools, and the Center for Educational Renewal. These leadership processes are (1) defining and sustaining educational purpose, (2) developing and nurturing community, and (3) fostering personal and organizational growth (Murphy, 1995, p. 2). Clark and Clark (1996) also stated that leadership processes, such as those listed below, emphasized the centrality of instruction and learning, as well as professional development:

- A strong sense of mission
- Shared vision
- Webs of communication
- Breakdown of hierarchies
- Shared governance
- Personal development
- Lifelong learning
- Learning communities

Current Issues in the Field

Glanz and Neville (1997) brought together writers in the field of supervision to debate the following controversial critical issues:

- Abolishing supervision
- Putting the S (supervision) back in ASCD (the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development)
- The benefits of supervision to teachers
- Reconciling the estrangement between curriculum and supervision
- Coaching
- The name *supervision* itself
- Collegiality between supervisors and teachers
- The relationship between staff development and supervision
- National standards for preparation of supervisors
- The influence of business management practices
- The viability of clinical supervision
- How technology influences supervision

In their book, Glanz and Neville describe the lively debate that occurred; this description is followed by perspective papers dealing

with moving to a *community* theory of supervision, supervision as *more than surveillance*, new supervisory *roles* in an age of complexity, the effects of *law* on supervision, and the *moral imperative* in advocating for *diversity*.

Glanz and Neville (1997) present dramatic evidence showing that although the field of supervision is in a state of flux, most scholars agree that (1) schools should be learning environments for all students and educators, and (2) the facilitation of learning and growth should be the *number one responsibility* of an educational leader.

Our book is about successful principal leadership and how it supports teacher and student learning. This has been called supervision, instructional or educational leadership, or administration. (See Figure 1.1 for further discussion of the designation.) The book is also about what successful principals do to facilitate empowerment and reform in schools. In the following chapters we present the findings from our study and discuss them in the context of relevant theory and research. In Chapters 2, 3, and 4, principal characteristics and their impacts on teachers in the areas of conferencing, staff development, and reflection are examined (i.e., Talking, Growing, and Reflecting—the TiGeR model; see Figure 1.2 for an overview of these three themes of instructional leadership, as we conceive it). In Part II we discuss additional findings related to principals' use of visibility, praise, and autonomy—juxtaposed with the negative behaviors of abandonment, criticism, and control. (See Figure 1.3 for an overview of these dichotomous behaviors and their effects on teachers.) In the eighth chapter, we offer our view, based on all we have learned, of the status and possible future of instructional leadership per se. Finally, in Chapter 9 we present a model of instructional leadership that integrates findings from our study, research findings about professional learning communities, and theoretical work on constructivist leading and learning. We propose this as a blueprint for academic leadership, an approach in which all educators are learners and leaders.

Note

1. Although in many cases instructional supervisors are, in fact, school principals, they may also be lead teachers, department chairpersons, curriculum directors, and staff developers.

Figure 1.1 Supervision: Time for a Name Change?

Words are powerful, and the term *supervision* could probably stand a change. But it is about much more than the name! We've all had this conversation before. Supervision smacks of something from the Dark Ages, a barbaric act of policing those who are only lately being acknowledged as professionals. And although we all recognize the need for "quality control" and even aggressive action on the part of a supervisor when incompetence in teaching our children is concerned, we also know that the hue and cry for the professionalization of teaching rings true. Even so, we cannot pretend that supervisors, given their institutionally vested authority to assess, are perceived as the equals of teachers, although we obviously need to redress the balance-of-power issue in supervision-teacher relationships. In fact, we may not yet understand all the complexities and exigencies of this supervision issue, but one thing is certain: The current state of affairs is like Dowling and Sheppard's (1976, p. 4) "low-grade fever," and we must minimize the tension and maximize the benefits of supervision.

So how do we do this? It is a thorny question. Although many of us consistently argue that talented, sincere supervisors who are also responsible for teacher evaluation can engage teachers in meaningful discussions about teaching and learning—and should do this in a nonthreatening way—we need to capture alternative ways to help teachers reflect critically on their actions, clarify their thinking, make explicit their theories-in-action, engage in critical analysis of self, and genuinely share.

Some supervisors are already doing this. Simple, traditional supervision is giving way to a new order, one that implies much more than just a new name (facilitation? collegial or peer observation? inclusive supervision?). Supervision as snoopervision or as rigid demands for conformity is the antithesis of shared inquiry and decision making. Today's supervision is position-free; it is supervision wherein leaders, teachers, and learners are all one and in which the underlying spirit is one of expansion of skills and spirit.

It seems we could at least give this new process a different, and more fitting, name. May I suggest that it is about collaboration, being one among equals, and having power with—not over—others? Perhaps Goldsberry's (1980) term, *colleague consultation,* comes close; in any event, Glickman (1992) said it well:

> If "instructional leadership" were substituted [for supervision] . . . little meaning would be lost and much might be gained. To be blunt: as a field, we may no longer need the old words and connotations. Instead, we might be seeing every talented educator (regardless of role) as an instructional leader and supervisor of instruction. If so, indeed, the old order will have crumbled. (p. 3)

At the same time, Glanz (1997a) asserts that teachers certainly *want* informed, practical supervision. He suggests that the field need not be "politically correct by eschewing the [supervision] label . . . [because] working face-to-face with classroom teachers to refine teaching practice . . . is still supervision to me" (p. 129).

An earlier version of this discussion appeared in J. R. Blase (1995).

Figure 1.2 Overview of Part I, Chapters 2, 3, 4: Three Themes of Instructional Leadership: Building a Culture of Collaboration, Equality, and Lifelong Study of Teaching and Learning Through Talk, Growth, and Reflection (the TiGeR Model)

Chapter 2	*Talk With Teachers* • Build trust • Develop the group • Foster collaboration and collegiality • Support peer coaching • Observe in classrooms • Confer with teachers about teaching and learning • Empower teachers • Maintain visibility
Chapter 3	*Promote Teachers' Professional Growth* • Study literature and proven programs • Support practice of new skills, risk taking, innovation, and creativity • Provide effective staff development programs • Apply principles of adult growth and development • Praise, support, and facilitate teachers' work • Provide resources and time • Give feedback and suggestions
Chapter 4	*Foster Teacher Reflection* • Develop teachers' reflection skills in order to construct professional knowledge and develop sociopolitical insights • Model and develop teachers' critical study (action research) skills • Become inquiry oriented • Use data to question, evaluate, and critique teaching and learning • Extend autonomy to teachers

Figure 1.3 Overview of Part II, Chapters 5, 6, 7: How Supervisors' Behaviors—Positive and Negative—Affect Teachers

Chapter 5	*Being Visible* results in: • High morale and motivation • Enhanced self-esteem • Increased sense of security • Reflection and reflectively oriented behavior	**Vs.**	*Interrupting and Abandoning* results in: • Anger • Low motivation • Psychic pain • Feelings of no support • Loss of respect for principal • Poor performance
Chapter 6	*Praising* results in: • High motivation • Feeling rewarded, cared about • Enhanced self-esteem and confidence • Willingness to comply • Reflection and reflectively oriented behavior	**Vs.**	*Criticizing* results in: • Anger • Low motivation • Damaged self-esteem • Fear • Confusion • Loss of respect and trust for principal • Appearing to comply; ignoring, avoiding principal • Resistance and rebellion • Cautiousness
Chapter 7	*Extending Autonomy* results in: • High motivation • Enhanced self-esteem and confidence • Increased sense of security and professional discretion • Reflection and reflectively oriented behavior	**Vs.**	*Maintaining Control* results in: • Limited involvement in decision making (false image of governance) • Sense of being manipulated • Feeling abused