Journal of Curriculum and Supervision
Spring 2000, Vol. 15, No. 3, 212–235

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO SUPERVISION: CASES FROM THE FIELD

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ABSTRACT: This article examines five alternative approaches to supervision that have their basis not only in theory, but in practice: peer coaching, portfolios for differentiated supervision, mentoring, peer assessment, and action research. The authors have worked closely with several schools in New York and New Jersey to help develop or examine their alternative supervisory programs. The article reviews these approaches through the presentation of five actual situations that highlight the successful implementation of these alternative strategies to supervision. Further, it examines the role of leadership in the introduction and implementation of these models. The authors used a modified form of grounded theory to analyze the data. The focus was on the constant comparison of the types of interactions involved in each approach and the role of the leader in the development and implementation of the programs. The major finding that emerged was that certain leadership and implementation practices promoted the successful implementation of alternative approaches to supervision.

Supervision is in crisis. Researchers have noted that a wide range of perplexing and challenging problems have beset educational supervision as a professional practice and field of study: conflicting definitions, ambiguities related to role and function, identity crises, low levels of teacher acceptance, conflicting theories, and a sense of vulnerability to a wide range of sociopolitical factors, among others.[1] At the cusp of the new millennium, supervision lacks focus, direction, and balance.[2]

Although these problems are not new and supervision scholars and practitioners have attested to them, the situation is reaching crisis proportions at the start of the 21st century. However, the authors disagree with Starratt, Glickman, Sergiovanni, and Gordon, who have

[1]See, for example, Jeffrey Glanz, "Exploring Supervision History: An Invitation and Agenda," *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision* 10 (Winter 1995): 95–113.

[2]Ibid.

argued for the dissolution of supervision.[3] The authors believe that social, political, and technological changes necessitate concomitant reforms in the way supervision is conceived and practiced.[4] They agree with Behar-Horenstein and Ornstein, who have stated:

> Changes at sociopolitical levels suggest that principals for the 21st century will need to be able to cope with change processes and challenges associated with educating diverse student populations and recognize the need for a broadened participation in the leadership process. Rather than operating in isolation with little input from their faculty, principals must recognize the need for the help and cooperation of each other as well as "outside" stakeholders.[5]

Supervisory leadership for the 21st century requires enhanced collaborative relationships, participatory decision making, reflective listening and practice, and teacher self-direction—all emanating from the constructivist paradigm.[6] Clearly, outdated and mechanistic conceptions of supervision that rely on inspectoral practices and, as Poole called it, "super"vision, are no longer valid, if they ever were.[7]

The need for the creation and implementation of alternative approaches is urgent in order to implement the above-mentioned practices and for supervision as a strategy for improvement of instruction to remain a viable goal. The choice of the word *alternative* approaches rather than *differentiated* supervision[8] is based on the belief that alternative approaches to the improvement of instruction can

[3]Robert J. Starratt, "After Supervision," *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision* 8 (Fall 1992): 77–86; Carl D. Glickman, "Introduction: Postmodernism and Supervision," in *Supervision in Transition,* ed. Carl D. Glickman (Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 1992), pp. 1–3; Thomas J. Sergiovanni, "Moral Authority and the Regeneration of Supervision," in *Supervision in Transition,* ed. Carl D. Glickman (Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 1992), pp. 203–214; Stephen P. Gordon, "Paradigms, Transitions, and the New Supervision," *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision* 8 (1992): 62–76.

[4]Edward Pajak, "Change and Continuity in Supervision and Leadership," in *Challenges and Achievements of American Education,* ed. G. Cawelti (Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 1993), pp. 158–186.

[5]Linda Behar-Horenstein and Alan C. Ornstein, "Curriculum, Instruction, and Supervision: Essential Leadership Roles for Principals," *Focus on Education* 40 (1997): 17.

[6]Karen Osterman, "Foreword," in Susan Sullivan and Jeffrey Glanz, *Supervision That Improves Teaching: Strategies and Techniques* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 1999); Daisy Arredondo, "Implications of Constructivist Theory on Supervisory Practices" (presentation before the Instructional Supervision Network, San Francisco, 1999).

[7]Wendy Poole, "Removing the 'Super' from Supervision," *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision* 9 (Spring 1994): 284–309.

[8]Alan A. Glatthorn, *Differentiated Supervision* (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1984).

include a wide range of options, from forms of clinical and developmental supervision that can be evaluative, to nonevaluative mentoring and peer coaching. In other words, the authors' conception of supervision is broad and inclusive; it offers practitioners a range of alternatives from traditional to nontraditional and from evaluative to nonevaluative. Indeed, a number of alternative approaches to supervision have been advocated over the years. The authors assumed that actual practice, as is often the case, would not reflect proposed theory.[9] Their assumptions were erroneous. In fact, individual schools and some school districts are realizing the pressing need to create innovative ways by which to support classroom teachers effectively and are implementing alternative approaches to supervision.

This article presents five alternative approaches to supervision that have their basis not only in theory, but in practice: mentoring, peer coaching, using portfolios for differentiated supervision, peer assessment, and action research. The authors have worked closely with schools to help develop or examine their alternative supervisory programs. In this article, these approaches are reviewed through the presentation of five actual situations that highlight the successful implementation of these alternative strategies to supervision. Following this examination, these supervisory approaches and practices are discussed in order to ascertain if they can enable supervision of classroom instruction to move into the new century. The role of leadership in the introduction and implementation of these models is an additional focus.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND METHODOLOGY

Descriptions of the five cases presented here are primarily based on interviews with the school leaders involved in each program. Triangulation, a deliberate use of multiple data collection methods that allows each method to reveal different perspectives of reality,[10] served to clarify and enrich information the leaders offered and to provide multiple perceptions of the processes.

The authors individually interviewed several principals and their assistants at their schools. The authors' professional relationships with the schools permitted additional interviews and discussions with staff members, numerous visits to the sites, and the collection of written information used in the programs and written

[9]Donald Schön, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1987).

[10]N. K. Denzen, *Sociological Methods: A Sourcebook* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978), p. 241.

about them. One of the authors served as a consultant in a site's peer coaching project, a role that led to involvement as a participant observer in the study.

In examining the data, the authors found that certain patterns kept appearing. Therefore, they employed a modified form of grounded theory procedures and techniques to analyze the data.[11] This analysis focused on the constant comparison of the types of interactions involved in each approach and the role of the leader in the development and implementation of the programs. This comparative analysis of leadership and implementation strategies permitted the formulation of an initial premise: that certain leadership and implementation practices promoted the successful implementation of alternative approaches to supervision.

MENTORING

The mentor-mentee relationship is, indeed, a transformative one that can forever change the course of one's life.[12]

Case #1

Mari Celi Sanchez[13] is an experienced and dedicated teacher in the Northern Valley Regional High School District in New Jersey. Over the course of her 18 years at the high school, she has received two "Outstanding Teacher of the Year" awards. After consulting with her assistant principal, Jim McDonnell, Mari Celi has decided to mentor Eric Jones, a nontenured, second-year teacher. Professional development for tenured teachers at Northern Valley Regional High is ongoing, comprehensive, and allows individuals to select among various supervisory options. In this case, Mari Celi has chosen mentoring, and she receives released time to work with Eric. Although nontenured teachers at the school must undergo mentorship, Eric had a choice whether or not to accept Mari Celi as his mentor. Had he declined, another mentor would have been offered to him.

Mari Celi meets with Eric to discuss their plans. She explains to him that she has no evaluative authority and will keep their conver-

[11]A. Strauss and J. Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1990).

[12]Robert Cienkus, Jennifer Grant Haworth, and Jack Kavanagh, "Editors' Introduction," *Peabody Journal of Education* 71, 1 (1996): 1–2.

[13]Although the supervisory approach is accurately described within each school, some of the names of the participants have been altered to ensure anonymity of those individuals who requested it.

sations confidential. Although Eric will have to undergo at least three formal observations over the course of the semester, Mari Celi will not participate in any way in the evaluation process. "My job," she explains to Eric, "is to work with you as much as you'd like on areas you feel may need improvement." Eric and Mari Celi develop a close professional relationship over the course of the next several months. He realizes that she, in fact, does not have any evaluative input and his confidence in her grows daily.[14] Eric tells her, "I feel I can really open up to you. More so than to a supervisor who I know will eventually evaluate me."

Eric Jones's skills have improved dramatically. "You know," says Mari Celi, "you are really a natural teacher. The kids love you, and your enthusiasm is infectious." Certainly Eric's evaluation reports in the year and a half he has been at the school have been exceptional. Eric attributes much of his success to the "expert and friendly assistance" he has received from Mari Celi.

While working on their second-semester instructional plans, Mari Celi shares some research she has recently completed as part of her doctoral work. The topic of the research is gender bias in the classroom.

"Gender bias is quite common in many classrooms, you know," explains Mari Celi.

"Oh, I believe that's overstated," Eric replies. "I treat everyone equally in my class."

"Okay," says Mari Celi. "Let's see. I'll observe you . . ."

They discuss plans for an upcoming lesson during which Mari Celi will observe as both an independent observer and a participant observer using a qualitative research approach.[15] Mari Celi records notes anecdotally during one segment of the lesson. After the class, Mari Celi shares her observations with Eric. Eric, not defensive at all, is surprised.

"Really? That's interesting. What do you think it means?"

"Well, . . ." responds Mari Celi.

Mari Celi and Eric continue to explore various possibilities in an atmosphere of trust, candor, and mutual respect.

[14]In the view of Blumberg and Jonas, Mari Celi has been given "access" into Eric's classroom. When access has been given, supervision is more successful. See A. Blumberg and R. S. Jonas, "Permitting Access: The Teacher's Control Over Supervision," *Educational Leadership* 44 (November 1987): 58–62. See also M. McBride and K. G. Skau, "Trust, Empowerment, and Reflection: Essentials of Supervision," *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision* 10 (Spring 1995): 262–277.

[15]Jeffrey Glanz, *Action Research: An Educational Leader's Guide to School Improvement* (Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers, 1998).

A Definition[16] *and Strategies*

Mentoring is a process that facilitates instructional improvement wherein an experienced educator agrees to provide assistance, support, and recommendations to another staff member or faculty members. The mentor can work with a novice or less experienced teacher collaboratively, nonjudgmentally studying and deliberating on ways instruction in the classroom may be improved, or the mentor can share expertise in a specific area with other educators. Mentors are not judges or critics, but facilitators of instructional improvement. All interactions and recommendations between the mentor and faculty members are confidential.

In many schools, like Northern Valley Regional High School, mentoring programs have been developed in which an experienced teacher is assigned or volunteers to works with a novice teacher for the purpose of "providing individualized, ongoing professional support."[17] In some parts of the United States, such as Toledo, Ohio, mentoring is actually negotiated into the union contract as an alternative supervisory approach. Although some in the field equate mentoring with supervision,[18] the authors assert that mentoring is an alternative form of supervision.

Although the mentor-protégé relationship is often between teachers at different levels of expertise, the strategies involve collaboration to reach the long-term goal of the development of self-directed, autonomous professionals. Reflective listening and promotion of reflective practice are integral parts of this evolutionary process. Thus, mentoring is one of the roads to be traveled on the way to autonomous professionalism. In the relationship between Eric and Mari Celi, collaboration and reflective practice were components of a supervisory practice that was not between equals. The nonevaluative, trusting relationship is the first rung on the ladder. It is a natural introduction to collaboration but is more directive than the other approaches the authors studied and saw in practice.

At Northern Valley Regional High School, the principal, Bert Ammerman, has initiated a range of alternative practices.[19] Although

[16]Definitions provided in this article have been adapted to fit the situation presented. They are not intended to be comprehensive or necessarily representative of similar practices in other school settings.

[17]Carl D. Glickman, Stephen P. Gordon, and J. M. Ross-Gordon, *Supervision of Instruction: A Developmental Approach* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1998), p. 353.

[18]Alan J. Reiman and Lois Thies-Sprinthall, *Mentoring and Supervision for Teacher Development* (New York: Longman, 1998).

[19]See discussion at the end of Case #5 for more discussion on the role of effective leadership at this school.

mentorship programs exist at almost all New Jersey schools because of state certification requirements, a number of options are available at Northern Valley Regional High School. Any experienced educator may volunteer to be a support mentor. However, as stated earlier, mentorship is one option a tenured teacher may select in terms of ongoing professional development. The essential idea, to paraphrase Vice Principal McDonnell, is that a mentor who works with a neophyte will also learn from the experience. A supervisor or administrator, knowing of a faculty member's expertise, may request that an individual serve in this capacity. The principal selects the mentees (protégés).

Once a mentor and protégé have been identified, meetings take place between the two individuals, and they collaboratively develop a plan of action. The supervisor approves the plan. The mentor implements the plan and reports on plan activities to the supervisor every other week.

Although this model at Northern Valley High School District is highly prescriptive, mentorship has proven successful as an alternative means of supervision. Assessments, including individual and group focus interviews, indicate a very favorable response to mentorship. In the words of one nontenured teacher:

> I appreciate the nonevaluative relationship I have with my mentor. I feel confident in her, and I am happy that there is someone with whom I can speak about important and sensitive instructional matters.

Mentors likewise affirm the benefits of mentorship. Mari Celi, for instance, commented that she preferred mentoring to having a supervisor complete a traditional class observation with her:

> Traditional observations are useless, especially for experienced teachers like myself. This way [mentorship] I can share my expertise with someone else and learn in the process. . . . I feel great that this school allows me this alternative approach to traditional supervision.

The authors found, indeed, that mentorship empowered these experienced educators. One protégé stated, "I feel that this school utilizes its experienced faculty to the fullest. We feel valued."

PEER COACHING

When two teachers observe each other, the one teaching is the "coach" and the one observing is the "coached."[20]

[20]B. Showers and B. Joyce, "The Evolution of Peer Coaching," *Educational Leadership* 53 (March 1996): 12–16.

Case #2

The International Institute is one of four minischools, or institutes, that make up Ditmas Middle School, a large New York City middle school. It was previously one of the lowest-performing middle schools in the district. Consequently, the district superintendent appointed Nancy Brogan, an assertive, go-getter principal, to improve both student achievement and school image. Open to innovation and aggressive in pursuing funds, she created four theme institutes for the 1,200-plus student body. The International Institute is composed primarily of Haitian, Russian, Spanish, Chinese, Bengali, and Urdu students who are bilingual. Because of the bilingual focus, the faculty of the International Institute mirrors the diversity of the student body.

Through an outreach effort, Principal Brogan secured the assistance of one of the authors of this article. The initial project was to help organize the governance committee of the institute. This task completed, conversations veered more toward curriculum and teaching issues. All of the teachers on the steering committee were committed, enthusiastic, effective, and creative, and, along with the institute director, Lynn Pagano, were open to anything that would promote student achievement. Because peer coaching was an approved choice in the new union contract's weekly period for professional development for each teacher, the steering committee decided to pursue the possibility of using this faculty period to develop and implement the skills and practices of peer coaching. The prospective participants and the consultant then made a site visit to a school that already had developed a very sophisticated system of peer assessment. The teachers returned excited and ready to take on the challenge.

The next decision was to determine the focus of the peer coaching. Two of the teachers had been trained during the summer in the new standards that the city and state had begun to require, and one had been involved in developing the city's Spanish curriculum and its adaptation for the city standards. The enthusiasm of these teachers about their recent work and the need for implementation triggered a conversation about two possible coaching models: (1) peer observations based on the implementation of the curriculum for the new standards and (2) coaching in which teachers would discuss classroom challenges or interests and conduct interclass visitations.

Mannor Wong, the Chinese bilingual teacher, commented: "Since I'm not tenured yet, I'd prefer honing my general instructional techniques." Farouki Naserin, the Urdu bilingual teacher, made the following request to Madeline Castañeda, the Spanish bilingual teacher: "Since you've already developed curriculum in Spanish for the new

standards, could I see how you're going to implement it in the classroom? Then maybe you could observe me as I try to use the adapted curriculum in my Urdu classes?"

The plan that emerged called for the participants to learn and practice interpersonal, observation, and feedback skills through observations of videotaped classroom instruction and role-plays of the interpersonal and feedback approaches. Then they would be prepared to help each other more effectively and become turnkey trainers for future coaching groups. A date for the first orientation and training meeting was set.

What happened next might be characterized with the phrase, "The best laid plans of mice and teachers . . ." The group began meeting in the director's office during the teachers' 45-minute lunch hour. Constant interruptions occurred, time was lost getting lunch, and teachers arrived late or not at all. Among those who didn't attend the initial meetings was Mannor, the Chinese bilingual teacher, who had not been involved in the early meetings and may have had some initial apprehensions. The group went back to the drawing board in search of a longer block of time at a different point in the day. Luckily, this particular group was involved in implementing a grant with some flexible funding. They eventually decided to use some of the grant money to meet after school for workshops on peer coaching.

Another setback occurred before launching the after-school workshops. Through her ongoing outreach efforts, Principal Brogan had procured additional professional development assistance as a means to increase achievement scores. One strategy included daily, brief observations in all classrooms by the directors of the four institutes, with completion of checklists for each teacher. Each faculty member was to follow certain procedures that the directors would verify in their visits. The consultant met with the principal and the director to explain that this method was at odds with the peer coaching goals. They agreed that the teachers involved in the project would be exempt from this general requirement.

Uninterrupted quality time, snacks, and compensation were a few of the elements that fostered the group's time on task. They spent the following weeks practicing their interpersonal and feedback skills and using various techniques to observe videos of teachers and students. As they simulated and role-played these skills in the workshops, they also began to practice observing colleagues' classes. They finally went through the clinical observation cycle with each other and other volunteers from their minischool.

Once the participants were comfortable with their observation and feedback skills, they established individual or paired plans for

their dialogues around curriculum implementation. Brief meetings would take place every two weeks to share experiences, provide feedback on what was and was not working, troubleshoot, and modify plans as needed. The participants were so enthusiastic that they decided to involve more volunteers the following fall and share their experience with another institute.

A Definition and Strategies

Peer coaching is an umbrella term for the many different configurations of teachers-helping-teachers that have emerged primarily since the 1980s. Some of the other terms often used interchangeably with *peer coaching* include *peer assistance, collegial coaching, technical coaching, cognitive coaching, challenge coaching,* and *peer supervision.* Most of these models pertain to variations of peer-to-peer assistance of equals and do not involve evaluation. Mentoring programs that consist of master teachers helping less experienced or less well trained colleagues are not included in the authors' categorization. In this case, *peer coaching* is defined as teachers helping teachers reflect on and improve teaching practices and/or implement particular teaching skills needed to implement knowledge gained through faculty or curriculum development. Showers and Joyce describe the process as two or more teachers meeting regularly for problem solving using planning, observation, feedback, and creative thinking for the development of a specific skill.[21]

Through the ongoing discussion of teaching and learning, curriculum development and implementation, peer coaching can become the heart of professional development. It encompasses all of the skills the authors deem essential for supervisory leadership in the 21st century: collaborative relationships, participatory decision making, reflective listening and practice, and teacher self-direction—with the clearly expressed goal of developing autonomous professionals.

Very important were the relationships among the leadership of the school, the director of the institute, the coordinator of the grant, and the rest of the teaching faculty at Ditmas Middle School. The principal and the director (an assistant principal) on occasion can be directive in their faculty/staff interactions. However, when they have confidence in faculty members, they let them fly. Thus, the principal empowers the director whenever feasible, and the director empowers faculty in whom she has confidence. The director of the grant therefore was able freely and independently to collaborate with the

[21]B. Joyce and B. Showers, "Improving Inservice Training: The Messages of Research," *Educational Leadership* 37 (March 1980): 379–385.

consultant, who in turn collaborated with key teachers to establish the peer coaching training and implementation. Both the principal and the director occasionally attended training sessions, but for the most part the group functioned independently. The principal and director also facilitated whenever possible the granting of requests for support—for example, time and resources.

PORTFOLIOS FOR DIFFERENTIATED SUPERVISION

Teachers who reflect about their own practices, value thinking, and emphasize depth over breadth of coverage tend to have classrooms with a measurable climate of thoughtfulness.[22]

Case #3

When Carmen Farina became principal of the New York City elementary school P.S. 6, she faced many challenges, some more familiar to suburban than to urban principals. She entered a school long renowned for academic excellence, located in one of the most elegant neighborhoods in the city and known in the community as the "private public school." Many of the students' parents had the means to send their children to private schools but preferred to send them to P.S. 6. They also generously funded the P.T.A. to provide some of the advantages that wealthy districts and independent schools often provide.

In her previous positions as a building principal and district staff developer, Carmen had transformed her school's language arts/social studies curriculum into an exciting interdisciplinary program called *Making Connections* and had overseen its implementation throughout the whole district. In describing her transition to P.S. 6, Carmen had this to say:

> My dilemma upon assuming the principalship was that the students scored high on the standardized tests while little student-centered learning was going on. Veteran teachers, for the most part, ran traditional classrooms. How could I effect change in an environment where many parents and teachers were content with the status quo?
>
> The approach I took was to begin visiting teachers on a daily basis and engaging them in conversations around their teaching practices. These visits enabled me to assess school strengths and weaknesses. Through constant class visits and discussion of successes and challenges, areas of concern and/or interest began to emerge. By the end of the year, we had been able to designate three priorities around curriculum needs and an area of interest for each teacher.

[22]J. Onosko, "Exploring the Thinking of Thoughtful Teachers," *Educational Leadership* 50 (October 1992): 40–43.

At that point, Carmen selected 10 teachers to participate in the first-year implementation of a model called *Portfolios for Differentiated Supervision.* Because she emphasized that participation was open to all faculty, a total of 16 teachers volunteered and subsequently took part in the process.

Laura Kotch, a school staff developer, was key to the successful development and implementation of the model. The following remarks are some of the thoughts she shared in greeting a group of visitors to the school:

> Each participating teacher is involved in creating a portfolio, a container for his or her area of inquiry. The decisions about which topics to study came from questions teachers had, their areas of interest, their curiosity and experimentation with new classroom strategies and techniques.

Laura concluded a workshop with these thoughts:

> Teachers have been spending time talking together, reading articles and books written by the experts, and reflecting on their beliefs and practices. The task of writing ideas down in a portfolio requires us to clarify thoughts and ideas, refine our language, and find our writer's voice. It will be worth all the hard work if the portfolio serves as a practical resource, while continuing to change and grow as our learning continues. As a facilitator, advisor, and friend working alongside the dedicated, hard-working, and talented professionals of P.S. 6, I am proud to be part of this exciting and innovative model of staff development.

A Definition and Strategies

A professional portfolio can serve many different purposes. It can be, as at P.S. 6, a repository for a particular area of inquiry. The P.S. 6 portfolio not only documents the development of innovative and effective practices, it is a central vehicle for the growth of the teacher through self-reflection, analysis, and sharing with colleagues through discussion and writing. Although each P.S. 6 portfolio is different, all include teacher resources and references, such as professional articles as well as practical suggestions.

At P.S. 6, the groundwork and foundation for the portfolio process occurred through the assessment of school strengths and weaknesses that were translated into a set of prioritized curriculum needs for the building. Within that framework, intensive classroom visitations and conversation about teaching practices led to the designation of an area of expertise for each teacher. Following the solicitation of a group of volunteers, a series of workshops honed writ-

ing skills and fostered analysis of and reflection on the areas of expertise. The participants then submitted drafts to the principal, who provided feedback. The principal wrote a "dear author" letter to all participants upon completion of their portfolios.

Portfolios can also be used to support and enrich mentoring and coaching relationships. Although it does not replace the classroom observation, the portfolio extends and enhances the professional discussion by going beyond what is observed in the classroom on a given day.

When a teacher applies for another position, an annotated collection of materials on a teacher's best classroom practices and work with colleagues supplements and strengthens the interview process.[23] The authors have repeatedly witnessed the influence that a well-crafted portfolio has on hiring committees.

Portfolios for differentiated supervision, as implemented at P.S. 6, combine all the important elements for improvement of classroom instruction: collaborative relationships—especially in the workshops and in the sharing of the final products; participatory decision making in the choice of focuses; and reflective practice—primarily in the development of the focuses and individual topics, and in the actual creation of the portfolio. The results are portfolios that are reflections of the autonomous professional.

In the case of P.S. 6, the principal, in collaboration with a like-minded staff developer, provided the impetus and became the initial driving force for the professional portfolio initiative. As a former school and district staff developer, the principal had a very strong instructional focus. She used that vision and strength to immerse herself in visits and foster dialogue around what was going on in the classrooms. Carmen seemed to have done her own "constant comparison"[24] with the teachers until they derived three focuses. Clearly, she was very much in charge *in collaboration* with her staff developer. Nonetheless, she allowed the process to take a natural course, did not discourage more volunteers than she had anticipated from participating, and recommended, fostered, and role-modeled the use of collaborative and self-directed strategies. As the authors have seen, once the process was established and the groundwork laid, the teachers for the most part worked autonomously.

[23]C. Danielson, *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching* (Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 1973).

[24]A. Strauss and J. Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1990).

PEER ASSESSMENT: SELECTION, SUPPORT, AND EVALUATION

Shared leadership can foster the professional growth and development of teachers which in turn leads to the empowerment of students as successful learners.[25]

Case #4

The International High School, located on the basement floor of LaGuardia Community College, is a joint venture of the Board of Education and the Board of Higher Education of the City of New York. This alternative high school was founded in 1985 to serve the needs of limited English proficient students. In its handbook it describes itself as "alternative in its admissions policy, population served, school governance, teaching methodology, setting, and opportunities for both students and faculty." Some of the unique learning experiences for students developed over the last 13 years are the following:

- A focus on content-based, English-as-a-second-language instruction
- Heterogeneous, collaborative groupings
- Career-oriented internships for one-third of each school year
- Organization of the entire curriculum around thematically based interdisciplinary cycles
- Team teaching
- Performance-based alternative assessment standards for coursework and graduation
- The opportunity to take college courses with matriculated college students for both high school and college credit

The school is open to all limited English proficient students residing in New York City who have lived in the United States for fewer than four years and who are entering 9th or 10th grade in the next school year. The diversity of languages, dress, and ethnicities that fills the halls dazzles the first-time visitor. In the following account, Eric Nadelstern, the founding and current principal of the International High School, retraces the road that the faculty has traveled to reach their singular level of faculty and student empowerment.

The First Years

In reflecting back, it was less about trying to figure out how to structure a school than trying to figure out how kids learn best. Through our discov-

[25]The Personnel Committee, The International High School, LaGuardia Community College, 1991.

eries, we figured out what a school would need to look like if it were built around our understanding about how kids learn best and in a way that allowed us to continue that level of inquiry; and then design the school based on new learnings.

Given that, it's not surprising that the first year we opened, our school looked not too dissimilar from a traditional New York City public high school. We divided all knowledge into the same six arbitrary disciplines everyone else has been confined to for centuries. Periods were exactly 40 minutes long, we had eight of them a day. We made the mistake of thinking that if eight periods were good, nine must be better. So, going into the second year, we shaved five minutes off each instructional period, and that gave an additional class.

The faculty did meet together for two hours a week. Back then, it was as a paid-per-session, after-school activity. Since it was part and parcel of working here, it wasn't necessarily voluntary, although no one was forced to be here. We shared our insights into this common exploration about learning. And on the basis of those insights, we continued to rethink the way the school needed to be structured.

The first major step in that direction, or at least a milestone in it, was something we referred to as the Student for a Day Project. Everyone on staff was given the opportunity to be relieved of responsibilities, teaching and otherwise, for an entire school day, to spend a day with a kid.

Over a three-month period, everyone on staff volunteered for this exercise. At the end of the experiment, we got together and shared our findings. In discussion, comments surfaced like, "The most interesting thing that happens in this school happens in the hallway in between classes." Or "Thirty-five-minute periods are insane. You can't do anything meaningful in 35 minutes, and to have to shift your focus every half hour is a crazy way of learning something."

So the curriculum committee decided to look at the structure and subsequently built a new one based on the 70-minute periods at LaGuardia Community College. I created a two-hour block on Wednesday afternoon for the staff to meet. On Wednesdays, students can choose to stay at the school if they wish—the computer room is open, athletic and club activities are offered, or they can participate in college activities.

The key is that the staff meet together to identify their successes, failures, and kids' problems. As the staff learns what it isn't doing, the students learn from the staff's experience of trying to meet the kids' needs through inquiry. A principle emerged: teachers best offer learning experiences for students that they experience first themselves. Therefore, peer assessment for children developed only after the teachers did it themselves.

Peer Assessment

The peer assessment itself grew out of a small school necessity. I realized that because of my small administrative staff, I needed to share responsibility. So I started with personnel. I asked teachers if they wanted to participate in hiring. I interviewed 60 people for seven [personnel committee] positions, with each interview lasting two hours. All seven staff members agreed to join the personnel committee and decided on a chair. They staffed the school for the second year. It did take time for them to become

effective. By the end of that first school year, they weren't able to fill all the vacancies.

Having hired most of the staff, they had a vested interest in their hires becoming successful. The underlying assumption is that when staffing is a shared activity, the entire faculty accepts responsibility for orienting and supporting new members. Thus, the third year the staff initiated peer support during the Wednesday afternoon meetings. Initially, peer support took place on Wednesdays without involving evaluation. Once the faculty became accustomed to providing support, they began visiting each other's classes. As the observations increased, some written feedback began. Trust had to be built, and it took time. Providing written feedback to each other did not become widespread until the fourth year. And it wasn't until the fifth year that the personnel committee wrote and codified the schema for evaluation.

The committee members concluded that a combination of self-evaluation and peer evaluation would be the most effective means to promote professional growth. By that time, my role was to meet weekly with the chair of the committee. The message to the faculty is that they are autonomous professionals who are trusted. The key to consensus in the school is that it is the faculty that shapes policy.

At this juncture, Eric Nadelstern sees his own role as a leader as threefold. First, he believes that his job is to model professional development, exemplified by the portfolio that he creates for his own assessment. Second, he considers that training his staff to be leaders is one of his central roles. And third, he believes that a major piece of his responsibility is an external one—to protect and advocate for his school. In that role of advocate and liaison to the outside world, he promoted the creation of a handbook entitled *Personnel Procedures for Peer Selection, Support, and Evaluation* that the International High School shares willingly with other professionals. His most recent accomplishment on behalf of the school is its selection as one of the first New York City charter schools.

A Definition and Strategies

The purpose of the peer support group is to provide a place for staff to exchange ideas, learn from one another, and support one another in reaching their professional goals. Groups composed of three to four members from at least two subject areas, one of whom is tenured, and including support staff, meet regularly and rotate every year. After setting collective goals, staff intervisit and write peer observations that reflect individual goals. The group provides support and feedback in the writing of self-evaluations, in the completion of the teaching portfolio, and in the preparation of presentations before the peer evaluation teams.

International High School requires at least two self-evaluations of nontenured teachers every year and one self-evaluation of tenured

staff at the end of each year. The evaluations can range from discussing growth to expressing disappointment, from looking at one course to comparing several, from focusing on content to examining skills.

The idea behind the peer evaluation team is that when a staff member needs feedback from the school at large, the staff member will make a presentation to a larger group of peers who represent the whole school. These presentations, as differentiated from the peer support group, often take place as the staff member passes through the gates that lead to tenure.

Tenured staff present every three years. The candidate prepares a portfolio with the following components: goals and objectives for the year; self, peer, and administrative evaluations; two out of three student class evaluations for each trimester; any professional work of the candidate's choice; and the annual end-of-term evaluation review.

The titles of the different types of assessment at International High School—peer support, self-evaluation, peer evaluation—in themselves reveal the inclusion of the basic tenets for supervision for the 21st century. Collaborative relationships, participatory decision making, reflective practice, and teacher self-direction are inherent in the three phases.

Finally, as the study readily reveals, the principal was and is a potent force and inspiration for the realization of the highest level of staff leadership and professionalism. He has always consciously tried to model his beliefs and values as he believes the faculty must for the students. He also supplies the intellectual and philosophical grounding that underlies professional and leadership development at International High School. The greatest indication of the internalization of the school's vision and the professional autonomy of the staff emerged when Eric Nadelstern left the school for one and a half years. The assessment process did not skip a beat—the staff continued to implement the vision and practiced at the same high level without any certainty of the principal's return.

ACTION RESEARCH

Although action research is not a quick fix for all school problems, it represents a process that . . . can focus the brain power of the entire instructional staff on maximizing learning.[26]

[26]John McLean, *Improving Education Through Action Research: A Guide for Administrators and Teachers* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 1995), p. 5.

Case #5

Doris Harrington is a tenured mathematics teacher at Northern Valley Regional High School, a New Jersey school with 1,100 students (and also the setting of Case #1). Having taught in the school for 18 years, Doris is excited about the new program that Principal Bert Ammerman spearheaded to enhance professional development and instructional improvement:

I think it's neat that we now have a system in place in which we feel empowered. I mean, having an option, a choice in determining my professional development is certainly new and much appreciated.

Doris selects an action research plan as a part of the supervisory program that teachers, supervisors, and administrators collaboratively developed.

I've read so much about action research and am so excited that others now appreciate how important it is to provide time for teachers to reflect about what we do every day in the classroom.

Doris's observations confirm the beliefs of many educators who maintain that encouraging effective teaching is one of the most important responsibilities of instructional supervisors.[27]

Familiarizing herself with the literature on action research,[28] Doris reviews the four basic steps: (1) selecting a focus for study, (2) collecting data, (3) analyzing and interpreting the data, and (4) taking action. She wonders about her classroom: "What has been successful? How do I know these strategies are successful? What needs improvement? What mistakes have I made? In what ways can I improve my instructional program?" In collaborative conversations with her assistant principal, Jim McDonnell, Doris frames her project.

She wonders whether or not the time and energies expended on cooperative learning activities are worth the effort. Although familiar with the extensive research on the subject,[29] Doris decides to compare her 4th period math class with her 6th period class in terms

[27]Donald A. Schön, "Coaching Reflective Teaching," in *Reflection in Teacher Education*, ed. P. P. Grimmett and G. F. Erickson (New York: Teachers College Press, 1988), pp. 19–30.

[28]John Elliott, *Action Research for Educational Change* (Bristol, PA: Falmer Press, 1991); Jeffrey Glanz, *Action Research: An Educational Leader's Guide to School Improvement* (Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers, 1998); E. T. Stringer, *Action Research: A Handbook for Practitioners* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996).

[29]David W. Johnson and Roger T. Johnson, *Cooperation and Competition: Theory and Practice* (Minneapolis, MN: Interaction Inc., 1989).

of how cooperative learning strategies will affect student achievement and attitudes toward problem solving in mathematics. She chooses these two classes because they are somewhat equivalent in mathematical problem-solving ability. She selects a nonequivalent control group design commonly associated with ex post facto research because the study involves the use of intact classes.[30]

She randomly assigns cooperative learning as the primary instructional strategy for the 4th period class, while the other class will work on mathematical problem solving through the traditional textbook method. After six weeks of implementing this plan, she administers a post-test math exam and discovers, after applying a t-test statistic, that the group exposed to cooperative learning attained significantly higher mathematical problem-solving scores than did the group taught mathematics traditionally. Doris keeps an anecdotal record throughout the research project and also administers an attitude questionnaire to ascertain how students felt about learning math using cooperative learning groups as compared to learning math in the more traditional format.

Based on her findings, Doris decides to incorporate cooperative learning procedures with all her classes. In consultation with Vice Principal McDonnell, she develops a plan to continue assessments throughout the year. Jim asks Doris to present her findings at both grade and faculty conferences.

Doris's enthusiasm for action research was emphatic:

> Employing action research engenders greater feelings of competence in solving problems and making instructional decisions. In the past, I never really thought about the efficacy of my teaching methods to any great extent. The time spent on this project directly impacts on my classroom practice. I'm much more skeptical of what really works and am certainly more reflective about what I do. Action research should, I believe, be an integral part of any instructional improvement effort. No one has to convince you to change an instructional strategy. Once you gather and analyze your own data, you'll be in a position to make your own judgments about what should or should not be done. Action research empowers teachers!

A Definition and Strategies

Action research is a type of applied research that has reemerged as a popular way of involving educators in reflective activities about their work. Action research is not defined in terms of a narrow, limited practice; rather, action researchers can use a range of methodologies, simple and complex, to better understand their work and even

[30]See Jeffrey Glanz, *Action Research: An Educational Leader's Guide to School Improvement* (Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers, 1998) for an explanation of this research design.

solve specific problems. Action research, properly used, can have immeasurable benefits, such as creating a systemwide mindset for school improvement and promoting reflection and self-improvement, among many others.

Action research is an ongoing process of reflection that involves four basic cyclical steps: (1) selecting a focus, (2) collecting data, (3) analyzing and interpreting data, and (4) taking action. At Northern Valley High School District, this model is highly prescriptive. Before beginning their projects, the teachers discuss them with their supervisors. Periods are designated for research and development during the year. The individual researchers submit a report at the end of the year on the project's significance for the individual and the district, and on its content and conclusions, as well as pedagogically sound methods to teach the materials. Without a formal structure to support such efforts, action research projects rarely, if ever, are successful. The implementation of this alternative means of instructional improvement in Northern Valley has furthered the efficacy of action research as an invaluable means to promote professional development. Action research as used at Northern Valley does not necessarily replace other traditional forms of "supervision."

The faculty members' choice of action research as a supervisory focus automatically places the teachers in the position of the self-directed, autonomous professional. Also, of course, reflective practice permeates action research. Collaboration and participative decision making took place in the development of the new program for professional development and instructional improvement and continue to take place in the development of the plans. In addition, the sharing of research results with the rest of the faculty sets in motion another cycle of professional development that will most likely include the collaborative and self-directed strategies used in the first project. Finally, Northern Valley offers another example of a visionary principal spearheading an alternative assessment endeavor.

Action research and mentoring (Case #1) are just two examples of alternative approaches to supervision that have been implemented at Northern Valley Regional High School in New Jersey. These efforts were initiated at the school level as a result of a "dissatisfaction with traditional supervisory methods." As Vice Principal McDonnell explained:

> We searched for more effective supervisory models because we realized that varied and developmental models of supervision would best meet the diverse needs of our faculty. It was an experiment that we initiated gradually and has, by and large, been viewed favorably by faculty here.

Efforts at this school reflect research on best practices of successful school leadership. Literature on transformational leadership