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Improvement Versus Evaluation as an Intractable Problem in School Supervision: Is a Reconciliation Possible?

> *My vision for supervision is a simple one - it is of a day when supervision will no longer be needed.*
> Sergiovanni (1992)
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> *. . . I do not mean that a community of educational supervisors has ceased to exist, but to suggest that perhaps they no longer have a legitimate reason to exist.*
> Starratt (1992)
>
> *Supervision is . . . becoming obsolete. . . .*
> Glickman (1992)

Introduction

Earliest recorded instances of the word "supervision" established the process as entailing "general management, direction, control, and oversight" (Gwynn, 1961; *Oxford English Dictionary*, 1989). Payne (1875), author of the first published textbook on supervision, stated emphatically that teachers must be "held responsible" for work performed in the classroom and that the supervisor, as expert, would "oversee" and ensure "harmony and efficiency." Methods in supervision prior to 1920 were impressionistic and inspectional (Button, 1961). The raison détra of supervision was to eradicate inefficiency and incompetence among the teaching force. Various elaborate rating forms were developed to accomplish this major objective of supervision (Boyce, 1915). Improvement of instruction was less important than purging the schools of the inept. Supervision as a role and function in schools was more concerned with evaluative measures (Glanz, 1991). The movement to alter supervisory theory and practice to more democratic and improvement foci, while at the same time minimizing the evaluative function, occurred in the 1920s as a direct result of growing opposi-

tion to autocratic supervisory methods (Glanz, 1990). Those involved in the supervision of instruction today are challenged by what Tanner and Tanner (1987) have termed the "improvement versus evaluation" dilemma. This problem in supervision has become so intractable that some educators have called for the elimination of supervision, as reflected in the quotations above.

Historically, a two-pronged focus of supervision has prevailed in public schools. On one side, supervision has been synonymous with summative evaluation (sometimes referred to as formal evaluation); that is, the making of some sort of decision regarding the competence of a teacher (Scriven, 1981). Evaluative decisions are legally sanctioned and positive evaluations are necessary to attain tenure (Fischer, Schimmel, & Kelly, 1987). The evaluative scenario is quite simple. The supervisor usually informs the teacher of the date and time when the evaluation is to take place. The teacher prepares and executes a lesson as the supervisor dutifully takes copious notes while usually sitting in the back of the classroom. Pleasant farewell greetings are exchanged as the supervisor leaves the

classroom. At times, an exit conference (or post-observation conference) is held which is followed by a formal written evaluation report including commendations and suggestions for improvement. Unless, the situation warrants immediate removal, a teacher usually receives a summative evaluation form at the close of the school year indicating a satisfactory or unsatisfactory rating (Haefele, 1981; Lower, 1987).

On the other side, formative teacher evaluation emphasizes processes of counseling and training. Supervisors consider themselves teachers-of-teachers and find much satisfaction from working with teachers on improving instruction and promoting pupil learning (Spears, 1953). Whether incorporating demonstration lessons, intervisitations, or workshops on teaching strategies, supervisors view their work as the improvement of instruction to maintain quality and high standards in schools.

Summative evaluation has been the dominant model for supervision in schools. Research indicates, however, that teachers do not favor evaluation for summative purposes such as formal observations for retention, but have more positive attitudes towards teacher evaluation when results are used in a formative manner to improve performance (Zelenak & Snider, 1974). Summative teacher evaluation is "not perceived as a positive process for facilitating the growth and development of the teaching staff, but rather as an arm of 'scientific management' for assuring that teachers comply with system expectations" (Johnson, 1993). Johnson continued by explaining that summative evaluation for nontenured teachers has its place. "But as teachers become more proficient and obtain tenure, the orientation of the teacher evaluation process needs to change" (p. 205).

Supervisors, essentially, are faced with a basic role conflict. They are authorized to enforce organizational mandates and ensure that teachers comply with system expectations for performance and conduct. Supervisors ensure this compliance through the formal evaluative process. At the same time, supervisors are responsible for promoting the improvement of instruction and student learning. Herein lies the conflict: the unresolved dilemma between the necessity to evaluate and the desire to genuinely assist teachers in the instructional process (Glanz, 1994; Marshall, 1992).

This article will examine briefly some of the current perspectives on the nature of the improvement and evaluative functions of supervision. Results of a study indicating the prevalence of this problem will also be described. The article will then address the possibility for reconciliation of this dilemma for supervision.

Theoretical Framework

Role conflicts of this nature were documented by Marshall (1992) in her study of assistant principals. Marshall stated that "an assistant principal might be required to help teachers develop coordinated curricula - a 'teacher support' function." "But this function," explained Marshall, "conflicts with the monitoring, supervising, and evaluating functions." Marshall continued, "The assistant may be working with a teacher as a colleague in one meeting and, perhaps one hour later, the same assistant may be meeting to chastise the same teacher for noncompliance with the district's new homework policy." Marshall concluded, "When they must monitor teachers' compliance, assistants have difficulty maintaining equal collegial and professional relationships with them" (pp. 6–7).

This inherent role conflict has been documented by other prominent scholars as well. Tanner and Tanner (1987) acknowledged this dilemma. Supervisors are challenged daily, they explained, to assist teachers "in solving classroom problems" (p. 105). As such, supervisors are inclined to interact with teachers personally and professionally. To be effective leaders, supervisors must maintain friendly, helpful relationships with teachers. However, when evaluation must be done, these collegial relationships may be jeopardized. Tanner and Tanner stated: "No doubt, many teachers are afraid to ask for help from supervisors because they believe that by exposing a problem with their teaching, they are inviting a low evaluation of their work . . . " (p. 105). They stated that this role conflict, inherent in supervisory work, presents almost insurmountable problems for supervisors. They called it a "basic conflict" between "inservice education" and "evaluation" (pp. 105–106). "The basic conflict between these functions is probably the most serious and, up until now, unresolved problem in the field of supervision" (p. 106).

Similarly, Costa and Guditus (1984) observed that supervisors are often confronted with the task of having "to evaluate and assist in dismissing incompetent teachers." They contended that this evaluation process tends "to interfere with the helping relationship needed to work productively with other staff members" (p. 84).

The improvement-evaluation dilemma in supervision is widely acknowledged. Consequently, some educators advocate a complete separation of the two functions (e.g., Acheson & Gall, 1987). More recently, Popham (1988) and Cangelosi (1991) argued that the two purposes of supervision, summative evaluation and the improvement function, are distinctly different. Employing different evaluators, they assert, is the only way to resolve the controversy regarding the formative-summative purposes of teacher evaluation. Popham (1988) stated that the "individual(s) who carry out formative evaluation must be different from the individual(s) who carry out summative teacher evaluation. It's just that simple" (p. 271).

Hunter (1988) disagreed with Popham that a divorce between the improvement and evaluative functions of supervision was necessary. Hunter maintained that the two functions "are really very compatible" (p. 276). Hunter was more emphatic when asked by Brandt (1985), editor of *Educational Leadership*, if she

thought that "a person in a position of authority over a teacher can't really function as a coach." Hunter responded: "No, I think that's a ridiculous notion. I have never found that people resent being evaluated by an authority figure who knows what he or she is doing."

Blumberg and Jonas (1987) concurred with Hunter that evaluation and improvement can coexist but only when teachers and supervisors work collaboratively. Building trust, collegiality, and genuine collaboration are necessary ingredients for meaningful supervisory relationships (Isenberg, 1990; Pajak, 1990). Moreover, the supervisory process can only be effective when supervisors are "granted access" into the classroom by teachers. Teachers, Blumberg and Jonas maintained, will "permit access" to supervisors who are "task-oriented," "nonpunitive," accessible, open, willing to listen, genuinely sincere, knowledgeable, and competent. However, they asserted, traditional supervision based on "meaningless ritual" is no longer viable and a detriment to the teacher/supervisor relationship.

Other educators eschew the evaluative function of supervision and envision supervision as solely assisting teachers in instruction. Rooney (1993), a principal in Illinois and advocate of separating the improvement and evaluative functions of supervision, criticized traditional methods of evaluation in an article entitled "Teacher Evaluation: No More 'Super'vision." Rooney noted that her job was more concerned with improving instruction than mere evaluation. Traditional supervisory methods, insisted Rooney, do not improve instruction. Rooney instituted peer coaching, intervisitations, and the abrogation of formal observations. Thus, Rooney's approach to resolve the evaluation-improvement problem was to empower teachers by involving them, as instructional leaders, in the improvement of teaching (see Black, 1993; Costa & Kallick, 1993; Garmston, 1993; Glatthorn & Newberg, 1984; Struyk & McCoy, 1993).

Many others, however, maintain that improvement and evaluation "are not easily separated in practice" (Poole, 1994). Poole explained that "collegial supervisory relationships may be just as judgmental as hierarchical supervisory relationships" (p. 308). Additionally, Hazi (1994) has demonstrated clearly that quite often evaluation and supervision are considered legally synonymous so that a separation may be impossible. As Hazi explained: "Supervision, as we would like it, and evaluation, as we can tolerate it, cannot easily cohabit in the same person without consequence. It is a rare individual who can both help and rate teachers effectively, given our current law and reform climate" (p. 215).

Attitudes of Supervisors and Teachers about Supervision and Evaluation

As demonstrated, the improvement-evaluation dilemma has been readily acknowledged. Given the importance of this problem and controversy surrounding its resolution, I undertook an exploratory study to determine the extent to which this issue is perceived by both teachers and supervisors as being critical. Participants were also polled regarding possible resolutions to this dilemma.

This study was an extension of an initial inquiry that surveyed the attitudes of teachers and assistant principals toward supervision. The data initially reported assistant principal's perceptions of their roles and responsibilities and results were tabulated (Glanz, 1994). Data were also collected reflecting assistant principals' and teachers' perceptions about the supervisor's role in evaluation and improving instruction. The primary research question investigated was: Do assistant principals' and teachers' perceptions of the assistant principal's involvement in evaluation and improvement of instruction differ?

Sample

A survey, approved by the Board of Education's Conflict of Interest Committee, was distributed to assistant principals and teachers in the New York City public schools during the 1992–1993 school year. A random number table was used to select a stratified sample of 200 assistant principals from both elementary and middle schools. A stratified random sample of 500 teachers was selected in the same manner.

The response rate for assistant principals was 82% (164 APs) as a result of two separate mailings. A similar number of mailings yielded a 41% (205 teachers) response rate for teachers.

A fairly representative number of APs from each of the five boroughs of New York City responded to the questionnaire. Eighty-five (85) elementary school APs and 79 middle school APs participated. Ninety-two (92) APs were male and seventy-two (72) were female. Fifty-five percent of the respondents had five or less years of experience as an AP.

Although a much less than expected response rate for teachers was received, a representative sampling of teachers was obtained by school and borough. A hundred-and-two (102) elementary teachers and hundred-and-three (103) middle school teachers responded to the survey. A hundred-and twenty-nine (129) teachers were female and seventy-six (76) were male. Sixty-three percent of the respondents had five or less years of experience as a teacher.

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected through a questionnaire comprised of 13 open-ended questions for assistant principals. Semantic differential scales measuring various aspects of the roles and responsibilities of APs were also used. Teachers were given a much less detailed questionnaire consisting of 3 open-ended questions. The original intent of the study was focused on perceptions of assistant principals about many aspects of their roles and responsibilities. Only after preliminary data were collected, specifically concerning the question dealing with the evaluation and

improvement functions of supervision, did the researcher decide to collect similar data from teachers. Therefore, the teacher survey was less extensive and more focused on the evaluation/improvement issue.

Supervisors were asked, for example, to respond to these questions: "To what extent do you participate in the evaluation of teachers?" "What is the nature of this evaluation?" "To what extent do you assist teachers in improving instruction?" "What is the nature of this involvement?" "Do you encounter any problems or concerns in working with teachers to improve instruction while at the same time being required to evaluate them?"

Teachers were asked about the degree to which assistant principals were involved in improving instruction. They were asked to describe this involvement. Teachers were also asked to describe the nature of evaluation and how they felt about the process.

A second method of inquiry was also utilized. Interviews were conducted by the researcher with eleven (11) assistant principals and eighteen (18) teachers. The individuals interviewed were personally known by the researcher. The individuals interviewed had not participated in the written survey.

Seidman (1991) stated that interviewing is the most suitable data collection method if we are to understand the experiences of others and the meaning they make of them. These interviews enabled the researcher to learn the complexities of the participants' experiences from his or her point of view. Following the advice of Mishler (1986), the interviews were flexible and open-ended in nature allowing for natural conversation. The goal was to understand each participants' experiences and perceptions related to the evaluation/improvement issue in a non-threatening way such that "meanings emerge, develop, and are shaped by and in turn shape the discourse." Each of the assistant principals and teachers were interviewed separately. Five of the interviews were conducted by telephone and the rest in person.

Interviews were audiorecorded and subsequently transcribed. Although an interview protocol served as a guide, most interviews digressed from the protocol after the initial questions, with subsequent questions emerging from respondent replies.

Data Analysis

The open-ended nature of the data collection process was preferred because the researcher felt that a more accurate assessment of assistant principals' and teachers' perceptions of the evaluative and improvement processes would be obtained. Therefore, due to the nature of the questionnaires and interview process no statistical analyses were undertaken. Data collected, qualitative in nature, was subjected to repeated careful readings of survey responses.

Findings

Data collected from assistant principal and teacher interviews as well as from questionnaire responses pro-

vide an understanding of the evaluation versus improvement dilemma prevalent in supervision.

(1) Teachers Attitudes Toward Supervision

Not surprisingly, this study confirmed previous findings that teachers resent supervision based on mere inspection, "snoopervision," and evaluation. Nearly every teacher participating in this study affirmed the non-constructive nature of supervision. For instance, one teacher posited: "All my supervisor does is to walk into my room, without notice of course, and look around while taking notes. Sometimes he stays for fifteen minutes or so and then leaves. Sometimes I receive a letter in my box highlighting areas that need improvement. What a waste. In fact, I usually throw it in the waste basket." One teacher poignantly stated: "It really bothers me. I mean that kind of supervision, uh, really 'snoopervision'. Always looking for mistakes. 'Catching us being bad', you know what I mean. I really resent uncaring, unsympathetic, bureaucratic-like supervisors. It makes my job tedious, if not impossible." Another teacher put it succinctly: "They don't help, just evaluate."

Many teachers noted that although their supervisor "was harmless" in that s/he "rarely bothers me", teachers did acknowledge the need for assistance. Teachers overwhelmingly approved of supervisors who cared and were "sympathetic and helpful". Thus, although teachers decried ineffective supervision, they did acknowledge the benefits of a "helpful" supervisor.

Numerous studies surveying teachers' attitudes towards supervision, conducted long ago as well as more recently, reveal that teachers welcome constructive, non-punitive feedback from supervisors who are perceived as having expertise (See Hayes, 1925; Jonas & Blumberg, 1986; Pajak & Glickman, 1984; Shannon, 1936). Importantly, however, when respondents in this study were asked whether or not they approved of separating the evaluative and improvement functions of supervision, teachers overwhelmingly favored such a proposal.

(2) Conflicting Perceptions about the Evaluation-Improvement Functions of Supervision

Interestingly, nearly every supervisor interviewed did not consider the "improvement-evaluation dilemma" a problem. As one supervisor put it: "No, you are constantly striving to improve instruction and ongoing evaluation is part of the process." More emphatically one supervisor stated: "No, that is what the job is about!" Another supervisor said: "No. If you work with a teacher you should evaluate them." Representative of most supervisors was this comment: "No. I am a very nurturing, supportive person and try to be non-threatening. However, I do not have any qualms about rating a teacher 'U' who after intense monitoring cannot teach more effectively."

Teachers, on the other hand, viewed the improvement-evaluation dilemma as critical. Few teachers decried autocratic and laissez faire supervisors. As one teacher said: "Most of the AP's I've had contact with are good people. They're not authoritarian, nor are they unconcerned or uninvolved with the kids or us." However, teachers overwhelmingly mentioned that they would hesitate to confide in a supervisor regarding a "teaching problem" because of "their rating powers." "Although my AP is a good listener, always available for me, and would, I think, be non-punitive, I would really hesitate going to her with a problem about my teaching . . . you know, she's still my supervisor." One teacher was quite unequivocal: "How can a supervisor presume to help and evaluate me at the same time?"

In sum, the purpose for conducting this study was to determine if differences existed between assistant principals' and teachers' perceptions of the evaluation-improvement dilemma. Clearly, differences abounded. Supervisors asserted that a distinction between the improvement and evaluative functions of supervision could be maintained, while teachers felt that a separation of functions was impractical, if not impossible. This dilemma, as Hazi (1994) has suggested, has led "individuals like Starratt to suggest abolishing supervision and Sergiovanni to imagine communities where supervision is no longer needed" (p. 216).

Implications: An Unresolvable Paradox

Historical analysis reveals that methods of supervision through the first two decades of the twentieth century were inspectional and evaluative. Supervision for improving instruction was minimal with much emphasis on removing the incompetent teacher. With the introduction of more democratic methods in supervision, emphasis shifted to improving instruction (Glanz, 1991). Although, supervision (assisting teachers in improving instruction) and evaluation (judging the effectiveness of teaching) evolved as distinct processes, supervision became synonymous with both formative and summative functions. Yet, supervisors and those concerned with the function of supervision have been caught in a seemingly intractable dilemma. Summative teacher evaluation has served to confound the improvement mission of supervision.

Is a resolution possible? Given current legal mandates (Hazi, 1989) and organizational constraints (Glanz, 1993; Poole, 1994), "disentangling the knot of evaluation-supervision may be an impossible and impractical task" (Hazi, 1994, p. 216). Although proposals have been proffered (Acheson & Gall, 1987; McGreal, 1996) and various attempts made (Glanz, 1994; Nolan, 1996; Poole 1994), resolutions have been elusive, partial, and tenuous.

To evaluate or not to evaluate is not the question. Educators readily acknowledge the import of evaluation. As Millman (1981) affirms, "teaching is too important to too many to be conducted without critical inquiry into its worth" (p. 12). Rather, who should

evaluate is more controversial. The problem is compounded when supervision is conceived as a process of working with teachers to improve instruction, while at the same time evaluation and supervision are considered legally synonymous. Can supervisors evaluate the same teachers they are assisting? Hazi (1994) concluded that "no amount of linguistic maneuvering will reconcile the two for teachers" (p. 216).

Notwithstanding supervisors who feel they can function effectively through collaboration (e.g., De-Pasquale, Jr., 1990), the only answer, it seems to me, is to finalize the divorce between supervision for improvement and supervision for evaluation. The improvement and evaluative functions of supervision are fundamentally at cross purposes. A historical precedent exists for, at least, a theoretical separation between supervision and evaluation. If educators can agree on the urgency for a separation, then efforts to establish a legal mandate can proceed. Without, however, a legal distinction between supervision for improvement and supervision for evaluation, traditional superordinate/subordinate relationships will perpetuate the "cold war" between teachers and supervisors, as articulated by Blumberg (1974) twenty years ago.

In this light, the quotations cited at the outset of this article to abolish supervision seem to refer to "supervision for evaluation." There is, it seems to me, nothing onerous about supervision for evaluation as long as the process is carried out by an independent party or committee. Supervision for improvement, whether it's called peer coaching or developmental supervision, should be the focus of specially trained personnel aiming to assist teachers collaboratively and nonjudgmentally. As Spears (1953) posited insightfully, "supervision is and always will be the key to the high instructional standards of America's public schools" (p. 462).

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