

## **EDUCATIONAL SUPERVISION IN A "TRANSFORMED" SCHOOL ORGANIZATION**

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### *Abstract*

*This paper examines the learning organization dimension of schools to identify implications for specific components of supervision, namely, knowledge, interpersonal/technical skills and task areas. Following from a relevant literature review and collegial experiences, a sample of implications is generated and couched in the form of impacts on role-related responsibilities of teachers and principals. The supervisory process is argued to be significantly affected by a learning organization presence, creating additional leadership role responsibilities. Most importantly, this paper suggests a transformation in understanding of the supervisory process in "transformed" school settings if supervision is to continue as the helping force it was designed to be.*

Educational change abounds and nowhere is this more noticeable than in the transformation of many schools into learning organizations (Razik & Swanson, 2001; Leithwood, 2001; Fullan, 1995). Less obvious, however, are the implications this transformation holds for the helping force termed "educational supervision". For those educators whose role responsibilities include teacher supervision, there is a need to understand this person-oriented process in a setting emphasizing empowerment, needs satisfaction and role effectiveness. This paper explores the learning organization dimension of schools to identify implications for specific components of supervision, namely, knowledge, interpersonal/technical skills and task areas.

To examine the learning organization impact on educational supervision, it is important to understand what a learning organization orientation means. Senge (2006) provides a conceptual definition of this orientation by referring to a learning organization as a setting "...where people continuously expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continuously learning how to learn together" (p. 3). From an operational perspective, educators might attribute this description to that of a school "in which teachers and students have ongoing opportunities to experience success, innovative learning is supported and encouraged, group potential is recognized and utilized, and cooperative effort is embraced and practised" (Treslan, 2008).

Notwithstanding the fact that many schools currently demonstrate this orientation, it can be assumed that these schools place educators in critical leadership roles requiring effective supervisory assistance. But what form of supervision is most effective in this setting?

Glickman, Gordon and Ross-Gordon (2005) propose that developmental supervision has much to offer here. Defined as the application of "...certain knowledge, interpersonal skills and technical skills to the tasks of direct assistance, group development, curriculum development, professional development, and action research that will enable teachers to teach in a collective, purposeful manner uniting organizational goals and teacher needs and provide for improved student learning" (p. 9), this view of supervision represents a paradigm shift from mere inspection of people as subordinates to encouraging collegial interactions. Although this supervisory approach involves working with teachers directly to impact student learning indirectly, it is tantamount to suggesting that yesterday's practices fall short of meeting current educator needs!

Table 1 presents a sample of learning organization implications across three vital components of developmental supervision, namely, knowledge, interpersonal/ technical skills, and task areas. These implications are couched in the form of impacts on role-related responsibilities of educators working in this setting. Information in this table has been gleaned from a review of the literature along with the experiences of this writer and educational colleagues.

## **Discussion**

Expanding capacity to create truly desired results (i.e., ensuring that teachers and students have ongoing opportunities to experience success) reflects needed changes in existing school and classroom functioning. Bureaucratic expectations must be transformed from restricting to facilitating shared decision making, creating a welcoming environment supportive of innovation and experientialism. This involves freeing or relaxing rigid curricular guidelines and facilitating student and teacher exploration of knowledge applications (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1993). To accomplish this, teachers need assistance in honing interpersonal skills and overcoming communication barriers, allowing them to assume their effective teacher leadership role (Sergiovanni, 1999). This is necessary not only to encourage cooperative student-teacher dialogue but also to help teachers maximize their role empowerment. The end result should be transformation of classroom and school into a laboratory, and enabling teachers to serve as action researchers in classroom settings characterized by effective pedagogical practice.

The supervisory challenge lies in adopting an appropriate supervisory approach that can be embraced by teachers, viewed as collaborative, and considered to contribute to professional development. From a practical perspective, fostering of collective action to bring about these changes is the very essence of collaborative supervision which is premised on participation by perceived equals in the making of instructional decisions. Those in supervisory positions should remember that collaboration is both an attitude and a repertoire of behaviors, where the outcome becomes a mutual plan of action. Since teachers are professionals, it would be prudent for any supervisory assistance to emphasize collaboration and be as non-directive as possible. In so doing, teachers can acquire increased classroom control over decisions essential to them and their students.

**TABLE 1**  
**Learning Organization Implications for Developmental Supervision**

<b>Learning Organization (Definitional Dimensions)</b>	<b>Developmental Supervision Components</b>		
	<b>Knowledge</b>	<b>Interpersonal/Technical Skills</b>	<b>Task Areas</b>
Expanding capacity to create truly desired results ( <i>i.e., teachers and students have ongoing opportunities to experience success</i> )	Change Bureaucracy Decision making	Exercising interpersonal skills Overcoming communication barriers	Teachers as action researchers
Nurturing new and expansive learning patterns ( <i>i.e., innovative learning is supported and encouraged</i> )	Innovation/experimentation Self-directed learning Beginning teacher potential	Stakeholder effectiveness and efficiency Facilitating student/teacher inquiry Exercising technical skills	Effective curricula development Teacher professional development
Freeing collective aspiration ( <i>i.e., group potential is recognized and utilized</i> )	School effectiveness Supervisory approaches Student/teacher empowerment	Fostering effective communication	Deploying constructivist pedagogy
Learning how to learn together ( <i>i.e., cooperative effort is embraced and practised</i> )	Collaborative effort Learning process Developmental supervision phases	Collaborative and/or non-directive supervisory approaches Creating a new learning perspective	Teacher career/school goal pursuit Teacher group development Teacher membership in collective staff endeavours

Nurturing new and expansive learning patterns (i.e., where innovative learning is supported and encouraged) suggests that as learning organizations, schools emphasize the how, not the what, of knowledge acquisition. Glickman et al. (2005) believe that this environment pre-empts testing knowledge understanding via specific test criterion in favour of a more constructivist pedagogy. To achieve the goal(s) of this challenging environment, teachers can use assistance from the supervisory process in better understanding the phenomenon of innovation/experimentation, self-directed learning, and the tapping of beginning teacher potential. This assistance could include stressing the importance of experience in comprehension, and helping students to question, examine, hypothesize and conjecture.

Supervisory assistance in facilitating effective and efficient classroom/school leadership and communication is crucial to the management of this learning environment, given that teachers are required to facilitate the inquiry process. As a result, teachers need to hone their assessment, planning, observation, research and evaluation skills. Working to overcome deficiencies in these areas will require supervisors to play a major role in assisting teachers to become effective curricula developers and contribute to teacher professional development. This assumes that interpersonal skills will be revisited and effectively utilized by all concerned. However, supervisors will need to accept teachers' professional judgements concerning what is best for student learning in order for supervisory assistance of this nature to be seen as non-judgmental.

Freeing collective aspiration (i.e., recognizing and utilizing group potential) implies freedom in stakeholder-institution interactions. Extended to the classroom, this can mean being empowered to accept responsibility for decisions made and acts performed. For supervisors, this means knowledge of school effectiveness, instructional empowerment initiatives, and understanding the range of supervisory approaches best suited to realizing these goals. In particular, supervisors need to appreciate the critical role of communication in group functioning, since tapping group potential is central to deployment of constructivist pedagogy and associated knowledge discovery.

Classroom teaching utilizing group potential can result in a need for assistance in the form of professional development activities. Materials dealing with effectiveness criteria, empowerment, and releasing group potential will be much in demand by those practising constructivist pedagogy and learning. Here astute supervisors should choose an intervention based on teacher readiness and need, apply the chosen approach in a collegial manner, and foster teacher development while gradually increasing teacher choice and decision making responsibility. Interestingly, this can be an ideal occasion for supervisors to assess the developmental levels of the teachers they work with to effectively match supervisory assistance with individual needs.

Overall, this particular aspect of schools operating as learning organizations lends itself to the nature of developmental supervision with its emphasis on individual and group interactive dynamics for goal achievement. Freeing collective aspiration focuses on minimizing over-zealous rules and regulations, de-emphasizing formality, and stressing the person, as prerequisites for goal achievement. It becomes clear that teachers profit professionally from receiving supervisory assistance supporting this environment, including collaborative

supervisory interventions embracing full development of teacher and student potential; opportunity to learn from failure; and provision of praise for activities well done (Glickman et al., 2005).

Learning how to learn together (i.e., embracing and practising cooperative effort) contradicts the more traditional belief that learning only occurs when small packets of knowledge are presented to a learner who, through recall and testing, displays understanding (i.e., learning) of those concepts. Learning organizations provide a propitious setting to re-examine this practice simply because an entirely new approach to learning is encouraged (Fosnot, as cited in Reagan, Case & Brubacher, 2000). In these schools freedom of expression, opportunity to explore, encouragement to create, and willingness to view failure as a learning experience defines a new paradigm of learning (Senge, 2006). Concomitantly, this approach to learning is particularly dependent on group activities. To be effective in these classroom settings, teachers can benefit from supervisory assistance aimed at positioning student knowledge acquisition first and foremost in a list of pedagogical priorities. It is also worthy of note that this learning organization dimension, when applied to the school, implies effective collaboration between home, school and larger community.

Effective assistance to teachers here will require those in supervisory positions to have extensive knowledge in the areas of collaborative effort, the learning process, and phases of developmental supervision. This is particularly important as teachers redesign the traditional learning environment through emphasis on constructive pedagogy and learning. Creating this new learning perspective should also bring with it awareness and acceptance of the fact that experience plays a major role in guiding the learner's mind. Thus supervisors need to appreciate that at the heart of this exercise lies the fact that teachers need to create an environment of encouragement for their students. Owens (2004) states that new learning requires an environment free from the confines of formality, impersonality and efficiencies currently found in many schools and classrooms. With supervisory assistance teachers can demonstrate that learning how to learn together constitutes a rich new learning experience for their students. Professionally, this can result in teachers needing to experience participation in collective staff endeavours focussing on innovation and experimentation, career fulfilment, and addressing the learning needs of students.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has examined implications for educational supervision in schools functioning as learning organizations. It is apparent that the definitional dimensions of a learning organization significantly affect the supervisory process through creation of additional leadership role responsibilities for those responsible in delivering effective supervisory experiences. An important fact quickly emerges, that being the need for a transformation in understanding of the supervisory process. While effective supervision includes working with teachers (adults) directly so as to impact on student learning indirectly, it assumes a more developmental perspective in schools functioning as learning organizations.

The four definitional dimensions of a learning organization reveal a need to understand and utilize both interpersonal and technical skills to ensure supervisory effectiveness. This is due to the fact that learning organizations excel at advanced, systemic and collective learning while employing a distinctive set of learning strategies, making it important for teachers to receive assistance when necessary in their leadership responsibilities. Specifically, effective communication needs to be mastered, along with the deployment of empowerment, collegiality, democracy and collaboration. This is important when one considers that supervision should help teachers participate effectively in maintaining their schools as learning organizations, reinventing schools around learning, not time; fixing current design flaws; establishing a [meaningful] academic day; keeping schools open longer; giving teachers the time they need; investing in technology; ...and sharing responsibility (Fullan, 1995).

It is also important to remember that effective supervision necessitates knowledge of adult education and the various types of supervisory approaches that can be used when working with teachers directly so as to positively impact students indirectly. Selecting the most effective intervention will always be critical to effective supervision, with specific attention paid to collaborative and non-directive supervisory behaviors. Glickman et al. (2005) state that “when supervisors listen to the teacher, clarify what the teacher says, encourage the teacher to speak more of their concern, and reflect by verifying the teachers’ perceptions...the teacher is in control” (p. 99) – a non-directive/collaborative interpersonal approach. Attaining the ultimate goal of educational supervision (i.e., unification of organizational goals and teachers’ needs to achieve effective student learning) means that the task areas of supervision must be understood by those in supervisory positions. Provision of direct assistance to teachers, group development, professional development, curriculum development, and action research activities are essential to the realization of pedagogical effectiveness.

Ultimately, supervision in schools functioning as learning organizations should enhance the teacher leadership role in improving student learning. The challenge is to facilitate a “paradigm shift” to collegiality both in school operation and leadership responsibility. In this way, educational supervision will continue as the helping force it was designed to be in our nation’s schools.

## **DEFINITIONS**

### **Interpersonal Skills:**

- Listening
- Clarifying
- Encouraging
- Reflecting
- Presenting
- Problem solving
- Negotiating
- Directing
- Standardizing

**Technical Skills:**

- Assessing and planning
- Observing
- Research and evaluation

**Task Areas:**

- Direct assistance to teachers
- Group development
- Professional development
- Curriculum development
- Action research

**Source:**

Glickman, C.D., Gordon, S.P., & Ross-Gordon, J.M. (2005). *The Basic Guide to Supervision and Instructional Leadership*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

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