English

CHARLES SUHOR

Survey of English Language Arts Supervisors Reveals More Work, Fewer Resources—and Optimism

According to a recent survey, English language arts supervisors are facing problems arising from increased responsibilities, insufficient time and resources, and roles oriented to people more than to administration. The survey, which was conducted by the Conference on English Education (CEE—a subgroup of the NCTE) Commission on Supervision and Curriculum Development, sampled 350 state- and district-level supervisors.

Expansion of roles has typically included increased emphasis on writing programs and new responsibilities in subjects other than English language arts. Although the supervisors cited professional organizations like ASCD, NCTE, and IRA as helpful resources for their work, they lamented the fact that expansion of roles and responsibilities has rarely been supported at the state or district levels by the provision of additional time or money.

Supervisory workload has also been increased by new state mandates and regulations. Mandates can be beneficial when they call for an increase in student writing and require inservice in writing instruction for teachers. Such requirements are double-edged, however, and can add red tape or promote curriculum fragmentation (as in competency testing). In any case, all mandates need implementation, and implementation means added supervisory tasks. Most supervisors have felt the pressure and say that time manage-

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Trends

ment is the skill in which they need the most help. In contrast, the supervisors noted skills in interpersonal relationships as their greatest strength. Reporting that their jobs are staff rather than line positions, the supervisors considered "people" skills central to their fundamental inservice roles.

Supervisors placed high priority on their own professional growth. They reported that their continuing education is carried out through university courses, professional conferences, and individual reading and research. But again, difficulties arise in finding adequate time and support for such development.

The portrait that emerges from the survey, then, is one of a dynamic but harried supervisor who precariously juggles traditional roles and new responsibilities. Despite the tensions cited by the 96 supervisors who responded (out of 350 sampled), the report is characterized by an upbeat attitude and a sense of deep professional involvement. The authors conclude that English language arts supervisors "shared a common belief in their abilities to carry out their responsibilities . . . and expressed determination to continue improving their supervisory skills in such areas as promoting change, staff development, management, and classroom observation."

The report was prepared by a subcommittee of the Commission on Supervision and Curriculum Development, consisting of Gillian Cook, University of Texas at San Antonio; Charles Duke, Utah State University; Frieda Owen, Wood County Schools, West Virginia; and Peter Schiff, Northern Kentucky University. A summary of the survey, entitled "Common Diversity: Roles and Responsibilities of Today's English Language Arts Supervisors," appeared in *English Education* (October 1985). More detailed survey data can be found in the subcommittee's "Summary of Questionnaire Results" (CS 208 838), available through ERIC.□

Charles Suhor is Director, ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills, and Deputy Executive Director, National Council of Teachers of English, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801.

Technology

Lewis A. Rhodes

Coping or Copping Out?

Deciding what computer system to buy is not an easy task. Hardware requires compatible software; software should be compatible with the present curriculum; and the staff who implement the curriculum must skillfully maneuver the software/hardware combination to reach their instructional goals. Therefore, before making a "simple" purchase, a school district must consider curriculum, staff development, and maintenance issues as well as contextual influences such as public expectations and an ever-changing technology.

Nevertheless, a recent national survey of 30 major school districts found that an increasing number of school administrators are delegating these decisions to outsiders who propose "complete" systems. An offer of a coherent package of hardware, software, training, and maintenance is certainly a seductive one. It eliminates the need to choose without sufficient experience, evaluate without accepted standards, and involve an entire school or district in a time-consuming learning proces s.

But will the convenience of decision making without the discomfort of thought take us where we really want to go? True, in recent years our purpose many times has been to *have* computers—a visible response to public interest and pressure to join the information society. Now, if for no other reason than the resources invested in them, we must begin to view computers not as an end but as a means. But to what?

The answers to that question can't be purchased in a "complete" system.[1] There is no shortcut to coherent use of technology to support the accomplishment of a school's goals. These institutional purposes are achieved only as a consequence of all the people in an organization becoming more effective in accomplishing their individual purposes. Thus the process of determining how new tools become integrated into present curriculum/instructional roles and relationships must be approached as a problem-solving exercise, a school-by-school exploration of present barriers to teaching and administrative effectiveness. For instance, how can the technology assist directly or indirectly by freeing teacher time? More significantly, how can it permit a school to accomplish purposes considered impractical until now? The lack of access to continuously updated information about students, for example, limits true diagnostic-prescriptive teaching.

Tools empower those who use them. To increase educational effectiveness, users must search for their own "complete" answers. Seemingly complex purchase decisions need not be delegated to outsiders. Much less administrative risk is involved when decisions are the result of a process in which the right people asking the right questions discover their own "complete" answers.□

[1] I am not suggesting that "complete" packages are of no value once the *right questions* have been asked. Especially valuable may be software leases that provide for annual upgrading.

Lewis A. Rhodes is Assistant Director for Technology, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Alexandria, Virginia.

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