Clarifying Developmental Supervision

Supervisors should match their assistance to teachers' conceptual levels, but with the ultimate goal of teachers taking charge of their own improvement.

The theory of developmental supervision (Glickman 1981, 1985) has generated a great deal of interest, application, and research, as well as some misinterpretation. Our purposes here are to clarify propositions underlying the process, discuss the three phases necessary to put the theory into practice, and illustrate the process as applied to two task areas of instructional supervision. Finally, we discuss the purpose of the theory.

Underlying Propositions

Developmental supervision is based on three general propositions. First, because of varied personal backgrounds and experiences, teachers operate at different levels of professional development. They vary in the way they view and relate to themselves, students, and others. Teachers also differ in their ability to analyze instructional problems, to use a repertoire of problem-solving strategies, and to match appropriate strategies to particular situations. Furthermore, there are variations within the same teacher depending on the particular instructional topic or timing of life and work events.

Second, because teachers operate at differing levels of thought, ability, and effectiveness, they need to be supervised in different ways. Teachers at lower developmental levels need more structure and direction; teachers at higher developmental levels need less structure and a more active role in decision making.

The third proposition is that the long-range goal of supervision should be to increase every teacher's and every faculty's ability to grow toward higher stages of thought. More reflective, self-directed teachers will be better able to solve their own instructional problems and meet their students' educational needs (Murphy and Brown 1970, Parkay 1979). Further, if the goal of education in a democratic society is to produce responsible learners and decision makers, then teachers who are themselves autonomous and independent will be better able to facilitate students' growth toward such ideals (Calhoun 1985). Put simply, thoughtful teachers promote thoughtful students.

Phase One: Diagnostic

The developmental supervisor's first task is to diagnose the level at which a teacher or group of teachers is functioning in regard to a particular instructional or curricular concern. The central determinant in the supervisor's diagnosis is the level of abstraction exhibited by the teacher or group. The concept of teacher abstraction is derived from conceptual systems theory (Harvey et al. 1961). Abstraction is the ability to form "more orientations toward the environment and the interpersonal world" (Sullivan et al. 1970). Abstraction is not an innate characteristic of an individual but rather a variable.

Teachers exhibiting low abstraction have difficulty identifying instructional problems and generating alternative solutions; they seek concrete advice from an expert or authority on how to complete a complex task. Teachers exhibiting moderate abstraction can define instructional problems (usually centering on a single dimension of the problem) and can generate one or two possible solutions. They strive for independence but need help in selecting and prioritizing solutions, thinking through consequences, and implementing an improvement plan. Teachers exhibiting high abstraction can identify problems from disparate sources of information. They can visualize various strategies, anticipate the consequences of each action, and select the most appropriate response. Highly abstract teachers follow the problem-solving task through to completion, taking full responsibility for its results.

The supervisor makes this diagnosis by talking with and observing teachers in action and asking them questions, such as, "What do you see as areas for classroom instructional improvement?" "How do you know this is an area of concern?" "What could you do about it?" Another part of diagnosis is observing classroom teaching behav-

ior, especially with students who aren't learning. The supervisor looks for the degree of flexibility and adaptability the teacher exhibits when handling a learning or behavioral problem. Do teachers use habitual, routinized sets of behaviors when learning problems continue? Can they change in midstream by abandoning actions that aren't working in favor of other actions? Is there a rationale for new actions, or are actions random and erratic? Talking with and observing teachers at work can help the supervisor to determine teachers' varying levels of abstraction.

Phase Two: Tactical

The supervisor's next step is tactical, focusing on the immediate concern of helping teachers solve current instructional problems. The tactical phase initially involves matching supervisory approach to the level of teacher abstraction. The supervisor matches a *directive* approach with teachers exhibiting low abstraction, a *collaborative* approach with teachers exhibiting moderate abstraction, and a *nondirective* approach with teachers exhibiting high abstraction.

Using the directive approach (with teachers of low abstraction), the supervisor provides teachers with a great deal of information and advice. This approach calls for high supervisor responsibility and low teacher responsibility for the instructional improvement decision. The supervisor does not attempt to coerce teachers to use a specific action, but instead suggests alternatives for the teacher to consider and choose.

The supervisor using the collaborative approach works with teachers (of moderate abstraction) to share perceptions of a problem, propose alternatives, and negotiate a mutually designed plan of action. In the collaborative approach, supervisors and teachers share responsibility for the final decision.

Taking the nondirective approach, the supervisor invites teachers (of high abstraction) to define instructional problems themselves, generate actions, think through consequences, and create their own action plans. The nondirective approach calls for low supervisor responsibility and high teacher responsibility for the final decision. Nondirective supervision, however, should not be confused with a laissez-faire approach.

The nondirective supervisor takes an active role by encouraging teachers to make critical decisions and follow through on those decisions, and by being an involved facilitator, helping teachers clarify their perceptions and plans.

The tactical phase of developmental supervision—matching supervisory approach to teacher level of abstraction—is the functional dimension of the model, concerned with the approach most likely to produce a satisfactory solution.

Phase Three: Strategic

The real and more important "developmental" dimension of the model is the third phase. The strategic phase is aimed at accelerating the development of teacher abstraction, helping teachers to think "harder and smarter," and stimulating their problem-solving abilities. The strategies intended to promote growth in teacher abstraction are all long-term propositions. One strategy is to gradually expose teachers to new ideas, ways of viewing students and instruction, problem-solving techniques, and teaching methods. At first such new ideas should be related to concepts that teachers already understand and value. In time teachers can be exposed to a wider range of ideas and innovations (see Hall and Loucks 1978).

A second strategy is to gradually lessen teachers' dependence on the supervisor during decision-making conferences. This can be done by gradually *decreasing* the structure provided by the supervisor while simultaneously *increasing* the teacher's decision-making role. A third strategy is for the supervisor to involve teachers exhibiting lower levels of abstraction with teachers exhibiting slightly higher levels in problem-solving sessions. Such "optimal mismatches" (Hunt 1971) can result in conceptual growth for teachers exhibiting lower abstraction.

The three phases of developmental supervision make for a complex model of instructional leadership. Table 1 summarizes the purposes, goals, and supervisory techniques related to each phase.

Two Illustrations of the Model at Work

We can further clarify the model by illustrating the three different phases of developmental supervision as implemented in two distinct supervisory tasks: providing direct assistance to three teachers and helping a group of teachers work better together.[1]

Direct assistance. In our first example, let's suppose that the developmental supervisor is engaged in a separate clinical cycle (preobservation conference, classroom observation, postobservation conference) with each of three teachers, focusing on teacher questions and student responses. In the *diagnostic* phase (phase 1) the supervisor holds preobservation conferences and classroom observations for each teacher. The supervisor diagnoses Teacher A as exhibiting low abstraction, Teacher B as moderately abstract, and Teacher C as highly abstract in regard to questioning techniques.

The *tactical* phase can be illustrated by discussing initial postobservation conferences held with each of three teachers. With Teacher A (low abstraction), the supervisor uses a directive approach, first presenting data gathered during the observation, then interpreting the data and asking for teacher response. The supervisor next suggests instructional improvement goals and enlists possible alternatives to accomplish them. The teacher is asked to select from these alternatives, and the supervisor outlines an action plan. Finally, the supervisor provides Teacher A with baseline data and standards by which to evaluate the effectiveness of the improvement effort.

Taking the collaborative approach with Teacher B (moderate abstraction), the supervisor asks for the teacher's perceptions of how the observed class went and potential areas for improving teacher questions and student responses. The supervisor then follows with observation data and his or her own interpretation of improvement areas. Comparing perceptions, the supervisor and Teacher B determine their goals for improvement. Through continued brainstorming, ne-

gotiating, and problem solving, the supervisor and teacher eventually agree on an action plan and follow-up activities designed to evaluate outcomes.

The supervisor uses a nondirective approach with Teacher C (high abstraction) by reporting observation data, which Teacher C has requested, and then using active listening skills while the teacher relates personal perceptions. The supervisor encourages Teacher C to set instructional improvement goals and explore alternative avenues for reaching those goals. The supervisor serves as a sounding board, using the nondirective interpersonal behaviors of listening, clarifying, encouraging, and reflecting as the teacher formulates an action plan.

Despite the fact that different supervisory approaches are used in each of the three conferences, they are all examples of the tactical phase of developmental supervision. In each conference the supervisor attempts an optimal match between supervisory approach and teacher level of abstraction. The goal of each conference is to solve a relatively immediate instructional problem.

The *strategic* phase of the developmental model is carried out in subsequent clinical cycles. During the next post-observation conference with Teacher A (originally of low abstraction), the supervisor moves away from a purely directive approach, asking the teacher to propose some personal ideas for instructional improvement. At this stage the supervisor might still assume the bulk of decision-making responsibility, but in future clinical cycles the supervisor and Teacher A would gradually move into a fully collaborative relationship.

During the next clinical cycle with Teacher B (originally of moderate abstraction), the supervisor begins a gradual shift away from a collaborative approach toward nondirective supervision. This is done by requesting that the teacher set a personal goal for instructional improvement, then collaborating on the remainder of the decisions in that conference. In subsequent postobservation conferences, the supervisor hands over more responsibility to Teacher B, in time assuming an entirely nondirective approach with that teacher. The ultimate goal of the strategic phase of developmental supervision is for all experienced teachers to take charge of their own instructional improvement efforts, with supervisors and peers serving as facilitators and providing feedback.

Group development. Our second example illustrates how a supervisor might work with a group of teachers. The critical part of a group's functioning is being able to make collective decisions in their team, grade level, department, or school. An effective group must be able to reach agreement on when change is necessary and what direction that change will take.

Suppose that a supervisor is working with three departments or teams on curriculum revisions. In the diagnostic phase, the supervisor determines that Group A is made up primarily of teachers exhibiting low abstraction; most of the teachers in Group B are exhibiting moderate or mixed levels of abstraction; and highly abstract teachers predominate in Group C. (If there is an equal distribution of abstract thinkers, the supervisor would regard the group as moderate.)

Greiner (1967) has identified a number of approaches used to bring about organizational change with groups. The supervisor can use adaptations of three of these approaches during the tactical phase of group development, for instance, a *decision-from-alternatives approach* when working with Group A (low abstraction). The supervisor identifies the need for curricular change, then presents the group with alternative ways to make the change, along with advantages and disadvantages of each alternative. The group then decides which alternative it will use. This approach is essentially directive, in that the supervisor takes responsibility for collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and presenting data to the group.

The supervisor uses an adaptation of the *data discussion approach* (Huse 1980) with Group B (moderate abstraction) by seeking data from the group, organizing the information gathered, and presenting the organized data to the group. The group then analyzes the supervisor's feedback to determine if change is necessary and, if so, the appropriate means for making the change. This is basically a collaborative approach to change, with the supervisor serving as an "information mediator" between initial data gathering and the group's final data

Table 1
Phases of Developmental Supervision

PHASE	PURPOSE	GOAL	SUPERVISORY TECHNIQUES
3. STRATEGIC*	Developmental	Increase teacher abstraction and self-direction.	Gradual exposure to new ideas; incremental decrease in structure, increase in teacher responsibility; optimal mismatches with other teachers.
2. TACTICAL	Functional	Meet instructional need/solve instructional problem.	Match supervisory approach (directive, collaborative, or nondirective) to teacher level of abstraction (low, moderate, or high).
1. DIAGNOSTIC	Functional and Developmental	Determine current teacher level of abstraction (low, moderate, or high).	Observe and interact with teacher(s). Compare teacher behaviors to research on teacher abstraction.

*Strategic phase, once begun, is ongoing. Diagnostic and tactical phases continuously repeat during the strategic phase.

analysis and decision.

The supervisor relies on the *group problem-solving approach* (Greiner 1967, Huse 1980) when working with Group C (high abstraction). Here the group generates its own data, then analyzes those data to identify problems and decide on appropriate changes. The supervisor serves as group facilitator throughout the problem-solving process. The group problem-solving approach, then, is a nondirective one (again, not a laissez-faire approach).

The strategic phase of group development begins with the next round of problem-solving sessions. The supervisor helps the less abstract groups to gradually increase their share of responsibility in the decision-making process. During Group A's next series of meetings, the supervisor changes to the more collaborative data discussion approach for identifying needed change, but maintains the original (and more directive) decision-from-alternative approach for choosing a plan of action. Eventually the supervisor completes the shift toward collaborative decision making, using the data discussion approach throughout the decision-making process.

For the next session with Group B, the supervisor shifts to the nondirective problem-solving approach for identifying the group's new problem, then shifts back to the role of information mediator, using the (more collaborative) data discussion approach for creating an action plan. In time, the supervisor uses the group problem-solving approach during all stages of decision making with Group B.

The gradual movement of the groups of lower abstraction to higher abstraction can be accelerated by optimal group mismatches. Group A is matched with Group B either in a workshop that simulates decision making or in an actual decision-making session aimed at solving a problem common to both groups. Here, Group B shares new ways of thinking about change and change strategies with Group A and thereby models a higher level of thought process and decision making for the members of Group A. A separate workshop or meeting, focusing on a different change-related problem, involves Groups B and C. In this session, Group B is pulled toward Group C's level of abstraction and change strategies.

Another way of promoting increased thought and collective responsibility of group members is by reforming groups in which the highest level of abstraction is exhibited by the majority of group members. This placement pulls upward the thinking of the minority of members who exhibit less abstraction. Unfortunately, the reverse is also true. If the majority of group members are less abstract, they tend to inhibit and pull down the more abstract thinkers.

The ultimate goal of developmental supervision is to have all groups operating at the group problem-solving level, with the supervisor using nondirective, interpersonal behaviors to facilitate the group's own decision making.

A Human Theory

We are aware that the model of developmental supervision is complex. Level of abstraction will vary not only among individuals and groups but *within* the same individual or group depending on the particular instructional concern. For example, a high school teacher might exhibit high abstraction when thinking about improvements in her advanced physics class and exhibit low abstraction when thinking about her general science class. A science department might exhibit high abstraction with a laboratory approach to teaching and exhibit lower levels of abstraction with student record-keeping. Also, a stage of development is not reached permanently but can change with new teaching situations, personal life happenings, and altered professional work conditions.

Developmental supervision is not a contingency or situational theory. It is not a theory to label teachers into fixed categories. It does not lend itself to algorithms or prescriptive actions. Rather, it is a theory about understanding the aim of our work in relation to ourselves and others. A democracy such as ours aims at educating students to become thoughtful and independent citizens who ultimately will make decisions in the best interests of all (Kohlberg and Mayer 1972). Insofar as informed human judgment is critical to education, we must strive for all educators to become more active, autonomous, and thoughtful about instruction.□

1. For a thorough discussion and review of research on the application of developmental supervision, see Glickman 1985.

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From Conference to Instruction

1 Using a directive approach, the supervisor provides the teacher with a great deal of information and advice

2 The supervisor using a collaborative approach works with the teacher to negotiate a mutually designed plan of action

3 Taking a nondirective approach, the supervisor invites the teacher to design a plan of action

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