

Supervision in the Age of Teacher Empowerment

A study of three schools that practice shared governance indicates that supervision and teacher empowerment are compatible concepts.

Will the empowerment of teachers make supervision and school administration obsolete? In this article I hope to offer insight into this question from a study I conducted on differentiated staffing, participative decision making, and the role of administrators. I investigated programs that had operationalized one or more aspects of differentiated staffing—such as senior teachers serving in supervisory roles; collective responsibility among teachers for student progress; and collaboration among teachers on educational policy, school improvement, and school effectiveness issues—as discussed in the reports by the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy (1986) and by the Holmes Group (1986). These reports suggest that such a system can enhance professionalism by affording teachers greater participation in school governance and decision making. Neither report, however, clearly specified the roles of administrators nor acknowledged how expanded responsibilities for teachers might alter them.

Because theories are often adapted by practitioners in ways far different than theorists envisioned, especially over time, I selected long-standing

programs that had been recognized as exemplary by either a government agency or a nationally known research organization. In each of the three programs I examined, the shared governance model had evolved from pre-1983 theories. Their practices, however, reflected many aspects of theories encouraged and adopted since the publication of *A Nation At Risk* in 1983. The portraits illustrate how teachers and administrators in three different settings have been able to share governance and benefit from the experience.

Sharing decisions concerning who does what is as vital as the enlargement of responsibilities that is so satisfying to the teachers in the study.

Midwestern High School

"Midwestern High School" has approximately 1,500 students and 85 professional staff members. It is part of a district that has had a peer review/teacher mentoring program in place for almost a decade. A review board of union and management leaders selects senior teachers as mentors on a competitive basis. Criteria for selection include letters of recommendation from the candidate's building principal, his or her union representative, and three peers. Emphasis is placed on whether the candidate is skilled in human relations and able to terminate teachers who cannot achieve competency. During three-year rotations, the senior teachers supervise the first-year work of novices. Sometimes tenured teachers are also recommended for mentoring by a combined building union and administrative committee. The mentors spend about 30 hours per year observing and consulting with the novices, offering assistance in practical classroom management and instructional techniques. More time is provided for those experiencing difficulty. During the year in which a teacher is being mentored, administrators have mini-

mal supervisory responsibilities for that teacher. They monitor attendance, make brief (5- to 10-minute) classroom visits, and record overall observations about the professional behavior of the teacher being mentored.

At every level of the program, the emphasis is upon sharing governance. District-level union officials and ad-

ministrators share in the supervision of mentors. Twice a year, mentors formally report the progress of their supervisees to the review board, which in turn carefully scrutinizes their efforts. Mentors may also recommend retention or termination of the teachers to the review board. After

novice teachers have successfully completed the first year, they are then placed in a traditional supervisory relationship with the building administrators, who make all subsequent retention and tenure recommendations.

Is it a perfect system without tension? Not always. For years administrators were reluctant to give up any traditional supervisory responsibilities; some remain skeptical. Because roles and responsibilities are at times ambiguous, those in participative governance situations need to be flexible. For example, because mentors are assigned to several schools, they do not directly associate with parents. Thus, if a novice is challenged by a parent, the administrator steps in as usual.

The benefits of shared governance, though, seem to compensate for these drawbacks. For the mentors, making meaningful contributions to the educational goals of the district provides powerful intrinsic rewards. For the novices, receiving more time, attention, and practical assistance than a building administrator can provide is a plus—a point with which administrators agree. Novices also feel their internship period prepares them in ways that their student teaching did not. While administrators share supervision with senior teachers during the novices' critical first year, they do retain many traditional supervisory responsibilities. The benefits of shared governance for administrators are twofold: gaining more competent teachers and having time to redirect their energies into other important responsibilities.

Suburban/Rural High School

"Suburban/Rural High" has 800 students, 65 faculty members. It is an East Coast traditional high school. For 15 years teachers there have been organized into departments without chairpersons in which they collectively make all instructional and managerial decisions. They select their courses and texts, schedule classes, determine budgetary allocations, order books and materials, and participate in hiring new staff and administrators. In addition, all members of the professional staff—administrators, librarians, counselors, and teachers—serve as personal and academic advisers to approximately

The More I See, The Better I Teach

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Today's staff development programs often focus on narrowly defined, technical models of teaching; supervision of instruction then falls within the limitations of these models. The result: teachers who function as technicians, as clones.

Reflective teaching, on the other hand, is "predicated on a broad and in-depth understanding of what is happening in the classroom" (Wildman and Niles 1987). It promotes dialogue about classroom events, dialogue requiring information, lots of information, sometimes in complex configurations (Barnett 1987). The result: teachers who are their own best critics.

We have developed our own staff development model to encourage reflective teaching. We believe that to reflect on their practice, teachers must first be able to describe what they are doing (Bracey 1987). When they learn the skills of observation typically reserved for supervisors and administrators, they become more analytical and insightful about their own teaching: They see themselves as others (their students) see them.

Information. We begin with the idea that information is the basis for all instructional decisions; then we provide an overview of effective teaching research. Teachers can draw this information from any number of models of teaching and use it conceptually. Conveying to teachers that this knowledge is a common language for decision making, not a formula for every lesson taught, is the key to proper integration of the information.

Data collection. In limited fashion, we've trained teachers to collect objective data as documentation for analysis of their teaching. Specifically, teachers learn to use anecdotal notetaking (not scripting), time-on-task coding, and seating chart flows. Teachers' initial fascination with these procedures leads to enthusiastic application and the development of keener observation powers. The real payoff is evident during the next stage, when teachers begin to analyze and reflect on their data.

Analysis. Focusing only on what they can document, teachers prepare nonjudgmental write-ups of how the lesson began, progressed, and concluded. Next the observer records important teaching skills and specific teacher and student behaviors seen during the lesson. These indicators become the basis for dialogue between observer and teacher. Finally, the observer lists behaviors that were less effective, such as "While you worked with reading group A from 9:00-9:15, groups B and C had no task." These behaviors are the basis for continued conversation between observer and teacher.

Anyone who has helped good teachers become better knows that supervisors have an ally in teachers who reflect on their own teaching; therefore, we expect authentic, sustained improvement from our efforts. This process improves the interaction between supervisor and teacher and, more important, develops independent habits of reflection. We have found that a promising way to so empower teachers is to train them to use the skills of instructional supervision so that the more they see, the better they teach.

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10 students. In many ways Suburban/Rural High (a U.S. Education Department award winner) is the antithesis of differentiated staffing. However, this school has operationalized theories that recommend a more professional model for decision making than traditional bureaucratic management.

At Suburban/Rural, the teachers I interviewed were enthusiastic about their enlarged and empowered responsibilities. They did not, however, view this change in their role as happening in the absence of supervision. On the contrary, nearly every teacher acknowledged the principal as the inspiration and guiding force behind this unusual and long-standing system of empowerment. The principal described himself as a facilitator of shared governance who plays the "managing partner" role discussed in the Carnegie Forum report.

A surprising example of why supervision is not obsolete has occurred at Suburban/Rural High School: teachers there have given back a significant responsibility to the supervisors. For the first seven or eight years of the program, teachers served as disciplinarians as part of their advisory responsibilities. Over time, though, they recognized that a more consistent discipline policy was needed. In order to play more of an advocate's role for students, they requested an assistant principal for discipline be hired.

As in any school, some tension exists between teachers and supervisors. For example, at difficult times teachers often want the principal to make decisions, while he encourages them to work through problems and reach their own solutions. Some teachers complain that the combination of consultative and participative decision making at full faculty meetings causes them to spend too much time talking about every item on the agenda. Nevertheless, none of the teachers I interviewed wanted to give up their special system. Because the teachers see their principal as instrumental in facilitating their empowerment, Suburban/Rural High is a powerful example of effective supervision in a school where teachers have appreciable influence over the entire program. Teachers actually recommended adding a position to the supervisory staff! That teachers

are also enthusiastic about their responsibilities attests to the possibilities of carefully managed shared governance.

Inner-City High School

"Inner-City High School" has 196 students, 12 teachers, and 3 paraprofessionals per site. It is an East Coast alternative school. For 18 years teachers and paraprofessionals, working in interdisciplinary teams of about 15 persons, have made decisions about curriculum, scheduling, budget, hiring, and school policy, including discipline. As at Suburban/Rural High, teachers here also serve as personal and academic advisers to students. The school is divided into four sites, and a principal and an assistant principal travel among them. Each site has a teacher coordinator who is the building peer supervisor. Teachers here believe they have a great deal of influence over the entire program.

Are the principal and assistant principal made obsolete as a result of the teacher coordinator role? The administrators and teachers I interviewed all view the administrators as facilitators and feel that governance is shared. Sometimes the views of teachers and administrators differ, but enthusiasm outweighs the inevitable criticism. Here, as at Suburban/Rural High, the principal is philosophically committed to shared governance and decision making. In addition to their facilitative roles, administrators supervise and evaluate new teachers, perform managerial functions as the school's liaisons to the central office, and offer insight and advice. In many ways they retain traditional responsibilities while offering teachers real empowerment.

Curiously, here too, over time, teachers have given back certain responsibilities to administrators. As an innovative experimental school, Inner-City High has in past years tried peer review and evaluation. However, teachers found the task incompatible with the small, collegial environment; they felt their time could be better spent on instructional and managerial tasks. As a result, administrators now consult with the teacher coordinators but are solely responsible for teacher evaluation.

The Key to Shared Governance

Skeptics might suggest that since teachers give back power, why bother to give it to them in the first place? The answer rests in the basic philosophy of shared governance. Sharing decisions concerning who does what is as vital as the enlargement of responsibilities that is so satisfying to the teachers in the study.

The research highlighted here suggests that supervision can be dynamic in empowered situations if administrators are philosophically committed to the concept. They also need to recognize that the process is slow, may be inefficient, and requires patience. And yet, in spite of the obstacles, the pay-offs of shared governance can be substantial. Expanding teachers' responsibilities in ways that give them significant influence may be key to developing better schools. Clearly, as we have seen in these three portraits, supervision and teacher empowerment are concepts that in practice are mutually compatible. In shared governance, the important point to remember is that the emphasis must be on *sharing*. □

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Author's note: To obtain a complete report of the study findings, please contact the author at the address below.

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