

High stakes supervision: we must do more

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The characteristics of the emerging and existing teaching force are explored in relation to supervision. Key trends that exacerbate teacher shortages include out-of-field teaching, increases in student population, critical subject-area shortages, attrition, and retirement. This paper calls for a high-stakes form of supervision as a long-term solution to working with the constantly changing nature of the teaching force.

Introduction

This is a call to examine why we must do more to ensure that the supervision of teachers emerges as a 'high stakes' area commensurate with the accountability movement. Given the rapidly changing nature of the teaching force and the federal mandate for 'highly qualified' teachers, paraprofessionals, and principals, (Chevalier and Dolton 2004, No Child Left Behind Act 2001) schools are challenged to hire and retain highly qualified teachers in record-setting numbers in the US and elsewhere and (Rasmussen 1999, Recruiting New Teachers 2005, Stern 2003, Templeton n. d.). This often leads to schools hiring more alternatively certified teachers (National Center for Education Information (NCEI) 2003) and assigning more teachers to work out-of-field (Ingersoll 1999, 2004, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) 2004).

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), however, emphasizes teacher quality as a key factor in improving student achievement. According to NCLB (2001), a highly qualified teacher has, in part, obtained full state certification, holds a minimum of a Bachelor's Degree; and has demonstrated subject area competence in each of the academic subjects in which he/she teaches (Cutler 2003, NCLB 2001). But, many schools struggle and fall short of these demands, finding ways around NCLB requirements through state loopholes (Hess *et al.* 2004, Ingersoll 2001). And who can blame them when some systems simply lack highly qualified applicants to fill positions? There is little doubt that a severe problem exists.

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Until now, efforts to solve this problem have largely focused on increasing the number of qualified teacher applicants through alternative licensure programmes, tougher academic and certification requirements, hiring incentives (Ingersoll and Smith 2003, Ingersoll 2003), and out-of-field teaching assignments (Jerald and Ingersoll 2002). But what happens to these non-traditional teachers once they enter the classroom? While some teachers receive support and guidance, between 40 and 50% do not and, therefore, add to the teacher attrition statistics (Ingersoll and Smith 2003). Unfortunately, school systems, state departments of education, and legislators look for ‘quick-fixes’ to solve the perennial issue of teacher shortages.

There has been much commentary on teacher shortages and their implications for administrators and policy-makers (Ingersoll 2004, Merrow 1999). In an interview concerning the ‘myth’ of teacher shortages, Darling-Hammond posited that, ‘Almost all of the shortages are self-inflicted because states and districts that haven’t looked at how to recruit and attract teachers [and] how to ensure that they retain teachers continually create for themselves this revolving door’ (Merrow 1999: 16). Another image illustrates the futility of constantly having to hire teachers:

The root of the problem is not shortages in the sense of too few teachers being produced, rather the root of the problem is largely turnover—too many teachers departing prior to retirement. Hence, the solution is not recruitment, but retention. ... The image that comes to mind is that of a bucket rapidly losing water because there are holes in the bottom. Pouring more water into the bucket will not be the answer if holes are not first patched (Ingersoll 2004: 146).

Both Ingersoll and Darling-Hammond bring retention to the centre of the teacher shortage argument. Although it is commonly noted that many teachers are approaching retirement, it must be taken into consideration that, while recruiting qualified teachers is important, effective retention strategies must also be outlined and utilized by administrators and teachers.

To this end, it can be to our advantage to continually re-examine the goals of supervision and tailor those goals toward the retention of new teachers. In these ‘leaky bucket’ schools where teacher turnover is the norm, is supervision a mutual process supplementing evaluation or does evaluation simply supplant supervision? The most hopeful answer may lay partially in the very legislation that focused more attention on teacher shortages.

The premise of the NCLB legislation is to provide for professional development of teachers working in programmes supported by Title I funds (NCLB, 2001).¹ However, what is lacking is any commitment to other types of immediate support for teachers. With more emphasis on school improvement and teacher quality, instructional supervision, professional development, and other support programmes such as mentoring (Feiman-Nemser 2000, Wang and Odell 2002), peer coaching and peer assistance (Arnau *et al.*, 2004, Bloom and Goldstein 2000), faculty study groups (Murphy and Lick 2004), action research (Glanz 2005), and portfolio development (Zepeda 2002) bundled as a comprehensive support programme might prove to be a beneficial solution to the school reform puzzle. Given the diversified composition of teachers, supervision needs to gain the attention of scholars and practitioners conducting research and developing best practices in K-12 schools.

Alternatively certified teachers

Although debate exists regarding the legitimacy of alternatively certified teachers, supply and demand often forces school systems to hire professionals who have received their credentials through alternative routes. With the endurance of alternative licensure programmes (Dill 1996, National Center for Education Information 2003), it is worthwhile to explore the characteristics of alternatively certified teachers as they, too, will have first-years of teaching; if they stay in the profession, they will move through career stages, but they may move at a different pace than their traditionally prepared counterparts. The differences between alternatively certified and traditionally certified teachers have been studied. Alternatively certified teachers tend:

- to be older;
- to have degrees in subjects other than education and more likely to have work experience in occupations other than education;
- to have more work experience;
- to be more likely an ethnic minority;
- to be male;
- to be bilingual; and,
- to prefer teaching in inner-city schools. (Chesley *et al.* 1997, Dial and Stevens 1993, Shen 1997)

Offering a ‘wake-up call,’ Moore Johnson (2001) indicates, ‘Today’s new teachers are as likely to be 40-year-old former lawyers or scientists with a five-week certification course behind them as they are to be 20-somethings fresh from teacher education programs’. Moore Johnson (2004: 268) further relates that ‘many schools and districts—particularly in low-income communities—will continue to hire teachers with minimal formal training because they have no choice but to fill these positions’. Instructional supervisors and school leaders must recognize these traits to guide alternatively certified teachers, and teachers with little educational training to meet their fullest professional potential. Alternatively certified teachers will carry different competencies, based on their previous professional experiences outside of education, and such experiences serve as a starting point for furthering adult learning and professional growth.

Out-of-field teaching

Shortages in key areas often force schools to assign teachers to subjects that they are not prepared to teach. In 1990, it was estimated that over 50,000 non-certified people enter the profession annually (Darling-Hammond 1990), and more recently Ingersoll (2001: 30) noted, ‘out-of-field teaching does not appear to be going away; ... levels of out-of-field teaching have changed little over the past decade’. Calculating the extent of out-of-field assignments is difficult because of the labels used to describe this phenomenon. As Ingersoll explains, ‘in many states teachers are

counted as out-of-field only if they are misassigned for more than half their classes per day. Because most misassignments amount to less than that, the problem is effectively defined out of existence' (2001: 31). Such teaching assignments have become institutionalized, and they tend to be found in the very schools in need of highly qualified teachers.

The data from 2003 illustrate the deleterious effects of both under-qualified and equally inexperienced teachers, especially in high-poverty schools, at all levels:

- At the *elementary level*, more than 13% of teachers in high-poverty schools have less than three years' experience;
- At the *middle school level*, over 50% of students in high-poverty middle schools take a class with a teacher who has not acquired even a minor in the subject he/she teaches; and,
- At the *high school level*, about 32% of students in high-poverty secondary schools take a class with a teacher who has not acquired even a minor in the subject he/she teaches. (Ansell and McCabe 2003)

Shortages lead teachers to be '... routinely asked to teach all the disciplines within the larger field'. As a result, 'in any given school year, [a form of] out-of-field teaching takes place in well over half of all secondary schools in the US' (Ingersoll 1999: 28).

The national reform agendas of the 1980s provided the starting point for the age of accountability and standards for a higher-calibre teaching force. This accountability needs to include supervision for both alternatively certified and out-of-field teachers who struggle to serve students while planning for instruction, securing instructional resources, and assessing student work. Without instructional supervision better geared toward teachers' needs, school leaders perpetuate mediocre instruction from under-prepared teachers, failing both the struggling teachers and their students.

Supervision for a changing teaching force—how to do more

Align supervision evaluation with teacher needs

If a qualified teacher in every classroom is a birthright for children (National Commission on Teaching & America's Future (NCTAF) 1997), then supervision that is responsive to individual needs should be a professional right for teachers. School systems need to provide supervision that supports the differing characteristics of teachers. Schools often encounter difficult situations as classes must be taught or covered by someone, even if that someone is not qualified according to the state guidelines regulating the profession. As a result, principals resort to less-qualified teachers and quick fixes. Another option, that has yet to emerge in the literature, is to provide supervision to meet the needs of out-of-field and non-traditionally prepared teachers. Given what we know about 'out-of-fielders', assistance through supervision and professional development must be built on firmer knowledge and understanding of this increasing pool of teachers.

Emergency supervision

Attrition within high-risk teaching populations (e.g. first-year, alternatively certified, out-of-field) calls for an ‘emergency supervision’ plan to assist teachers entering the profession without requisite knowledge. Since out-of-field teachers have gaps in their knowledge and may be alternatively certified, supervision needs to focus on providing more intensive on-the-job assistance with a ‘hands-on focus’.

A high maintenance supervisory approach at the onset of an out-of-field assignment will yield positive results. If the aims of supervision are to promote teacher growth and development, its practice cannot be viewed as a measure to remediate deficiencies with the teacher being ‘fixed’ by a series of discreet activities. Supervisors need to take a more proactive approach, using the expertise of other teachers to assist the out-of-fielder. Opportunities for mentoring, peer observations, and professional development must be provided with frequent monitoring to ensure that the instructional programme is not compromised because of placement of under-qualified teachers. Follow-up learning opportunities and specific feedback on progress toward mastering skills and subject matter will also need to be coordinated. Supervision, however, cannot be viewed as the ‘quick-fix’ solution to the prevalence of out-of-field teaching. It is but one piece of a larger puzzle in guiding beginning teachers toward proficiency; and like all sustained school improvement, it is ongoing and recursive.

Empathetic supervision is framed around the school’s context

Perhaps, what should count equally is differentiated supervision within the contexts in which teachers work because ‘meeting the challenges of NCLB and providing a competent, caring, and highly qualified teacher for every child will not be possible unless we create schools in which all teachers can thrive’ (The Southeast Center for Teaching Quality 2003: 1). All schools have teacher support structures—supervision, professional development, and teacher evaluation. However, many school leaders fail to connect these support structures to create seamless learning opportunities for teachers. For professional development to make a difference in the lives of teachers and, by extension, the lives of students, teachers need multiple learning opportunities bundled to work in concert with each other. The defining features of such efforts include opportunities that are embedded in the workday (job embedded learning), replete with opportunities for reflection, dialogue, and collaboration.

Without a school culture that supports collaboration, the principal’s supervisory efforts will yield few lasting results. Without collaboration, learning communities cannot develop. In schools that are learning communities, teachers ‘constantly search for new ways of making improvements’ (Fullan 2001: 60), and this is why schools must provide teachers with ongoing support and encouragement to make changes in their instructional practices. Effective supervisors recognize the relationship between accountability, improved teaching, support that teachers need, and the relationships that supervisors build with teachers.

Teacher-led supervision changes power structures

If they are empowered to lead, veteran teachers are in a unique position to assist in steering the course of professional development to include peer mediated forms of supervision (e.g., videotape analysis, action research, portfolio), and ‘teachers who lead leave their mark on teaching. By their presence and their performance, they change how other teachers think about, plan for, and conduct their work with students’ (Little 1988: 103). Given the opportunity, more experienced teachers can help support non-traditional teachers through formal and informal collaboration and interaction.

Differentiated supervision is based on the individual teacher

Given the short shelf lives of beginning teachers, it is critical for supervision to be examined in light of career stage development. Research has shown that instructional supervision that is differentiated across the career continuum is necessary to support teacher growth and development (Glatthorn 1997, Sullivan and Glanz 2000, Zepeda 2003). The importance of induction and socialization into the profession has been well documented, and many states have legislation that dictates intensive assistance (e.g. mentoring) for teachers during the first year of teaching. In addition to this, more school systems have implemented their own programmes to ease the transition into teaching. However, many new teachers entering the classroom for the first time have different characteristics than their predecessors, rendering many of these programmes obsolete and applicable only to those who fit within narrow boundaries mediated on traditional routes to entering the profession. *One-size-fits-all* programmes rarely match the types of assistance needed to survive the realities of working as a teacher and interacting with more diverse student populations. Differences among teachers can be attributed, in part, to the myriad ways in which teachers can be prepared (alternatively certified), and the time in career and age-span in which teachers enter (mid-career changers) or re-enter after raising children or completing a first career.

The relative age of the teaching force, combined with its in-field experience, should guide supervisory and other professional development initiatives. Special design features of such initiatives need to be grounded in what we know about adult learning, career stages, and motivation theory, because veteran teachers have different needs to those of beginning teachers (Brundage 1996, Steffy *et al.* 1999). Although the science of stage and career development is ‘risky business’, with no absolutes, veteran teachers have reported a need for time for collaborative inquiry, such as peer coaching coupled with ‘reflection ... in between’ classroom observations (Brundage 1996: 92).

No fixed formula can explain the plight of the first-year teacher although the literature characterizes this period as a painful test of survival (Wang and Odell 2002). The supervision of first-year teachers is multifaceted, and its complexity is embedded in the workplace conditions of the school that often influence whether new teachers choose to remain in the

school or leave (Bloom and Goldstein 2000, Moore Johnson 2004). To this end, it remains imperative that supervision for novice teachers must break the patterns of:

isolated working conditions where teachers seldom see or hear each other teach ... [and where] Colleagues rarely communicate about instructional matters, especially by requesting or offering professional advice and assistance to each other in efforts to improve. (Rosenholtz 1989: 429)

Supervisors can learn important lessons from the robust research base on first-year teachers by striving to:

- break patterns of isolation (Lortie 1975);
- ease the transition from the role of student or other profession to that of professional educator;
- foster dialogue, critique, and identification of additional support so that beginning teachers do not feel ‘neglected by overburdened school supervisory personnel’ (Grant and Zeichner 1981: 100);
- increase the talk of teaching among teachers;
- attend to the refinement of instructional delivery and assessment of student learning by focusing on ‘transferring the theories learned in preservice training to appropriate teaching practices’ (Fox and Singletary 1986: 14)
- provide opportunities to take risks (Holland and Weise 1998); and,
- link staff development, induction, and mentoring activities (Zepeda 2000).

Implications for high stakes supervision

What implications can be drawn from examining the characteristics of the teaching force and the trends that affect those in the profession? First, the teaching force is at-risk across the continuum from novice through veteran, and all the while the accountability bar keeps rising. Teachers are entering the classroom in record numbers, but many school systems do not provide differentiated supervision that acknowledges, ‘*A new view of learning-to-teach as a coherent, integrated continuum that begins with recruitment and continues through professional preparation and ongoing development*’ (NCTAF 1997: 7).

At one end of the spectrum, beginning teachers need support to make the transition into the profession. The experiences of the first few months (perhaps even weeks) shape beliefs and practices that novice teachers will carry with them throughout their professional careers. At the other end of the spectrum are the 28.8% of teachers who have 20 or more years in the profession (NCES 2004: 132). Moreover, teachers in the middle cannot be overlooked as they also have different learning needs than beginning and veteran teachers.

What appears to be elusive is providing supervision and evaluation that is responsive to the broad-range of needs of teachers who have differing experience levels, varying degrees of preparation, and who, for compelling reasons, are teaching out-of-field. In relation to supervision and evaluation,

are there any points of convergence for a teaching staff in any given school? An absolute answer to this question defies logic.

The new mantra for supervision in this millennium and beyond should be *we must do more* to break the outmoded culture of neglect, where evaluation for accountability supplants supervision that promotes growth and development. For supervision to achieve this lofty goal, these seemingly enduring practices must be replaced with more acutely responsive thinking and action toward the very characteristics of any given teacher in any given school. Supervision similar to the many ‘practices and programs for the ongoing professional development of employed teachers often lack clarity of purpose, focus and rigor’ (NCTAF 1997: 22). We must do more.

Supervision and evaluation must first be broadly examined, then specifically aligned more to the characteristics of teachers—traditionally certified, alternatively certified, beginning, mid-career, and veteran teachers, out-of-field teachers, and teachers who have delayed or re-entered the profession. To align supervision to the characteristics of teachers, supervisors must know the people in their buildings. Gaining this insight about teachers’ needs starts during the hiring process and continues throughout their careers.

What does this mean for teachers, supervisors, and the school systems that educate the 5.2 million students enrolled in K-12 schools in the USA? School improvement lacking a focus on individualized and differentiated supervision and related learning opportunities for adults is shortsighted.

Journal articles, national and federal documents, and other sources speak broadly about professional development, the need for supportive administrators, and the innumerable workplace conditions needed to support teachers. The literature is replete with recommendations regarding accountability standards, such as state testing of competencies, evaluating overall teacher performance based on gains in student achievement on statewide testing, and better screening of applicants entering the teaching profession. These recommendations appear ironic, considering the myriad routes to alternative certification, the prevalence of out-of-field teaching, and the escalating number of mid-careers and beyond, teachers who are either entering or re-entering the profession. We cannot regulate the teaching force to proficiency; this path only takes us so far. Supportive supervision will take us even further.

Although supervision as peer coaching and intensive mentoring by teachers for teachers can forward the original intents of supervision, administrators cannot get off the hook so easily; teachers need support and leaders willing to make supervision a precursor to annual evaluation. The intents behind supervision and evaluation are quite different; however, evaluation without supervision first smacks of professional malpractice.

Do all supervisory roads lead to evaluation?

Given the activities that divert the principal from focusing on the instructional programme supervision is often reduced to meaningless check sheets. This type of pseudo-supervision betrays the intent of the original models

(clinical), the peer-mediated models that began in the early 1980s (coaching), and the more recent models (action research). Koppich (2000: 21) cautions that the ‘outmoded theory of teaching and learning’ which most teacher evaluation systems are based results in lost opportunities for supervision that makes a difference. Teacher evaluation predicated on a summative model is outmoded because:

- It is top-down, requiring little or no involvement on the part of teachers themselves;
- It applies the same teaching standards and criteria, which are often unclear or unstated, to all teachers regardless of years of experience;
- Principals are often not well trained in conducting evaluations, and rarely have adequate time to do so effectively;
- Research has shown that principals’ ratings are not useful in improving instruction;
- There is little evidence to suggest that it is possible to generalize about an individual’s professional competence based on a small number of brief observations;
- Even if the evaluation is based on so-called best practices, it does not adequately assess the quality of instruction or the quality of student learning; and,
- Nearly everyone is rated at least ‘satisfactory’. (Koppich 2000: 21)

For supervision to emerge as a high stakes practice, it must be done as a means to work *with* teachers *before* they are evaluated for accountability. Supervision is often the road less travelled by administrators. Why is it doubtful that all supervisory roads do not lead to evaluation? First, by matter of legally binding agreements with unions, state statutes, and policies adopted by school boards, typically only evaluation is mandatory. Hence, supervision is conducted only when it is included as part of the overall teacher evaluation procedures, or as a means to document remedial progress contained in a plan of improvement. Unfortunately, supervision is rarely applied as an opportunity to enhance teacher growth and professional learning.

This type of emergency-based supervision is similar to what injured people brought to a hospital emergency room experience, where all are triaged. Emergency, or deficit supervision, must be replaced with more responsive and empathetic processes that relate more directly to the context of the school, the characteristics of teachers and students, and the culture of the classroom environment.

Supervision practised as evaluation is a custom that has been embedded as a part of the culture of the US school system. However, this custom can be broken by using, perhaps, the most underutilized resource in the school—teachers. Supervision predicated on teacher leadership would look quite different, regardless of its form (e.g. peer coaching, action research, portfolio development). Institution of such processes would *change* school structures, namely the structures of power and authority. However, while teachers bear great responsibility for improving instruction and taking on leadership roles, school leaders must attune supervision, evaluation, and professional development to meet the needs of all teachers (Moore Johnson, *et al.* 2001,

Wallace 1998). If teachers are to emerge as professional resources, then new roles in supportive environments must be created to sustain more collaborative and inquiring practices. The literature on empowerment supports this new role for teachers:

Teachers learn by doing, reading, and reflecting; ... by collaborating with other teachers; ... and by sharing what they see. This type of learning enables teachers to make the leap from theory to accomplished practice. Such learning requires a setting that supports teacher inquiry and collaboration and strategies grounded in teachers' questions and concerns. To understand deeply, teachers must learn about, see, and experience successful learning-centered ... teaching practices. (Darling-Hammond 1998: 5)

What one sees will be determined by years of experience, relative age, and where the person is in relation to career stage (Huberman 1988). For example, veteran teachers can fill a void by mentoring beginning teachers and others with less experience. Veteran teachers have credibility due to their years in the system; their understanding about how to get things done; and, their broad range and knowledge of instructional strategies. Beginning teachers need help 'seeing' the reality that is often overshadowed and clouded by the emotional turmoil associated with the first years of teaching. Novice teachers might be reluctant to admit a weakness in content, instructional strategies, or classroom management routines because they are being 'judged' as to their overall value and worth during the first year of teaching.

To support peer forms of supervision, 'learning periods' for adults need to be scheduled during the day. If learning from practice was embedded in the workday of teachers, perhaps they could learn from their own practices based on what occurs in the classroom. In research by The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers at the Harvard Graduate School of Education these findings were highlighted:

The new teachers who reported feeling the most supported described their schools as having what we called "integrated professional cultures". There, new teachers could expect frequent and meaningful interaction among faculty members across all experience levels, and an appropriate novice status that accounted for their developmental needs while not underestimating their potential contributions. (Moore Johnson, 2001: 8)

The most successful schools function within a culture of collaboration and collegiality, and struggling schools must make serious strides to institutionalize a collaborative professional culture within the school. While much of this culture functions informally, formal time and resources would be well spent on instructional supervision, professional development, and collaboration between teachers of all subjects, grade levels, and experience levels.

More importantly, if all teachers are empowered to work with supervisors and peers on an equal footing with one another, supervision and other supportive practices can be developed. Out-of-field teachers will need assistance with both content and instruction as it relates to the needs of learners in their classrooms. Alternatively certified teachers will have similar needs, and principals do not necessarily have the expertise or the time to assist them fully. Results reported from a 1999 NCES study revealed 'contrasts between teachers' needs and the policies and practices found in most states and local schools' perpetuate the 'one-size-fits all approach' in that:

New and veteran teachers alike say they do not feel very well prepared to teach effectively to the four fastest changing aspects of the nation's schools—raising standards in the classroom, students with special needs, students from diverse cultural backgrounds, and use of technology. The fact that newer teachers report as much unease as their veteran colleagues indicates that teacher education and *professional development programs* are not addressing the realities found in today's classroom (emphasis added). (Riley 1999: 7)

High stakes supervision requires a great deal of attention and more careful and thoughtful analysis. High stakes supervision is not a model, but an imperative for school communities to strive relentlessly to help their adults grow in ways that can help them accept the challenges they face. If standards-based reform and accountability movements aim to hold teachers and students accountable for their work, school leaders must further embrace their roles as instructional leaders and recognize that the teaching force's needs are just as diverse as those of students. Teachers can and will improve, but they do better with some little assistance. They need administrative support as well as a positive environment promoting personal and professional growth and development. Without high stakes supervision, schools perpetuate the current system of mediocrity, attrition, and burnout. By embracing high stakes supervision, schools nurture better teachers and in turn, better students.

Note

1. The premise of the NCLB legislation is to provide for professional development of teachers working in programmes supported by Title 1 funds. More specifically, Title 1 funds can only be used to support programmes if the teachers in these programmes are highly qualified (NCLB, 2001).

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