

Prologue

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About two years ago we began a conversation about what school supervisors did that resulted in improved teacher performance in the classroom, which in turn would result in improved learning outcomes for students. At a time when all nations are engaged in economic competition and the issues of human capital development are paramount throughout the world, we asked the simple and reasonable question, “Where school supervisors do contribute to improved learning outcomes for students, what is it specifically that they do?” Taking our inspiration from the seminal article by Black and William (1998) and the groundswell of research that followed it about teacher behaviors that positively influenced student outcomes (formative assessment); we wrote a call inviting articles about “formative observation of teachers by their supervisors.” We invited Carol Burris, a high school principal in New York State, and a Fellow of the National Education Policy Center, to write the introduction.

It seemed to us that this was a sensible question to ask. We hoped that the question would provoke and invite readers to consider the

matter of which policies and practices resulted in beneficial outcomes for all students.

As Carol Burris reflects on her experience, and on the contributions of Madelyn Hunter, in her introduction to this issue, we see the political and social pressures that make the simple question that we asked at the outset so difficult to answer. The scripted lessons, numerical evaluations of teachers, checklist-type teacher observation forms to which she refers we recognize are only symptoms, the reasons for their existence are varied, and they run deep. Burris suggests, hopefully, this issue will begin a dialogue among our readers of what effective teaching and productive supervisory relationships might be.

We think that the voices reflected in this issue represent a fair cross section of the issues involved in teacher supervision and in development of effective teachers, but one aspect of what was found is somewhat troubling- only

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one article addressed the topic of the call head-on.

In all of the nations represented by the articles included in this issue, there was a strong concern for improving outcomes, whether by modifying programs for teacher preparation, engaging in self-renewal of faculty, experimenting with videotaping and self-reflection of teachers, or engaging students in problem based instruction for students; only one submission dealt directly with the topic of the call- supervisory practices that are associated with increased student learning. Initially, we were troubled by the lack of such targeted submissions; but all of the submissions reflected the press for improved teaching and teacher preparation. However, more significantly, they also reflected the political, hierarchal nature of teaching and teacher preparation, and the factors that originate from within the society (including poorly prepared teachers) that governments, policy makers, public schools and institutions of higher education have to respond to.

Of the eight articles in this issue, the first describes changes over a ten year period in teacher education in response to external and internal pressures. The second and third article deal with video-taping and self-reflection by teachers as a way to improve instruction. The fourth and fifth articles focus on instructional approaches that are associated with increased student learning. The sixth article describes an approach to improvement of instruction that the school and faculty refer to as *professional renewal and self-assessment*. In the seventh article, the only one to address supervisory practices directly, There was disagreement between teachers and their supervisors about what supervisors actually did when they observed classes and conferred with teachers. The concluding article describes

education in rural Uganda. While does not address teacher supervision, it does speak to two themes that appear in other articles in this this issue: The influence of social pressures on the schools that serve a society, and the need for better prepared teachers- governments simply have to do more and better to prepare the next generation for productive lives. It is included in this issue on supervision to remind us of that.

In the lead article, Fiona Benson describes the evolution in teacher education, specifically the student teaching component, at McGill University, Canada. In describing the changes that occurred in the field based component of teacher education over a ten year period, Benson identifies the drivers of that change-the political and social external pressures that the university had to respond to. In addition to external pressure on the university, social and political pressures were felt by cooperating teachers, and by faculty, because of increases in the number of students in the public schools, and of student teachers, with learning and mental disabilities, and unique sexual orientations. The shortage of funds for on-going, quality professional development in the public schools, arguably among the most cost effective ways to improve teacher effectiveness (Odden & Picus, 2014) was a problem that was recognized, as was the difficulty of providing English language instructional materials for the public schools in Quebec, a province where the official language is French.

In the next article, Leonardo A. Mercado and Laura Baecher examine video-based self-observation done by teachers as a vehicle for individual, reflective practice. Mercado and Baecher describe the systematic application of video-based self-observation the Instituto Cultural Peruano Norteamericano (ICPNA) bi-national center in Lima, Peru by English as a foreign language (EFL). In this article they

describe a large implementation involving 400 teachers, and the institutional benefits of the implementation. They present a program-wide initiative in which video-based self-observation was central to the process of teacher improvement and evaluation. Describing how video-based self-observation impacts teachers supervision, the authors also explain how the reflective process was related to improved teaching, providing insights on specific teacher skills, strategies and techniques that promote student learning. While formative teacher evaluation may provide information to administrators to determine which teachers they want to keep (in addition to improving the practice of teachers), teacher *buy-in* is required to achieve the full benefit. As Mercado and Baecher put it, “. . . getting teachers within a professional community to benefit from reflective practice through video-based self-observation may not be possible unless a conscious decision is made at the institutional level to promote it within a well-defined professional development framework.”

In a somewhat related article Marcia Knoll explores the need for sensitivity on the part of the supervisor to the needs of each teacher. This article addresses effective conferencing strategies and how a college helps program participants to prepare for leadership positions in the public schools. The importance of teacher supervisors to understand the needs of the teachers in order to be able to provide the opportunities for teacher growth through reflection on their practice is stressed.

Mariya Yukhymenko and her associates describe an approach that used *ill-structured problems*, an approach that teachers can use to encourage collaborative learning and create student centered classrooms. Using a strictly structured curriculum dealing with real-world international issues, middle school students in

schools across the United States were engaged an online simulation (with students in other schools) of international decision-making dealing with, economic policies, environment, human rights, and health. At the end of the semester students were debriefed and asked to reflect on what they had learned. The study identified instructional practices that benefits students and teachers. An ancillary outcome was recognition that even in student-centered, self-directed classrooms, teachers played an important role in providing support to students.

In the next article Näslund-Hadley and her associates investigate instructional approaches in classrooms in three Latin American countries to attempt to identify instructional approaches that are associated with higher learning outcomes as measured on the same regional test. Using video-taping of teachers to identify what was actually going on in the classrooms, they found that inquiry based instruction was associated with greater achievement and that complexity of the content, promotion of analytical and critical-thinking skills by the teacher was associated with higher scores on the regional assessments. The study also revealed that drill and memorization dominated instruction, and that many teachers were ill informed about the subjects (math and science) that they were teaching.

At John Paul College (a K-12 ecumenical school), Pauline Mundie and Robert Marr describe the approach that was used to improve instruction- *professional renewal and self-assessment*. The decision to rely on professional renewal was the outcome of discussion among faculty, including school leaders and teachers about how to revise the teacher appraisal process, satisfy the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers; and more importantly, raise student achievement and respond to the learning needs of all students.

Vincent Romano surveyed the teachers and supervisors in a junior-senior high school district in suburban New York about what was actually happening when supervisors observed teachers and then conferred with them about what was going on in the classroom and compared the differences between teacher/supervisor perceptions. Questions such as, "My observer expresses his/her feelings honestly;" "My observer encourages me to identify possible relationships between my particular teaching strategies and desired outcomes;" and "My observer focuses on my concerns by listening actively, reflectively, and empathetically. Teachers and supervisors agreed on ten supervisory behaviors needed for supervisors to promote development of teachers. They disagreed on the degree to which supervisors actually displayed those behaviors. Romano's research, found that the greatest difference in perception between supervisors and teachers was *trust*, which reinforces what Burris noted in the introduction, "if teachers [see] every observation as evaluative, they [will] not be as open to coaching, but would instead, hunker down and be on the defense."

Drajea describes the schools in Rural Uganda noting the relationships that exist between poverty, parents' level of literacy, and the educational opportunities that exist for their children. The report provided no surprises about the relationships that were found. What was encouraging was the fact that all parents, regardless of the level of their own education, recognized education as being important for their children to have a better life and more opportunities than they did. An interesting inclusion in this article is handwritten notes by pupils in the schools in rural, semi-rural, and urban areas about why they were retained in grade and what they expect from their parents. What children want and expect in Rural Uganda is no different from what children want and

expect in all nations. We encourage you to peruse this "scrapbook."

A new addition to this issue and all future issues is a book review section. Eric Martone, the managing editor, has accepted the editorial responsibility for that section and will decide which books will be reviewed. This issue includes a review by Eric Martone of *American Cocktail* by Anita Reynolds with Howard M. Miller. *American Cocktail* is the memoir of Anita Reynolds (1901-1980) a black woman whose unconventional life led to meetings with the greats of her time, including James Joyce, Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, Charlie Chaplin, Picasso, Matisse, and Ralph Bunche, among others.

References

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