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POSITIVE SUPERVISION AND THE QUEST FOR EXCELLENCE

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Introduction

I like to think of teaching as a performing art.

Those who work in the performing arts like to have an audience. Actors and actresses say that contact with their fans is what turns them on. Athletes beg their parents, relatives and friends to come and see them play. Singers, dancers and entertainers – all cater to the sound of applause, applause, applause.

But teachers? Except for a few who are often considered exhibitionists by their colleagues, teachers what to perform in the privacy of their classroom without any outsiders present. Then, at the end of the year (or at the end of their career) they say "no one really appreciated me." How sad!

Let me present three scenarios of how teachers at the tertiary level view supervision. First, a well-known Harvard professor was once approached by one of his students who asked him "Professor, how is it that you never got a graduate degree?" The professor looked somewhat pained and replied, "But my dear, who could possibly teach me?" That is bad!

Perla Maquil, a former Ateneo professor, who has since gone to her reward, when queried about faculty evaluation said, "Ask the students!" This is a fairly representative opinion of those who teach college and graduate school. But its runs the risk of making teaching a popularity game.

The third scenario is exemplified by one of my students who teaches in a well-known Manila University, when she was asked: "What should supervision be like in my school?" She wrote:

Unfortunately, supervision at the college level (in my school) is very minimal or in my case, nil. The closest thing we have to a performance evaluation is the student evaluation once each year."

Recently, through the initiative of the faculty in our college, peer evaluation is being considered. We will finally have what we ate hungering for – some procedures that will provide us with feedback as to whether we are effectively achieving school goals and using the right techniques."

Teachers in our college are practitioners with no background whatsoever in teaching. . . . The clamor for direction, guidance, support, and motivation; or, in short, for effective supervision is, indeed, understandable.

Three Dogmatic Statements about Supervision

At the outset of this paper, I would like to make three somewhat dogmatic statements about supervision. They are based on the more than 40 years experience of the Philippine Accrediting Association of School, Colleges, and Universities or PAASCU, as it is popularly called.

First

The quality of a school is almost directly proportionate to the quality of instruction given in that school. What does PAASCU think spells quality? Is it the number of hectares of property? Is it the number of concrete multi-storied building? Is it the number of volumes in the library? Is it the number of computers available to the students for hands-on use? The answer to all those questions is NO. By and large PAASCU says that the quality of the school is determined by what goes on inside the classrooms of the school. It is the quality of classroom instruction that is the gauge of a school's quality.

Second

The quality of classroom instruction given in a school is very much dependent upon the quality of the performance of the faculty who teach in the school. Is it the number of years the professors have been teaching that constitutes quality? Is it the number of advanced degrees they have acquired? Is it the number of articles and books they have written? Once again, the answer to all questions is NO. The crucial questions us: "How do the professors perform day after day in the classroom?"

These statements are based on the 40 years experience of PAASCU. When a team visits a schools for two days almost one entire day – 5% of their time in school — is spent visiting classrooms. Another indication is that at the end of the visit — during the wrap-up session — the highest weights are given to the areas of faculty and instruction.

I would like to push the PAASCU experience one step further and ask, "How can we improve faculty performance is open related to the type of direct supervision teachers have received in the past or are receiving at present.

Third

The leads to the third dogmatic statement which says the quality of faculty performance in the classroom is often related to the type of supervision faculty members have receive. Certainly, there are many indictors of excellent faculty performance; for example, student evaluation, student performance on standardized achievement tests, student research output, to name a few. But I suggest that supervision and performance evaluation by peers, chairs, and dean should also rank high here.

I know that visitation of faculty is not a popular theme. Some professors see it is an invasion of privacy. Some would say it is a breach of academic freedom. Some see it as "snooper-version" or an exercise in faultfinding. I would like to suggest that this is because of a warped or faulty understanding of the nature of supervision. Much of this animus against visitation stems from the history of supervision.

History of Supervision in the Philippines

A brief overview of the history of instructional supervision in the Philippines would look like this (Ruiz 1972):

1900-1924

At first supervision was seen as inspection carried on by civic officials for purposes of control. We have a vestige of this today in certain family proprietary schools where those who build and finance the school feel they have a right to inspect and make policy even when they are not professional educators themselves.

1925-1941

The famous Monroe Survey led to a shift in authority from civic officials to educators but the emphasis was on specialization. Special teachers (sometimes called supervisors) decided what would be taught to whom. We have a vestige of this today in our syllabus writers and curriculum coordinators.

1946-1969

After World War II, the catch phrase was public relations. Supervisors were supposed to have "smooth interpersonal relations" and rapport with their teachers. But the supervision of this period was really not much different from its predecessors. Supervisors still told teachers what to teach and by implication the way it should be taught.

One way to begin is to model various aspects of classroom teaching yourself — whatever you can do well — be it exposition, questioning, drilling, facilitating a discussion. This will lend greater credibility to the process. It shows that you yourself are not excluded from the process.

Another avenue of approach is to ask one of the master teachers on the faculty to agree to the criteria by which he or she is going to be evaluated.

Other points to be agreed upon might include when to arrive, how long to stay, and the focus of the evaluation. In other words, will the supervisor focus on one aspect of teaching or will he attempt to assess the total situation? If there has been no prior visitation of classes, I suggest that the initial visit be announced and not rated. Even though this may produce a "canned lesson" with little spontaneity, there is a value in allowing the teacher the satisfaction of preparing and delivering a good lesson.

During the Visit

Presuming that these points have general consensus, I suggest that during the actual visit(s), the supervisor follow a three-stage process which begins with a "pop-in visit," then moves on to a "formal visit," and finally to a "clinical visit."

The Pop-in Visit

Formal visits lasting a full hour or more are what the most teachers are afraid of. Therefore, I suggest the college professors might derive more profit from shorter pop-in visit. Even if the visit is announced, it may be sufficient at the outset to observe how the class begins? Is there any connection with previous classes? Is the content of the new lesson presented so that it is understandable? Are different points of view and specific examples given when appropriate? Is the class attentive and when appropriate so student actively participated in the lesson? Even if the supervisor stays for only half a period, these points can be observed and commented upon during the post conference.

The Formal Visit

When the supervisor feels that the young teacher has a sufficient number of pop-in visits and when the supervisor feels that support has been given and rapport has been established, it may be time to move on to the formal visit. While on the one hand, the pop-in visit was brief, without any special preparation on the part of the teacher; on the other hand, the formal visit is a schedule full-period visit will take place, why it is being conducted, and what he or she needs to do to prepare for the visit. Another big difference is that

whereas the pop-in visit is developmental in nature and no rating is normally given, the formal visit may be developmental and evaluative. Therefore, it may be rated.

The Clinical Visit

Once the young teacher has had a sufficient number of pop-in visits, rather than scheduling a formal visit, the supervisor may suggest that they move to Clinical Supervision. This is a type of instructional supervision which draws its data from focused observation of a previously planned class and which involves face-to-face interaction between supervisor and teacher (Acheson & Gall, 1986).

When compared with other types of visits, the clinical visit is more democratic, more teacher centered, and more interactive. Supervisor and teacher mutually agree upon the content, the time, and the place. The purpose is to focus on the acquisition of one teaching skill. It is normally not rated.

Whereas in other types of visits, the teacher prepares and the supervisor observe the lesson and leads the feedback session, in the clinical visit, the teacher and supervisor prepare the lesson together. The supervisor's role is to monitor the class when taught and facilitate the initiative and is led to acritique his/her own performance.

After the Visit

The post-conference conducted after the visit is where the hard work of the supervisor will bear fruits. If the teacher has received positive and helpful feedback, the teacher will be encouraged to develop new skill and become a more effective teacher. To use Stephen Covey's (1993) phase, the post-conference should be a "win-win situation." Ideally, it should be a conversation about effective teaching carried on by two professionals who respect each other.

With due considerations given to choice of time and place of the post-conference, a good rule to follow is "different strokes for different folks." The key is to prepare not only what you will say, but also how you will say it. Try to involve the teacher in the discussion by asking leading questions, by avoid acrimony. It is good idea to have a written copy of the suggestion(s) you want to make but the wise supervisor should avoid a long, laundry list of picky points accompanied by "these are just a few, little things I would like you to consider." A gentle feedback session with one solid suggestion for improvement works better than lengthy, Olympian decrees. Each post-conference should conclude with the door left open for a future visit.

If the supervisor concludes by saying "Would you like me to come to visit, again (and if the young teacher replies in the affirmative) He might ask: "Is there some aspect of your teaching that you would like to me to observe?" This not only opens the door for future

visits, but also encourages the invitational type observation where the teachers takes the highly desirable to be involved in the process.

Conclusion

The clinical visit is the best example of positive supervision. Where traditional supervision is supervisor-centered, clinical supervision is teacher-centered. Where in traditional supervision the teacher alters his/her teaching style according to the suggestion of the supervisor, now the teacher r takes the initiative. Where in the bad, old days, if the supervisor was satisfied, the teacher was satisfied, too, and the result was often complacency or stagnation; now the questions being asked are:

"How can this teacher become more self-directed?"

"How can we improve the teaching-learning situation together?"

"How can we get the teacher to take ownership of and responsibility for improving classroom performance?"

I think those of us who work in Philippines colleges and universities are ready to ask and answer the very same questions.

A Personal Note:

I would like to thank Dr. Melgosa and the organizers of this Forum for inviting me to share my ideas on supervision. *Regrettably, the death of my brother prevented me from being present for the forum on September 2. I thank you for your prayers.*

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