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Approaches to Teacher Supervision and Their Implications for Pre/In-service Language Teacher Education*

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This study explores two major approaches to language teacher supervision: judgemental and non-judgemental approaches. A distinction is drawn between 'general supervision' and 'clinical supervision'. We closely examine the two approaches in terms of underlying assumptions, major concerns, and strengths and weaknesses. Then we look at four issues that teacher educators need to take into account: 1) the problem of evaluation of teaching practice; 2) the degree of the clarity of standards; 3) affecting factors; and 4) various trainees' reaction. Some implications are also given for the choice of a teacher supervision model in pre- and in-service language teacher training and education.

I. INTRODUCTION

Language teacher supervision is an important aspect in any teacher education programme, but it has received scanty attention in the field of teacher education. The traditional approach to teacher education is characterized as top-down, trainer-centered and knowledge-based. Over the last two decades, the traditional approach has been challenged in the sense that it failed to provide teachers with opportunity to reflect on their actions. It is also criticized for forcing teachers into the role of passive recipients of prescriptions. What is called for is supervisory models which help teachers to be more critical and reflective of their own teaching.

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One recurring question regarding teacher supervision is how supervisors could help teachers become aware of their own learning process. The present study sets its aim to examine different approaches to teacher supervision and to seek a way of making supervision more meaningful and helpful to reflective teaching. But it has its limitations- for example, lack of experimental studies in the field of language teacher education. This may make the current study sound theoretical and operational.

To elaborate terms, teacher supervision is presented here as an interactive process involving two individuals: the teacher (or the student teacher) and another person, teacher educator, trainer, administrator, mentor or colleague. These two individuals are engaged in process, the purpose of which is to generate some form of change in the teacher or in his teaching (Freeman, 1989). Flanders (1970) discusses the part a supervisor takes in the process as a helper in improving teaching effectiveness (p. 10). In the literature of language teacher education, the term 'supervisor' is defined in different ways. However, it seems to be the case that there exists a superior-subordinate relationship between a supervisor and a teacher being supervised (Early & Bolitho, 1981; Nettle, 1988). In the present discussion, we adopt Ralph's (1994) definition of a supervisor as any experienced educator, such as school or school district administrator, classroom cooperating teacher, university faculty advisor, mentor, or peer/ colleague with a leadership role in the helping relationship (p. 354).

II. CLINICAL SUPERVISION

Clinical supervision developed in the mid 1950's when Morris Cogan and his associates, supervising student teachers at Havard University, faced the fact that what they were doing was not working. The supervisory crew hammered out ways that yielded greater gains and more satisfaction. Soon the scope of the work reached out beyond pre-service teacher education to the in-service area. Cogan called the system of supervision 'clinical supervision' because it operated right in the clinic of the classroom and depended on direct observation of manifest behaviour. See Cogan (1973) for the overview of clinical supervision. As Cogan (1973) points out, the word 'clinical' has allusions of sickbeds, hospitals, and mortal illness but he argues for the appropriateness of the word 'clinical' because it refers

to 'the presentation, analysis, and treatment of actual cases and concrete problems in some special field' (p. 8). In other words, the term was selected to draw attention to the emphasis placed on classroom observation, analysis of in-class events, and the focus on teachers' and students' in-class behaviour.

Cogan(1973) makes a distinction between the use of the terms 'general supervision' and 'clinical supervision'(p. 8). According to his distinction, 'general supervision' takes place principally outside the classroom. It denotes activities like the writing and revision of curricula, the preparation of units and materials of instruction, the development of processes and instruments for reporting to parents, and such broad concerns as the evaluation of the total educational programme. On the other hand, 'clinical supervision' focuses on the improvement of the teacher's classroom instruction. The principal data of clinical supervision include records of classroom events, that is what the teacher and students do in the classroom during the teaching-learning process. Therefore, clinical supervision may be defined as the rationale and practice designed to improve the teacher's classroom performance. As defined by Reavis (1976), clinical supervision rests on the belief that instruction can only be improved by direct feedback to a teacher on aspects of his teaching (p. 360). Clinical supervision is distinct from general supervision in the sense that its domain is linked to the level of classroom teaching behaviour and it involves supervision in direct contact with a teacher (Cogan, 1973).

Many teacher educators accept the distinction between general supervision and clinical supervision, but they often include various approaches ranging from extremely judgemental to non-directive supervision within clinical supervision (Wallace, 1991). Within this structure, different approaches, judgemental or non-judgemental, can be applied, though the question is which approach is more appropriate to a certain purpose in a given situation. Here, we accept the distinction between general supervision and clinical supervision. It is, however, made simply to stress the narrower focus of the discussion. In the present discussion, the term 'supervision' refers to a clinical supervision, which includes various approaches to supervision.

III. APPROACHES TO LANGUAGE TEACHER SUPERVISION

We turn to the issue on how supervision is to be carried out. Most who

contemplate the improvement of instruction through supervision ask what supervisory approach is most appropriate for enabling teachers to improve instruction and learning in their classroom. As Zeichner and Liston (1987) note, there exist numerous disagreements over supervisory methods among teacher educators. As indicated earlier, they range from a very prescriptive approach at one end to a very flexible approach at the other. It is likely that patterns and styles of supervision can be categorized by infinite divisions, and they overlap in various ways. We also come across a wide variety of terms used, for example, non-directive, client-centered, developmental and many others.

The above terms show a wide choice of supervisory behaviors which teacher educators can use in the process of training teachers. Now we need to make it clear how we categorize approaches to supervision in the subsequent discussion. What is needed here is a way to categorize supervision usefully yet simply. We take a very broad division. With respect to the question of how to carry out the supervision, two different approaches appear in the literature: judgemental and non-judgemental approaches. A distinction is made between these main approaches. Prescriptive, non-collaborative and directive modes are different names of the judgemental approach. Collaborative, developmental and non-directive models of supervision are used interchangeably with the non-judgemental approach. The underlying assumptions of these two main approaches will be discussed. In the following sections, the argument will be made with contrasting views of the role of supervisor, the definition of supervision, advantages or disadvantages of each. Through the examination of two approaches we intend to seek a way of making supervision more meaningful and helpful to teachers' reflective and creative teaching in the field of language teacher education.

1. Judgemental Approach

In this approach, the evaluation of the teacher predominates and the authority position of the supervisor is evident. As indicated earlier, this approach is alternatively called 'prescriptive', 'directive approach' or 'non-collaborative approach'. They commonly refer to a type of supervision operated within a certain frame of reference to evaluate teaching performance.

1) Underlying Assumptions and Major Concerns

This approach assumes that the supervisor is an expert or professional whose major role is to make a critical assessment of the person's teaching ability. Wallace (1991) describes a supervisor as an authority figure with expert status and he knows what ought to be done in a given situation. Obviously, the description is related to professional status and power hierarchy. Cogan (1973) illustrates this:

As soon as a situation arises in which one person needs help and another gives it, a situationally determined hierarchy tends to be established. This hierarchy is characterized by the ascendancy of the giver and the subordination of the receiver (p. 66).

There seems to be the view that a supervisor, who has observed hundreds of lessons, is more highly skilled than someone who is new to the profession. Withall and Wood (1979) also describe the image of a supervisor in the traditional approach:

Supervisors have tended to project an image of superiority and omniscience in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of a teacher's performance and in offering advice concerning how to improve future performance (p. 55).

The judgemental supervision is linked to the assumption that competencies can be isolated in teacher training. The judgemental supervision is characterized as directed toward prescribed ends. This approach is directed towards assessing whether the job is being done in a satisfactory manner. Usually it entails comments on the strengths and weaknesses of the teacher's observed performance. The supervisor tells the teacher what he did wrong and what he can do to put it right. The process is perceived as providing feedback on deficiencies or problems in need of correction or improvement.

It may be fair to say that the judgemental approach has been rejected by many teacher educators for its prescriptive nature. However, this does not mean that there is no place for it. This approach could serve a certain purpose. For example, we could find a good ground for this approach in the inevitable situation where administrative evaluation is required. In order to make administrative decisions, the

supervisor may evaluate a teacher by using a rating instrument or his own frame of reference as the criteria. Since its underlying assumption is that teaching should be conducted in a certain way, it has more often been justified in the pre-service training situation, where teacher observation is done mainly for training purposes. In a similar vein, Bowers (1987) speaks of the need for the prescriptive model of supervision: "It is a means of developing in a cohort of teachers, normally within a group context, a set of desired skills or habits, frequently relating to a given curriculum or set of materials" (p. 138). Freeman (1982) puts this approach at the first stage in the hierarchy of needs, saying that the merits of the supervisory approach lie in the clarity of its standards and in its emphasis on improving specific teaching skills (p. 22).

In terms of the trainees' reaction to the prescriptive approach, we find some positive signs. The students in McGarvey and Swallow's (1986) investigation detected positive effects in building up confidence in their capacity of planning, presenting and experiencing classroom aids (p. 131). Copeland's (1982) study revealed that some trainee teachers felt the need to be told what to do when they first began to teach. The teachers in the investigation further pointed out that if the supervisor did not give directions, then he was not seen to be qualified. This result would be attributed to their insecurity in teaching without knowing what was expected. Many language teacher educators (for example, Chang, 1995, 1999; Delamere, 1986; Gebhard, 1984) note that many teachers prefer judgemental approaches to supervision and it is often the case that most are not the enlightened individuals they are claimed to be and even if they are, many actually desire the help and advice of an expert.

2) Some Pitfalls

While the prescriptive approach, as has been discussed, serves certain purpose, there are major pitfalls in implementing it. Most of all, the judgemental approach possesses psychological threat and it can be frightening to the teacher. As supervision is focused on whether teachers are performing certain teaching techniques well or badly, they become anxious about being judged by the supervisor. A supervisory session on the performance is threatening to the teacher, particularly when things go wrong. The problem here fundamentally lies in the question, 'Who exercises power?' The teacher is very likely to perceive the

supervisor as a person who can and does make evaluation of his performance. As Cogan (1973) notes, the fabric of the teacher-supervisor relationship in the judgemental approach is almost invariably colored by some threads of the rater-ratee relationship (p. 63).

The following concern is with its effectiveness in improving the trainee's teaching practice and further in developing his self-evaluation ability. In fact, it is not certain that it always succeeds in improving the trainee's teaching skills. Gower and Walters (1983) point out that teachers are told what they did wrong but they may not change their behavior. This is to say that they are often overloaded with too many critical comments so they accept everything and change nothing. Smyth (1991) ascribes this result to the fact that the prescriptive supervision creates dependence rather than independence. It is not directly related to the teachers' agendas, issues and concerns, but rather to those of someone within the bureaucratic hierarchy, that is, the supervisor's. Mutual communication between two parties concerned is very limited in the prescriptive approach. Blumberg and Cusick's (1970) study of the verbal interaction between the supervisor and teachers during feedback conferences, revealed that the supervisor gave his own opinions and ideas four times as often as he asked for the teacher's ideas. The research also found that teachers passively accepted the supervisor's opinions, and that both the supervisor and teachers were playing out some kind of giver-receiver roles.

As Carr (1984) emphasizes, it is not sufficient to acquire a stock of sophisticated teaching techniques and master the intricacies of modern technological aids (p. 4). Teachers need to learn about theorizing their practice in ways that enable them to develop their own self-appraisal. We raise doubts on how effective prescriptive supervision appears to be in this respect. As we have suggested, it can meet the aim of helping teachers to acquire certain teaching skills but none of the points made about judgemental supervision seems to be helpful in the further requirement, that is self-awareness and self-criticism.

2. Non-judgemental Approach

The non-directive approach is supported by a holistic view of teacher education which sees teaching as more than technical aspects of classroom management. Non-judgemental supervision serves as a means of encouraging teachers to see teaching with a developmental perspective. Competency-based teacher education is

challenged. The skill-based approach appears straightforward since it assumes that a good teacher is one who acquires a set of specific technical skills (Delamere, 1986, p. 327). It is criticized for its limited ability to help teachers grow further as teachers. This challenge leads to the point that the traditional prescriptive supervision, rooted in the competency-based approach to teacher education, should be examined. There is a parallel between the developmental approach to teacher education and a non-judgemental approach to supervision. A paradigm shift from directive top-down supervision to more teacher-centered supervision has occurred through effort to seek the kind of supervision that encourages teachers' critical self-evaluation for long-term teaching professional development. Non-judgemental supervision is used to cover various patterns of teacher-centered approaches to supervision. It includes supervision provided in a non-threatening manner with positive reinforcement. We will look at some underlying assumptions of the approach and its advantages over the traditional judgemental supervision.

1) Underlying Assumptions

This alternative approach objects to the hierarchical relationship of the traditional approach. Many teacher educators characterize the teacher-supervisor relationship in this approach as a helping relationship (for example, see Cogan, 1973). In the helping relationship, trust, openness, willingness to listen, non-judgemental manner and support are key conditions if the teacher's self-development is to take place. The relationship can be further developed as a kind of partnership rooted in moral support. As Kim (1996) indicates, the rationale for this relationship derives from a belief that the teacher's self-development is more likely to flourish within the cooperation between the supervisor and the teacher. Both the supervisor and the teacher give and receive support: it is suggested that perspectives of those concerned, that is, a supervisor and a teacher, should be respected. Cogan (1973, p. 69) observes this relationship:

In the collegueship it is easier for professionals to help each other and at the same time strengthen themselves professionally and personally than it is within the structure of the other relationships recommended for supervision (p. 69).

With respect to atmosphere, the supervisor-teacher relationships defined above

build a base for a non-threatening relationship between them, since mutual trust and respect is crucial. The atmosphere considered most appropriate to the rationale developed here is friendly. Williams (1989) emphasizes that high morale, good group relationships, and a friendly atmosphere are what we need. Non-judgemental supervision should be pursued with the aim of encouraging the teacher to express his own reflections and self-evaluation which should lead him to more effective improvement in teaching. While in the traditional prescriptive model the trainer dominates the feedback session, support for the trainee's active involvement in the dialogue about his teaching is essential. As is already implied, the supervisor and the teacher share responsibility for improving self-evaluation. Smyth (1991) argues this point:

What we need to do is to fundamentally transform the basis upon which changes purportedly occur in [teaching and] supervision—from one that endorses (however subtly) an authoritarian and manipulative approach, to one that actively empowers teachers, providing them with an ideological framework for uncovering the myths, metaphors and constraints of that teaching. Accordingly, teachers would cease to be the passive recipients of other people's theories and become participants in codifying meaning and understanding in what they do (p. 9).

We have pointed out underlying assumptions of the non-judgemental approach to teacher supervision. In the subsequent section, we shall look at some of its major concerns and advantages over the traditional prescriptive supervision.

2) Major Concerns and Some Advantages

As the teacher is encouraged to take part in the evaluation, the teacher becomes more autonomous and self-confident and, as he becomes more capable of self-evaluation, the supervisor's role becomes secondary. This does not mean that the expertise of the supervisor is devalued. Rather we emphasize that the person who has the greatest influence over development as a teacher is neither college tutor, headteacher at the school, nor administrator, but the teacher himself. An observation made by Wilson et al. (1969) bears directly on this point:

Teachers are asking not for supervisors to relieve them of decision-making functions, but for an increase in their professional responsibilities as teachers. They are asking, in short, to become participants in supervision rather than the object of it (p. 21).

In that case, supervision should be channelled towards why behavior has succeeded or failed, devising further alternative strategies, instead of towards simply talking about how much the teacher did in the way he had been taught. The supervisor stimulates open discussion of alternative teaching strategies, presenting other perspectives. The teacher takes part in enriching himself with alternative strategies, and therefore the horizon of the teacher's perspective is enlarged. This alternative approach shares the same spirit as the reflective teaching model about this point: the teacher should be considered as a critical learner through teaching (see Nettle, 1988). He learns about teaching through being engaged in critical inquiry into his own teaching.

The student teachers in McGarvey and Swallow (1986), in the non-directive approach, admired their tutors' flexibility and sensitivity. Williams (1989), in a scheme of developmental classroom visits in an in-service teacher training programme for primary teachers in Singapore, found that both teachers and trainers viewed the non-directive method as positive; they did not consider the tutor's persistent quests for analysis to be threatening, rather they appreciated that this was a valuable means of probing the complexities of teaching.

IV. SOME IMPLICATIONS

It has become clear that non-prescriptive supervision provides more theoretical grounds for positive reinforcement in improving teaching particularly in terms of teacher's self-development. With regard to supervision, several things are important to consider in implementing those alternative suggestions made in the previous section.

1. The Problem of Evaluation

As Cogan (1973) notes, one pitfall lies in the fact that evaluation is an almost

uneradicable human tendency and it has great survival value. Sergiovanni and Strarratt (1979) point out a deep problem embodied here:

The focus of human relations supervision was and still is an emphasis on 'winning friends' in an attempt to influence people. To many, 'winning friends' was a slick tactic which made the movement seem manipulative and inauthentic, even dishonest (p. 4).

It has been suggested that the supervisor should clearly divorce himself from the role of evaluator or rater. However, the question is how we can completely separate the supervisor's evaluation from normative judgements about teaching in general. At least in the initial phases of the supervisory programme, evaluation functions as judgemental assessment rather than as guide, and anxiety persists because the teacher knows that the supervisor evaluates his teaching in view of past experiences. In this situation, it does not seem to be easy to establish a non-threatening relationship with teachers in the face of anxiety about supervisory evaluation. Freeman (1982) suggests that the trainer should exercise self-discipline in order to avoid the problem and this suggestion brings us to another subject which is the training of teacher trainers.

2. The Degree of the Clarity of Standards

The alternative non-judgemental approach does not seem to provide us with the same clarity of standards on improving specific teaching skills as the prescriptive approach does. In the prescriptive situation, there are usually clear-cut guidelines on the role of supervisor: it is easier and neater for trainers to give trainee teachers 'assessment', that is, good or bad, rather than to encourage them to reflect and experiment with their teaching. In the alternative approach they should be involved in discussion rather than telling what was right or wrong. To introduce non-judgemental, developmental supervision as a teaching and learning processes requires considerable work on the part of the trainer. In Abbott's (1985) study, some supervisors did not choose the collaborative approach suggested, saying that its process was not clear and they did not understand it. It is trainers job to decide which line to take in between.

3. Affective Factors

Another point we consider is that styles of supervision can be influenced by such factors as the supervisor's personal preference, the aim of the training course, trainee teachers, and the cultural background. Wallace (1991) notes that some supervisors may show characteristics of both approaches in the same supervisory conference, or may use more of one approach with less experienced student teachers and more of the other approach with qualified and experienced teachers (p. 110). Also there seems to be some time when supervisors should not only concentrate on isolated items of teaching skills, but at the same time give considerable help and support for self-development. Then negotiation between different approaches may be inevitable. For instance, in the cultural background where a supervisor has been respected as one with superior power, there is less chance that the collaborative approach will be implemented.

4. Various Trainees' Reaction

There are confusing findings about trainees' reaction to different styles of supervision. The trainee teachers in McGarvey and Swallow's (1986) survey acknowledged that they did not find the directive approach a valuable way to proceed, though it had certain positive effects. The experienced teachers in Copeland (1982) showed positive reactions to a prescriptive supervisory approach. In the investigation undertaken by Perlberg and Theodor (1975), the reactions of teachers with teaching experience indicate that they preferred to be encouraged, to receive polite criticism. They rejected exclusive criticism, imposed opinions, or no permission to talk. On the other hand, they expected the supervisor to know what was right or wrong and to tell them what to do and how to do it, and for this to be done in a pleasant manner. Wallace (1991, p. 115) calls it 'pleasant authoritarianism'. In addition, although the aim was to help the teachers to create reflective teaching, some trainee teachers showed strong resistance to having their teaching thoroughly scrutinized by someone they did not know very well, that is, the supervisor.

V. CONCLUSION

Whereas answers to the question of appropriateness of supervisory approach must include additional factors such as cultural assumptions and preferences, we hold that the non-judgemental approach is more effective in raising the teacher's awareness of his teaching. The argument of this study has been that teachers benefit from feedback processes that enable them to gain understanding and empowerment over their own teaching. It has also been suggested that the opportunity for more collaborative supervision, as much as possible, should be given to foster autonomy and self-evaluation. We believe that it is a viable alternative in the sense that it at least provides a starting point for the teacher's critical thinking, self-evaluation, and even long-term professional development. It is suggested that the non-judgemental approach should be considered as a way to make supervision more meaningful and helpful for the improvement of teaching and the development of teacher growth.

Up to now, the present study has discussed the question of how supervision can be practised if it is to be a process designed to help teachers learn about and improve their teaching. A distinction between judgemental and non-judgemental approaches to the supervisory process has been made. A brief review of the literature indicates that the majority of educators who have written on this topic tend to prefer a non-judgemental over a judgemental approach to teacher supervision. This trend assumes that the role of the supervisor should change from that of an authoritarian to that of a collaborator or counsellor in an effort to build an atmosphere of cooperation and openness to new ideas. This paper has also discussed potential benefits from collaborative supervision within which a relationship between teachers and supervisors is based on the negotiation of purposes and a more symmetrical power relationship. There is clearly much more that can be discovered about the ways supervision helps teachers improve teaching. It is hoped that in the future continued exploration of models of supervision will help teachers and supervisors learn more about teaching in general and improve their own teaching.

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