DIFFERENTIATED SUPERVISION MODEL: A WAY OF IMPROVING SCHOOL LEADERSHIP IN SAUDI ARABIA

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the differentiated supervision initiative that was implemented in some Saudi schools as a way for school leadership improvement. Four reports written by the supervisors of districts participating in the initiative were qualitatively analyzed looking for their main themes. All reports agreed that the model is effective and helps to improve instruction and the school environment. There was also agreement that the model enhanced the role of the supervisor in the instructional aspect of the schools' daily life. According to these reports, another advantage of the model was that it increased the ability of the supervisor to focus on a few schools. Major weaknesses and barriers to its implementation were also identified.

Keywords: *school leadership, differentiated supervision, professional development*

INTRODUCTION

Instructional supervision is "the comprehensive set of services provided and processes used to help teachers facilitate their own professional development so that the goals of the school districts or the school might be better attained" (Glatthorn, 1990, p. 84). Thus, supervision is a way of offering to teachers specialized help in improving their work (Oliva & Pawlas, 1999). It is a process that involves working with teachers in a collegial, collaborative relationship to enhance the quality of teaching and learning within schools and that promotes the professional development of teachers (Beach & Reinhartz, 2000).

Supervision in Saudi schools

According to the Supervisor Guide (Ministry of Education, 1999), educational supervision in Saudi Arabia has gone through four main stages: strict administrative inspection, "educational" inspection, direction, and supervision.

The 1957 inspection system, which is the traditional form of supervision, involved strict inspections supervised by the Ministry of Education. Inspectors were expected to visit each school three times during the school year in order to inspect the administrative and instructional aspects of the school and to enforce Ministry regulations. This type of inspection was characterized by the behaviors of telling, directing, and judging. Often, the purpose of the supervisory visits to schools was to identify mistakes or shortcomings. In 1964, this system was changed to technical

(instructional) inspection. The word "technical" was used to denote the educational and scientific aspects of the inspections and to move the focus away from the administrative inspection. In reality, the nature of the inspection did not change. Inspectors were assigned new tasks that focused on the instructional aspects of the schools in addition to administrative aspects.

In 1967, inspection sections were established in the districts' educational directorates, and the inspection sections were linked to the departments of elementary, intermediate, and secondary schools. Each district inspector was expected to submit a biannual report on his/her work to the inspectors in the Ministry of Education. Later, the title of "inspector" was changed to "director", and directors were encouraged to develop good working relationships with teachers.

In 1981, another significant development in supervision occurred in Saudi Arabia: the establishment of the Department of Instructional Supervision and Training within the Ministry of Education. In 1996, the title of the directors was officially changed to "instructional supervisors" (Ministry of Education, 1999).

Supervisory practice in Saudi Arabia has been rooted more in tradition and personal preferences than in a body of research or knowledge. Supervisors in Saudi schools do not follow a set approach to supervision. In fact, most of them do not have clear, well-defined goals (Almakushi, 2003). Although the situations vary considerably between schools and regions, nearly all of the supervisors perform the same tasks within the general guidelines that are mandated by the Ministry of Education. Thus, supervisory practices are largely built from personal experiences and experimentations. Because supervisors are typically appointed without prior preparation, the quality of their work depends strongly on their personal abilities, qualifications, and willingness to work. In some research studies, teachers and supervisors have indicated that there is a need to revise the supervision system in Saudi Arabia (Al-Tuwaijri, 1985).

Research in Saudi Arabia (Al-Tuwajri, 1985; Alabduljabar, 2008) has shown that teachers desire an alternative model of supervision characterized by shared teacher-supervisor responsibility, collegial rather than superordinate supervision, cooperation and trust rather than imposition and fear, and a democratic rather than authoritarian process. Saudi teachers also support the use of different supervisory activities.

In 1997, the Ministry of Education proposed the *new supervision practice*, and supervisors were highly encouraged to employ it. In this new system, collegial supervisory and staff development activities were emphasized. In addition, the co-supervisor was proposed as an on-site supervisor. The co-supervisor is an expert teacher whose teaching load is reduced so that he/she can arrange professional development activities for teachers.

The genesis of supervision and the practices of many supervisors are tied to classroom visits and evaluations. For both teachers and supervisors, it is difficult to

separate supervision from these two practices. Supervision is often confused with the evaluation of teachers. This confusion hinders the improvement of supervision. According to Al-Tuwaijri (1985, p. 167), "Saudi supervisors generally are of the opinion that teachers feel insecure during the supervisor's classroom visit."

For the most part all of the different approaches and models of supervision have the ultimate goal of supervision as an aim: improving instruction. Improving instruction, which eventually improves students' outcomes, is the purpose of every supervisory system. Supervision in Saudi Arabia, as in other countries, encounters many difficulties in achieving its goals. According to Starratt (1997), "there is no research that shows that supervision, as it is generally practiced, results in substantial and sustained changes in teachers' teaching" (p. 6). In his study, Alhammad (2000) surveyed the obstacles facing supervisory practices. The major obstacles were: (1) lack of trust between teachers and supervisors, (2) the supervisors' high load of teachers, (3) lack of training for supervisors, (4) weak relationships between teachers and supervisors, (5) lack of cooperation from principals, (6) the amount of office and paper work supervisors must complete, and (7) the emphasis on the classroom visit as the only supervisory practice.

Many models have been implemented; however, more reform efforts are needed. Problems such as tension and lack of mutual trust between supervisors and teachers, poor staff development programs, and ritual supervisory activities, to mention a few, are common in the school environment. The supervision field must develop a supervision model that can integrate the advantages of the other models while avoiding their shortcomings.

Differentiated Supervision

Differentiated supervision is among the latest approaches to supervision. It aims to carefully consider the individual differences among teachers, on the one hand, and the human relations between the supervisor and the teachers, on the other. Thus, it provides teachers with the opportunity to choose the type of supervision they will receive (Glatthorn, 1990).

The differentiated supervision model was first proposed by Allan Glatthorn (Glatthorn, 1984). It "is an approach to supervision that provides teachers with options about the kinds of supervisory and evaluative services they receive" (Glatthorn, 1997, p. 3). The basic premise of differentiated supervision is quite simple: different circumstances and different teachers require different approaches of supervivion (Daresh and Playko, 1995). As Glatthorn (1997) emphasizes, in differentiated supervision, the term "supervisor" denotes any professional providing supervision services, including supervisors, principals, and peer experts. This broad view of supervision presents it as a process rather than a job. From this perspective, the supervisor is not the sole person who is in the position of "supervision"; rather, anyone who practices the process of supervision fulfills this role.

Differentiated supervision is a relatively new concept. It was proposed as a supervision model by Allan Glatthorn in the first edition of his book, *Differentiated Supervision* (1984). In this book, the author proposed four options for teachers' professional development. These were modified in the second edition of the book (Glatthorn, 1997) into only three options, which he called "components": (1) intensive development, which is a version of clinical supervision, (2) cooperative development, and (3) self-directed development.

In the second edition of *Differentiated Supervision* (1997), the full model is presented. The author provides the foundation for differentiated supervision, including the rationale behind it. In the book, the author presents two options for his model: the developmental option and the evaluative option. Then, the book demonstrates the three components of the developmental option in detail. At the end of the book, the author provides readers with "a process approach" that each school or district can utilize to develop its own model.

In his argument for the rationale behind differentiated supervision, Glatthorn (1997) states that teaching should be considered a profession, not a craft. Teachers should not be required to wait for the supervisor to solve their problems or improve their performance. Teachers should take the initiative and should have more control over their professional development, within generally accepted professional standards (Glatthorn 1997). Teachers can work toward their own professional development. He adds that working in a collegial school environment, where teachers serve as sources of support and feedback for one another, motivates teachers, which is essential for school effectiveness. Glatthorn (1997) asserts that a differentiated system is one of the best ways to foster collegiality as it strongly emphasizes cooperation and mutual assistance. A key component of the differentiated approach is that it enables teachers to work together, helping each other to grow professionally.

Another rationale for the model that was identified by Glatthorn is individual differences among teachers. Teachers differ in their skills, abilities, and motivations. They also vary in their preferences for professional development strategies. Differentiated supervision takes this into consideration and attempts to provide teachers with several options for improving their teaching. Glatthorn's final rationale for the model is that supervisors cannot do everything alone. One of the main problems that supervisors face is their inability to work effectively with a large number of teachers. Visiting all of the teachers is time consuming and prevents supervisors from concentrating their efforts on areas that need improvement. Differentiated supervision enables the supervisor to focus the assistance on those teachers needing or requesting them, rather than providing ritualistic visits for all teachers (Glatthorn 1997, p. 5). The differentiated model of supervision enhances the leadership aspects in school work. It empowers principals and teachers to create a self-renewing school.

In addition to the variety of options available in the differentiated model, flexibility is a distinctive feature that makes the model applicable and practical.

Glatthorn recommends that each school or district develop a model of differentiated supervision that best suits the environment (Glatthorn, 1997).

Differentiated supervision was originally implemented in three schools in Riyadh. Principals and teachers were briefly oriented to the model and provided with short workshops on it. Principals received coaching from three supervisors (including the researcher). Several meetings were held with teachers. Also, there were several meetings for the principals in which they presented their progress and discussed the problems they faced. By the end of that year, the model was modified and rebuilt to suit Saudi schools. Major changes included deleting curriculum evaluation and action research from the second option (professional development) and suggesting some standards for each option. In the following year, the model was implemented in four districts. All supervisors were trained *during* the implementation. The project was supervised by a team from the Ministry of Education. This phase of implementation lasted for one school year. At the end of the first semester, representatives of the participating districts held a meeting to review their progress. At the end of the school year, each district was asked to hold a workshop for the supervisors to write an evaluative report of the implementation.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the differentiated supervision initiative in Saudi schools by analyzing the reports written by the districts participating in the initiative. Each district submitted a detailed report that showed the process of application, advantages and disadvantages of the model, and the difficulty faced during the application period. Evaluating this initiative would help in developing the model and enlightening the decision about its implementation.

DATA

This study is based on the analysis of the four reports written by the districts that applied the model. These are five lengthy reports developed through supervisor and principal workshops held specifically to review and evaluate the project. Some reports include results of questionnaires administered to teachers and principals. Each report begins by describing the process of implementation and then focuses on detailed description of the advantages and disadvantages of the model as well as barriers to its implementation as seen by the principals and supervisors.

The basic qualitative research approach was followed (Creswell, 2009). The reports were analyzed looking for general themes in three main areas: advantages (what are the positive points in the model?), disadvantages (what are the negative points in the model?), and obstacles (what obstacles did the schools face during the period of application?). Each report was read several times and coded according to categories that related to the above three main themes.

RESULTS

The data analysis revealed major findings in the three areas of strengths, weaknesses, and obstacles; the results are detailed below.

Strengths

The reports analysis revealed several positive aspects in the model. These aspects are closely related to the instructional process at school. All reports agreed that the model is effective and helps to improve instruction and the school environment through initiating and fostering professional dialogues inside the school. It "created warmth in the school", according to one of the reports. The reports also showed the agreement that the model enhances the role of the supervisor in the instructional aspect of the schools' daily life, rather than focusing on inspection and evaluative tasks. It reinforces a motivating educational leadership. According to all reports, teachers are starting to develop a new understanding of supervision. Teachers are now looking at supervisors as advisors. As one of the reports stating it: "they are not coming just to look for mistakes".

In the traditional supervision system a supervisor was required to visit up to fifty schools, in this differentiated model of supervision the supervisors is responsible only for 4 to 5 schools. Thus, according to these reports, another advantage of the model is that it enhances the ability of the supervisor to give greater attention to a few schools. Focusing on limited number of schools enables the supervisors to plan for improvement and follow up his/ her planning, and helps in developing a collegial relationship inside schools. Offering different options for teachers along with not focusing on classroom visits was mentioned by the reports as a factor that led to an atmosphere of trust and acceptance between the teachers and the supervisor. Teachers feel that supervision is more responsive to their abilities and changing needs. Another strength mentioned by some principals is that the application of the model created rapport, which schools typically lack, in the school.

Teachers began to work collaboratively and discuss their professional growth and responsibilities. The model also led to the discovery and enhancement of teachers' abilities. Another remark mentioned as an advantage for the model is that it transfers training into the school building. The reports also agreed that the model "breaks the ice" and facilitates the advancement of a culture of professional development in the school. The current results confirm those of Piraino (2006), including a strong principal preference for differentiated teacher supervision. Also, principals indicated that differentiated supervision was effective in fostering a school culture that encouraged teacher collaboration, professional inquiry, and a commitment to continuous improvement. Principals also stated that differentiated teacher supervision was quite effective in improving teachers' planning and preparation, classroom instruction, and professionalism through collegiality and professional inquiry. It is evident that this model has created a sense of collaboration and trust among teachers, which are main factors for creating a learning community.

Weaknesses

The reports, however, indicated several weaknesses and disadvantages of the model. The most perplexing comment in the reports (which was also raised frequently during the regular meetings with the supervisors) was the model's general approach to teacher supervision. Many supervisors were concerned about the fact that they had to observe teachers in other subject areas and analyze their teaching. They asserted that assuring that the teacher is presenting sound information on the subject matter is a major task for the supervisor and cannot be accomplished by teachers from different specialties. They further stated that this approach of general supervision is embarrassing and limits the supervisor from providing real assistance to teachers from other specialties.

It appears as though the traditional view of specialized (subject matter) supervision is deeply rooted in the culture of instructional supervision. Reports mentioned that some supervisors are afraid that teachers will stop keeping their knowledge in their subject matter area current because they do not receive visits from a specialized supervisor. Another weakness mentioned by several principals is the lack of time as teachers with four to five classes per day cannot engage in peer coaching sessions. Lack of time was identified as one of the main problems of supervision in Saudi schools (Albabtain, 2009). Several principals, however, stated that if the teachers are committed to the activity, they will find the time to complete it.

Obstacles

The third theme that the study revealed is the obstacles – the administrative or environmental factors that external to the model but they negatively affect its implementation. The reports mentioned several obstacles that limited the process of applying the model. These included the lack of: teachers' and principals' time, proper rooms for meetings and other staff development activities, and an orientation for teachers and principals. Principals and supervisors' lack of leadership skills seems to be an obstacle for effective implementation of the model. Although these obstacles are mentioned in the reports as factors that hinder the implementation, it should be noticed that these obstacles are not limited to the model. In fact they hinder the implementation of any model for improvement. Several studies have sited lack of proper buildings and rooms a major problem that prevents supervisors from implementing staff development activities (Alhammad, 2000; Albabtain, (2009).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluative reports of the differentiated supervision initiative in Saudi schools show that the model is promising and helps in building the characteristics of a successful school, such as collaborative work, collegiality, and professional development in the school building. The model also has some weak points that could be modified through training and collaboration with other specialists. The obstacles identified are not limited to this model and could be overcome through careful

planning and appropriate orientation. The model is promising, though it needs development taking into consideration all teachers and supervisors' concerns.

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