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Kathleen M. Bailey
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1 Doing supervision: Roles and skills

This book is intended for people who might become language teacher supervisors, as well as for those who already have supervisory responsibilities. It reviews literature on supervision in a variety of settings, including applied linguistics, business and industry, psychotherapy, general education, social work, and an emerging body of work in language teacher supervision itself. The majority of the literature cited here comes from North American contexts, but I have indicated those parts of the text that draw on research and practice from other regions.

Writing this book as a traditional literature review would be like using only the physics of motion and gravity to explain the art of Olympic pairs figure skating. Theory and research alone cannot capture the complicated dynamics of a masterly performance. Nor would a literature review about ice-skating greatly help inexperienced skaters with buckling ankles and unsteady balance increase their skills.

While language teacher supervision is not as physically demanding as pairs figure skating, it is dynamic, emotionally charged, and interactive, and there are many trials involved in supervising well. For these reasons this book combines a literature review with the case approach; and since supervision involves interaction, the cases are designed to put you, the reader, into situations requiring communication.

Because this book is in part based on my experiences and those of my students and colleagues, it is necessarily personal, and full of my own opinions and recommendations. I have tried to flag the parts of the text that are opinion and those that result from research or theory. For instance, *I* and *me* indicate my opinion or personal experience. And *we* is not the royal or the editorial *we*; rather, it marks my shared experiences with readers (you), either as teachers or as supervisors.

Finally, because the purpose of this book is to help supervisors (or future supervisors) do their work better and more confidently, each chapter contains activities to help you apply the concepts presented. These activities consist of the Case Discussion (about the specific case presented in the chapter), Tasks and Discussion (related to broader supervisory contexts), and Suggestions for Further Reading (to help you pursue your interest in the topic).

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This chapter begins with a case that is based on a true story. The chapter then discusses supervision as a profession, focusing specifically on language teacher supervision. It reviews the roles of supervisors in various professional contexts, including education, before discussing the particular skills supervisors need. A rationale is also provided for using the case approach for learning about language teacher supervision. We will begin with a case to contextualize the issues raised in this chapter.

Case for analysis: Your new job as a language teacher supervisor

You have just completed your postgraduate work in applied linguistics and language teaching at a university that provides both language instruction and teacher education. During your studies you had a teaching assistantship (TA-ship), which enabled you to make money and to gain experience by teaching language classes as you completed your degree.

Upon finishing your degree, you are hired on a part-time basis to teach and to assist the professor who will supervise the teaching assistants (TAs) in the coming year. You will observe classes, help the new TAs learn about the curriculum, hold office hours, and administer the final examinations. You feel well prepared for the language classes you will teach, but you view your supervisory role with some trepidation, as you have had only a little prior experience in observing teachers, and it was not entirely positive. Nevertheless, you feel that you may gain some skills that will be beneficial to you by assisting the professor in charge of the teaching assistants.

Three weeks before the semester begins, that professor resigns. The teacher education professors in the department don't want to supervise the TAs; they feel this job consumes time that they should devote to research and publishing. The department chair therefore appoints you to serve as the TA supervisor for the coming year. There is no formal job description, but you are given a temporary faculty appointment, including benefits and a reasonable salary. That's the good news. The bad news is that you will be supervising and evaluating some of your closest friends, as well as some language teachers who are older and more experienced than you are.

Supervision as a profession

The status of supervision as a specific profession has been discussed in many fields, including business and industry, psychology, social work,

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and education. Writing about supervision in general education, Alfonso, Firth, and Neville have said:

> A major deterrent to full professional status of educational supervisors is an ill-defined knowledge base and a lack of an agreed-upon set of professional skills. Every profession equips its members with a conceptual and intellectual base from which skills are derived and expressed in practice. The skills of instructional supervision, however, have remained remarkably undefined and random, partly because the theoretical base is so thin. Moreover, the skills that are used are generally acquired on the job, rather than during professional preparation and internship. (1984:16)

Bernard has noted a similar situation in the preparation of clinical psychologists. She says that "unlike the literature that addresses counselor training, little has been said about the training of supervisors" (1979:60). Indeed, this lack of preparation for supervisors is a repeated theme in the literature of various professions. In recent years, however, publications in general education have suggested this situation is changing.

During the later decades of the past century, teacher supervision emerged as a career track in language education. Perhaps this trend developed because language teaching has become a commercial enterprise, and supervisors are needed to make sure that customers get what they pay for. Or maybe, in aspiring to establish language teaching as a profession, teachers have chosen to monitor their own programs' instructional practices (Nunan, 1999a, 1999b). On the other hand, perhaps so much language teaching around the world is done by people without professional preparation that there is a need for quality control mechanisms. Maybe language educators have simply adopted general education's traditional bureaucratic structures, including having certain employees be responsible for ensuring the quality of others' work.

Whatever the reasons, many language teachers find themselves working as supervisors. Their duties include visiting and evaluating other teachers, discussing their lessons with them, and making recommendations to them about what to continue and what to change.

Unfortunately, very few language teachers ever receive any formal preparation for carrying out supervisors' responsibilities. It is often assumed that teachers who are promoted to supervisorial positions will automatically know how to supervise because they have seniority or because they have displayed leadership qualities. Some are appointed as supervisors because they are stable, cooperative employees. Still others attain teacher supervision positions because they are recognized as effective teachers. If they continue to teach while in their supervisory positions, presumably they will serve as good role models. If their new duties mean they no longer teach, then they are expected to convey to

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others, through description and discussion, what they themselves know about teaching.

This book is meant to fill a gap in the professional preparation literature of applied linguistics. We will begin by considering some definitions of supervision.

What is language teacher supervision?

What is supervision? The term has many possible definitions, which vary across contexts and over time. Most definitions come from general education or from business and industry rather than from language teaching itself.

The hierarchical contexts of language teacher supervision

One complication in defining supervision is that being a supervisor is usually a middle-management position in the organizational chart, meaning that the supervisor is answerable to both the teachers and the administration. Daughtrey and Ricks point out that industrial supervisors are also called first-line managers, referring to the first line above the workers on the organizational chart – those people who "work with the operating personnel who actually produce the product or service that the firm provides" (1989:13).

Like first-line managers, language teaching supervisors frequently work side by side with teachers. Some teach language courses themselves and supervise other teachers as one of many responsibilities. Others, such as program directors, department chairpersons, coordinators, or headmistresses or headmasters, may not have teaching responsibilities. Their roles typically include other administrative responsibilities in addition to supervising language teachers.

Definitions of supervision

Defining *supervision* is not a simple task. The field has "a variety of sometimes incompatible definitions, a very low level of popular acceptance, and many perplexing and challenging problems" (Anderson, 1982:181). Anderson notes that "even the terminology of supervision causes discomfort and weakens allegiance" (ibid.).

In some situations, supervision has been defined for legal and contractual purposes. For example, according to Hazi (1994:199), New Jersey law defines a supervisor as "any appropriately certified individual assigned with the responsibility for the direction and guidance of the work of teaching staff members." In that context, supervision is defined

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by the administrative code and is "legally synonymous with evaluation" (ibid.).

A broader definition comes from Daresh (2001:25), a general education author, who says that "supervision is a process of overseeing the ability of people to meet the goals of the organization in which they work." He stresses that supervision should be seen as a process rather than as a professional role.

Goldsberry defines supervision as "an organizational responsibility and function focused upon the assessment and refinement of current practices" (1988:1). He also notes the hierarchical nature of supervision: "Because it is an organizational responsibility, it necessarily involves interaction between an organizational superordinate and a subordinate – meaning that legitimate authority for decision-making resides with the supervisor" (ibid.:1–2).

In the context of the U.S. child welfare system, Gambrill and Stein (1983) say effective supervisors are those "who help their staff help their clients in a manner that maximizes positive consequences for all" (p. 7). In a similar way, effective language teacher supervisors help language teachers help students in order to maximize learning and positive attitudes.

Almost everyone in language teaching has folk wisdom about what it means to be a supervisor because so many of us have been supervised at some time. There are some specific definitions in our field, however. For instance, Wallace states that a supervisor is "anyone who has . . . the duty of monitoring and improving the quality of teaching done by other colleagues in an educational situation" (1991:107). Gebhard says that "language teacher supervision is an ongoing process of teacher education in which the supervisor observes what goes on in the teacher's classroom with an eye toward the goal of improved instruction" (1990a:1).

However, teacher supervision is not just concerned with the creative and positive aspects of helping language teachers achieve their full potential. If it were, the job title might be "teacher developer" instead. Supervision also includes less rewarding and rather unpleasant responsibilities, such as providing negative feedback, ensuring that teachers adhere to program policy, and even firing employees if the need arises.

Tensions in the supervisor-teacher relationship

The negative side of supervision has earned it some colorful nicknames, such as the "reluctant profession" (Mosher and Purpel, 1972). Supervision has also been referred to as "snoopervision" and as "managing messes" (Schön, 1983:14). The ongoing relationship between teachers and supervisors has even been called a "private cold war" (Blumberg, 1980).

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In general education, where surprise evaluation visits are common, teachers have resorted to signals to alert one another about unannounced observations. Black documented teachers using the code warning "the ghost walks" to communicate that the school principal was making surprise classroom visits (1993:38). In another context, she says a note reading "Stand and deliver!" was passed along the corridors to spread the word that supervisory visits were imminent (ibid.). Clearly these phrases indicate a certain level of tension in the relationship between teachers and supervisors.

Supervisors' varied roles in professional contexts

The following literature review will discuss the varied roles and challenges of language teacher supervisors. Let me acknowledge at the outset that this literature is predominantly from North America, although it is drawn from a variety of professions. How language teacher supervision is depicted depends on the treatment of the subject by the author(s). Some incorporate ideas from supervision in business and industry, others discuss supervision in general education contexts, and still others focus almost entirely on language teacher supervision.

Historically, the assembly-line model in industry has influenced educational supervision. Hoy and Woolfolk (1989) say, "unfortunately, supervision has its roots in the industrial literature of bureaucracy. Close supervision was a classic response to production problems; it was management's attempt to control subordinates" (p. 113). These authors note that the terms *evaluation, assessment, appraisal*, and *rating* are "consistent with the industrial notion of overseeing, directing and controlling workers" (ibid.).

In some parts of the world, the development of the language teacher supervisor's role has paralleled a trend toward increasing individualization in education. Supervisors' responsibilities have moved from being largely judgmental and evaluative to being more developmental in focus. In 1984, Alfonso et al. summarized this change as follows: "[T]he task of supervision now is to refine the process of teaching and improve the effectiveness of the results of schooling" (p. 17).

As professional language teacher supervisors, particularly if we supervise teachers from different cultures or work in a different culture ourselves, we must remember that changes in language teacher supervisors' roles do not occur at the same pace or move in the same direction everywhere. The supervisor's role is, in part, culturally defined and conceptually located in the educational and political history of a particular region.

Over time, many alternatives have emerged as to how to enact the supervisor's role. Sometimes these options create confusion about

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supervisors' responsibilities. In general education, "although supervision has been a normal school-based activity for as long as there have been public schools in America, no real consensus has ever been reached concerning what supervision should be or what educational supervisors should do" (Daresh, 2001:3). This statement is true in many non-U.S. contexts as well.

Some authors lament the many roles that supervisors must perform. Goldsberry (1988:2) notes that many organizational roles (e.g., principal, reading supervisor, curriculum coordinator) involve several different important functions. He suggests separating the supervisorial role from these other functions so that supervisors can focus on improving instruction.

In general education, supervisors have many tasks: "They are expected to be instructional experts, diagnosticians, curriculum developers, instructional planners, problem solvers, innovators, clinical observation specialists, and managers of the processes of teaching and learning" (Alfonso et al., 1984:16–17). These various responsibilities are more or less inherently supervisory in nature: Curriculum development and instructional planning are often done by teachers and other professionals who are not supervisors, but supervisors' responsibilities often focus on more than teachers' classroom performance. Much of the literature has discussed "the 'role' of supervision, yet it has given too little attention to the identification and development of the skills needed to make supervision effective" (ibid.). Teacher supervisors seldom receive training to perform their roles, and perhaps for this reason "the major concept of current supervisory behavior is its undue emphasis on reactive performance – doing things as a result of a crisis orientation – rather than through careful, logical planning and preparation" (Daresh, 2001:25).

In child welfare work, Gambrill and Stein (1983:8) say evaluation of staff members must include both positive monitoring, or "attending to achievements and assets," and negative monitoring, or "attending to mistakes and deficiencies." They emphasize the former over the latter.

In psychotherapy, Bernard (1979:64) identified three key roles for supervisors working with counselor-trainees: the teacher-student approach, the counselor-client approach, and the consultant approach. She defined these roles in terms of their goals:

> The supervisor as teacher focuses on some knowledge or expertise that he or she wishes to transmit to the counselor. The supervisor as counselor places priority on the [trainee] counselor's personal needs, with the belief that this focus will allow the [trainee] counselor to overcome the nervousness or self-doubt that impedes natural development. The supervisor as consultant focuses on a relationship with the [trainee] counselor that

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> is explorative in nature and assumes that the [trainee] has the ability to express his or her supervision needs. (ibid.)

Very few language teacher supervisors have formal training, so they may work "at an instinctive level . . . or at the level of folk models about what supervisors do" (Wajnryb, 1995a:73).

Roles of teacher supervisors in general education

The roles of educational supervisors vary greatly across time and place. For example, in 1967, Wiles portrayed supervisors in general education somewhat idealistically. In his view, supervisors "serve as liaisons to get people into contact with resource people who can help" (Wiles, 1967:11, cited in Daresh, 2001:11):

> They stimulate staff members to look at the extent to which ideas and resources are being shared, and the degree to which persons are encouraged and supported as they try new things. They make it easier to carry out the agreements that emerge from evaluation sessions. They listen to individuals discuss their problems and recommend other resources that may help in the search for solutions. They bring to individual teachers, whose confidence they possess, appropriate suggestions and materials. They serve, as far as they are able, the feelings that teachers have about the system and its policies, and they recommend that the administration examine irritations among staff members.

Wiles was a proponent of the human relations school of supervision. In some ways he was a man ahead of his time.

Abrell's humanistic supervision

Eventually, humanistic supervision did become a trend in general education. A humanistic supervisor "possesses and develops characteristics that enable him / her to consistently affirm a constructive other-centered action that leads to the growth of others, to the improvement of instruction, and to his / her own self-improvement" (Abrell, 1974:213). A humanistic supervisor needs to cultivate "those skills, attitudes and understandings essential to carrying out the multi-faceted role of person-centered supervision" (ibid.). By "person-centered supervision" Abrell meant that the supervisor would attempt to utilize "the aspirations, needs, and talents of the person(s) with whom he / she cooperatively works" (ibid.:214).

Abrell spelled out 10 key characteristics that effective humanistic supervisors need. The first three include the beliefs that all human beings

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"(1) possess the power . . . of solving their own problems; (2) possess genuine freedom of creative choice and action, and are, within certain objective limits, the masters of their own destiny; [and] (3) achieve the good life by harmoniously combining personal satisfactions and continuous self-development with significant work and other activities that contribute to the welfare of those with whom one relates" (ibid.:215).

In addition, according to Abrell, humanistic supervisors must also exhibit the following characteristics:

4. a commitment to democratic procedures when working with others;
5. a willingness to question others' and one's own basic assumptions and convictions;
6. a deep commitment and capacity to make others feel worthwhile, important, and uplifted;
7. a willingness and ability to establish warm and empathetic relationships with all persons, regardless of their racial, religious, ethnic, or educational backgrounds;
8. an ability to listen and a desire to utilize the experience of others as a resource for planning and achieving goals;
9. an enthusiasm for and belief in supervision as a viable process for contributing to human growth and progress;
10. a commitment to upgrade oneself as a whole human being and the desire to carry on a continuing inquiry in the field of supervision.

Abrell concludes that the humanistic supervisor's frame of reference "is characterized by his / her compassionate concern for fellow workers" (ibid.).

Goldsberry's three models of teacher supervision

Goldsberry (1988) distinguishes three important models of educational supervision by the purpose of each. First, nominal supervision has the "primary purpose of maintaining a façade that supervision is being practiced" (p. 2). Second, the prescriptive model is "based upon the notion that the supervisor needs to correct deficiencies in teaching and has a primary purpose of surfacing these flaws and correcting them" (ibid.). This model is a long-lived view of supervision that has influenced language teaching as well (Freeman, 1982, 1989a; Gebhard, 1984; Wallace, 1991). Third, the reflective model assumes that "teachers need skilled support to refine their own efforts" (Goldsberry, 1988:2). This model's primary purpose is "the stimulation of guided reflection based upon disciplined inquiry into the ends and means of teaching" (ibid.). Goldsberry's key contrasts among these three models are summarized in Table 1.1.

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Table 1.1 *Three models of supervision in general education (adapted from Goldsberry, 1988:3)*

	Nominal model	Prescriptive model	Reflective model
Purposes	To maintain status quo To protect "insiders" To provide a façade	To promote uniform practices To maximize benefits of expertise	To promote reflective adaptation To develop expertise
Reasons to observe	To comply with legal requirements To "keep in touch"	To identify weaknesses or deficiencies To check for standard practices To collect data germane to standards	To collect descriptive information To provide a second perspective
Reasons to confer	To comply with legal requirements To "keep in touch"	To prescribe needed changes To reinforce standard practices To recognize excellence	To promote reflection To surface puzzlement To formulate hypotheses of effect
Aim	Appearance of accountability	Widespread use of standards	Reasoned experimentation

Goldsberry calls nominal supervision a "void posing as supervision" and "lip-service supervision" (ibid.:4). He adds, "When there is inadequate time to do the job, when the supervisor lacks the preparation or skill to do it well, nominal supervision is preferred to trying to do too much in too little time and thus doing it badly" (ibid.:5). He concludes that "until supervisors are provided with adequate preparation and time to do the job, nominal supervision is all the organization can expect" (ibid.).

The prescriptive model, in contrast, is supervision taken seriously, Goldsberry says. Because the supervisor's diagnostic skills are assumed to be superior to the teachers' (ibid.:5),

> the supervisor's job is to prescribe treatment. If the problems are cured, then the teacher as patient simply goes on until another symptom appears or until time for the next regular check-up. If the problems persist, then the supervisor as physician proceeds with a battery of tests, increases dosages of treatments, calls in

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