

Book Review:

Instructional Supervision Applying Tools and Concepts

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Zepeda, S. J. (2007). *Instructional Supervision Applying Tools and Concepts*. Larchmont, New York, Eye on Education.

Sally J. Zepeda took a fresh approach, in her book *Instructional Supervision Applying Tools and Concepts*, to the topic of leading a school to success in the 21st Century. The 15 chapters in this book are laid out in a manner which builds upon each other allowing the reader to grow in relation to his/her thinking about how leaders should effectively supervise individuals in the school setting. Zepeda went beyond the general concept of supervision emphasizing that supervision must promote lifelong learning skills in both students and teachers. She firmly leaves one believing that, in order to develop students who are lifelong learners; schools must first and foremost develop and foster teachers who are also life long learners.

Chapter one gives a basic review of different standards which permeate the field of education and their relation to day to day teaching strategies and supervisor roles. Accountability and high stakes testing and the related movements are discussed, emphasizing how these are impacting effective supervisory models which promote collaboration and the building of learning communities. Zepeda linked instructional supervision, professional development, and teacher evaluation, stating that “woven together in a holistic way, learning opportunities follow their own course while contributing to the overall development of the faculty and organization (pg. 13) Moreover, Zepeda discussed the importance of identifying one’s values and beliefs in order to shape one’s vision to lead. She stressed that this vision should be reviewed periodically in order to be most effective in meeting the changing needs of the school setting. Finally, in this chapter, Zepeda discussed school culture and the element of trust. She emphasized that trust is a prerequisite for building a positive school culture”. She stated that “trust and respect build a strong foundation for the work and efforts of teachers” (pg. 22).

In chapter two Zepeda defined the aim of instructional supervision is “to promote growth, development, interaction, fault free problem solving, and a commitment to building

capacity in teachers” (pg. 29). She differentiates between supervision as being formative and evaluation as being summative. It is important for administrators to note that although teachers do gain information from a yearly evaluation, they must consistently receive the supervision of which Zepeda speaks of in this chapter for growth in teacher learning to occur. Zepeda further emphasizes in this chapter that typically school districts use the same supervisory model for all teachers in evaluating their school year performance. She points out that “supervision in this vein goes against the grain of what can be achieved by professionals working together.” Zepeda introduces the reader to the concept of differentiated supervision in this chapter. “Differentiated supervision operates on the premise that teaching is a profession; teachers should have a degree of control over their professional development and the power to make choices about the support they need” (pg. 34). To conclude this chapter, Zepeda poses that the educational supervisor is one who does more than just merely observe teachers in the classroom setting once or twice a year for approval of renewal of contract. She views the supervisor as one who has a myriad of roles in promoting growth and learning in their teachers ultimately leading to growth and learning in their students.

Informal and formal instructional supervision and their importance are discussed in chapter three. Zepeda introduces the concept of *Management by Wandering Around*. She defines the purpose of informal observations as “to affirm what the teachers are doing right, encouraging them to keep up the momentum” (pg. 50). Zepeda offers the reader four reasons why informal observations are useful. They allow for opportunities to motivate teachers, monitor instruction, be accessible and provide support, and keep informed about instruction in the school. Formal observations are defined as lasting for an extended period of time; usually mandated by the state in which one is working. Zepeda stressed that a formal observation must include a pre-observation conference, a pos-observation conference and occur in a timely manner in order to be meaningful.

In chapters four, five, and six, Zepeda went into detail defining the concepts of the pre-observation conference, the classroom observation, and the post-observation conference. This section of the book in particular would be a great resource for the new administrator. Chapter four explains the importance of a pre-observation conference, setting goals, and identifying areas of focus for the upcoming observation. Zepeda defined the Johari Window as a tool for exploring communication between a supervisor and a teacher. “The Johari Window describes personal knowledge and interactions in terms of four panes: the open pane, the hidden pane, the blind pane, and the unknown pane. (pg. 77). Each pane respectively identifies something known and unknown to self and something known and unknown to others. This chapter clearly brings to the forefront that a successful preobservation conference will promote dialogue amongst and between the teacher and the administrator. This is the essence for the administrator who wishes to keep a finger on the pulse of the curriculum matters of her/his school. Chapter five presented and explained a variety of observation tools for use during the classroom observation. The difference between a wide angle focus and a narrow focus was introduced and examples of each were given. This section in particular would be very useful for today’s administrator. It offers a variety of assessment tools which can be tailored to meet a variety of needs in any typical school setting. The resources offered in this chapter will facilitate teacher learning immensely. In chapter six, the author defined the post-observation conference as the final stage in a cycle of

clinical supervision; a learning opportunity that spurs further growth. The issue of trust was revisited in this chapter. The author chose to remind the reader that trust is the cornerstone of the supervisory relationship. It is important to note here that the author saw the teacher as an integral part of the post-observation conference actively reconstructing the events of the classroom observation with the supervisor or peer as the facilitator. The author viewed the whole pre-observation, observation, post-observation cycle as one that promotes growth, extends learning, and fosters creativity. This in essence leads to building an environment of trust which potentially has a positive affect on the overall school culture. This portion of the book is a must read for all administrators both early career and veteran.

The next chapter, titled *Career Stages, Adult Learning, and Supervision*, gives the reader a general review of the nexus between adult learning and student learning. It also reviews the career stage continuum and emphasizes that the administrator must know their faculty. Several assessment tools or profiles are offered to allow the reader to be able to learn more about the dynamics of their faculty. This chapter also emphasizes the importance of short and long term goal setting, tracking faculty goals and different attributes of goals. The reader is reminded that “adults want authentic learning experiences with immediate application in their real worlds of teaching” (pg. 199). This leads to a discussion of establishing and building a climate that is conducive to adult learning; important for both the early career administrator as well as the established administrator. Chapter eight reviews several leadership models in relation to employee motivation that are covered in many college leadership programs. Although this chapter may be fresh in the minds of many early career administrators it does offer veterans a refresher course in fostering internal and external motivation in teachers that eventually will lead to professional growth and development.

Chapters nine and twelve cover peer coaching and mentoring and induction respectively. Both place an emphasis on supporting the teacher regardless of stage of career. Zepeda used Joyce and Showers’ (1981) definition to describe peer coaching as involving a collegial approach to the analysis of teaching for the purpose of integrating mastered skills and strategies into a curriculum, a set of instructional goals, a time span, and a personal teaching style. (p.170) Zepeda identifies peer coaching as being job embedded or done by the teachers and administrators as they engage in their daily work activities. The cycle of the pre-observation, observation, post-observation model is directly linked to the peer coaching model. Finally training was emphasized in implementing an effective peer coaching model and the issue of trust was revisited in chapter nine. Chapter twelve focuses on the multifaceted and complex nature of mentoring. Zepeda gives a sound rationale as to why an effective mentoring program is essential in today’s school system. The qualities, skills and functions of mentors are reviewed along with how to select, train, and assign mentors; all essential again in establishing a positive school culture and building trust.

Zepeda detailed action research and portfolio supervision in chapters ten and eleven. She defined action research as being “a method of inquiry undertaken by educators in order to better understand the education environment and to improve practice” (pg. 244). She defines portfolio supervision as “a work in progress that allows teachers to chronicle teaching practices, attainment of short and long term goals, and knowledge gained in constructing artifacts” (pg. 260). Both methods of evaluation push the teacher to think beyond the typical end of the year evaluation tool. Zepeda offers these tools to encourage the administrator and teacher to think beyond the status quo and look to have an overall impact in their school’s

curriculum development. Evaluation should push teachers to think about what they are doing in day to day classroom activities, identify areas of needed improvement or professional development opportunities and also identify areas of strength which can be shared with others in their work environment. Common themes presented in previous chapters such as goal setting, self-analysis, reflection, professional development, and a cyclical process were all reviewed in this chapter.

Zepeda reviews a touchy but most needed topic for any level administrator in chapter thirteen. She effectively defined a marginal teacher as “one who manages to perform just well enough to keep his or her job to the detriment of student learning” (pg. 291). Although a difficult topic to discuss, it was correctly placed in this book. Zepeda explained the topic so that most level administrators will know how, when, and where to proceed. She also offered a list of markers of marginal teaching. Difficulties supervisors encounter while working with marginal teachers were also discussed. It is important to note that these difficulties must be confronted in order to effectively make your point when identifying a marginal teacher. Teachers may question the preparation and background of the supervisor and may have a different perception of the past and present site leadership. There may be lack of support from the central office, time constraints, or psychological stressors that can result in marginal teaching. Zepeda pointed out that working with just one marginal teacher could affect an entire faculty. Marginal teaching must be confronted and Zepeda offers the administrator the components of a formal plan of remediation.

In the last two chapters of her book, Zepeda pulled together all she has discussed in previous chapters, reviewing the elements of professional development and job embedded learning. She reminds the reader of the standards for professional development put forth by the National Staff Development Council. She points out that administrators who are visible in the classrooms and other settings where teachers meet are in a better position to identify professional development needs and provide follow-up support to implement new skills learned or to refine old skills being used. Finally, Zepeda states that “learning is the hallmark of a teacher’s professional journey. Effective teachers do not merely direct their students’ learning; they grow and thrive in their own” (pg. 353).

Zepeda’s book was an easy read and a must in this reviewer’s mind for all leadership programs. She offered many resourceful tools which can be easily implemented in any supervisory role. Her thoughts and ideas were practical, yet thought provoking. She pushed the reader to think beyond what she presented and to recognize the implications of their actions whether they use her techniques or not. *Instructional Supervision Applying Tools and Concepts* is a must resource for anyone considering a leadership role in the public school system in the 21st Century.

Karen Melvin is working toward an Ed.S. in Ed Leadership at the University of Florida. Her main research/career interests involve teacher retention/teacher efficacy in the workplace, the needs of early childhood students, and the development of teachers going in to the early childhood workforce.

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