Position Paper

by

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Introduction

Successful instructional supervision is a very complex task which requires astute management skills, strong interpersonal skills, and a vast knowledge base. After analyzing many philosophies of education and supervisory beliefs, I have continued to fine tune my philosophy of education and examine how it relates to my future role as a supervisor. The following paper is an organization of those thoughts.

Philosophy of Education

There are five basic philosophies of education: perennialism, idealism, realism, experimentalism, and existentialism. Glickman pares this list down to three superphilosophies: essentialism, progressivism and existentialism (Glickman, 2010). Of those, my beliefs seem to be most in line with experimentalism. Experimentalism is a conglomeration of the educational philosophies of pragmatism, progressivism, and reconstructionism (Glickman, 2010). In experimentalism knowledge is viewed as the interaction between the scientific person and the environment. One key component of experimentalism is that knowledge is reality. New knowledge, therefore, may alter reality. Furthermore, knowledge is never final; it is constantly evolving. The classroom implication of this umbrella of philosophy is discovery; inquiry-based learning where the learner accumulates knowledge through problem solving.

Supervisory Platform Philosophy

Through experimentalists eyes, a supervisor would work cooperatively with teachers to problem solve and discover what methodologies work best to educate children. True to the philosophy, supervisors with these beliefs should use the tried and true strategies they possess, but always be open to new knowledge. Supervisors both convey wisdom and guide learning (Glickman, 2010).

As a part of this philosophy, when working with individuals, I most often use a cluster of collaborative behaviors where decision-making is shared. I use a similar approach when working with groups, again sharing the decision-making. I believe it is important that the supervisor and teacher both have an equal stake in the problem solving process. However, I also have to add that a balance of multiple philosophies may be required. For example, Essentialism, where the supervisor is the expert, is far from my cup of tea. On the other hand, I do believe there are a time and a place for implementing this philosophy. The term “restricted choices” comes to mind. While the words restricted and choice may seem contradictory, I believe it is necessary to provide guidelines for some decision-making. As a supervisor, I will be held ultimately responsible for management decisions I make. Therefore, they need to be decisions with which I am comfortable. I could never be supportive of choices made through shared decision-making that I felt were in bad judgment or were against my educational philosophy. Hopefully by restricting choices this situation would be avoided.

Supervision

Instructional supervision can be defined connotatively as overseeing the act of teaching. Suffice it to say this is a seemingly large oversimplification of an extremely complicated concept. Instructional supervision involves managing budgets, evaluating teachers and disciplining students. The tasks of an instructional supervisor range from structuring professional development to monitoring the lunchroom. Furthermore, supervisors may serve as the custodian, technology expert, nurse, or secretary; often times all within a given hour!

The purpose of instructional supervision is to provide guidance to instructors. Again, this is a very simplistic statement given that providing guidance as a multi-faceted process. It involves having a basic knowledge of educational practices, relating well to people, and guiding change and decision-making processes. Perhaps most importantly, it involves challenging students and teachers to stretch their minds to accomplish more than they thought possible. The ultimate purpose then, of instructional supervision, is to provide a framework so that today’s students may be guided to live fulfilling lives and eventually be contributing members of society.

Influences

My beliefs of education have been greatly influenced by a plethora of people. Many colleagues, supervisors, professors, students and parents have helped shape the educator I am today. However, in spite of the countless dollars and endless time I’ve spent making myself a better educator, perhaps one of the most important influences in my professional life has been my own children. The day my oldest child went to kindergarten a little over 14 years ago, my eyes were opened to the power I have as an educator. His happiness and overall well-being were greatly affected by his daily school experiences. It hit me then that the same must also be true for the 23 students I stood in front of every day. Consequently, when I face a difficult decision professionally, I try very hard to remember that my own children could easily be in a similar situation. If that were the case, how would I, as a parent, want the situation to be handled? When I proceed making decisions by remembering that the little boy or girl in front of me is somebody’s baby; somebody’s pride and joy, I react compassionately. I believe this has made me a better teacher.

Future Supervision

As a future instructional supervisor, it is my hope that I can manage teachers in a productive, positive environment. I will value honest, open communication and I have learned from others how to handle potential situations I will face; both from experiencing situations that have been handled both positively and negatively.

Conclusion

In conclusion, pulling all of these thoughts together has really caused me to see in black and white what a challenge being an instructional supervisor will be. It will be a struggle to balance the needs of the students, teachers, and community. I feel if I attack each new challenge with fortitude and honesty the results will be promising. In the words of Jim Collins, (2001) I aspire to “never stop trying to be qualified for the job.”

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