

Organizational Learning in Schools: A Cross-Case Study of Teacher Supervisors' Beliefs, Actions, and Practices

Author: Susan J. Anderson

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Cathy Kaufman

Dissertation Committee Members: Dr. Peggy Farrah
Dr. Wenfan Yan

ABSTRACT

This cross-case study evaluates the effectiveness of teacher supervisors' facilitation of organizational learning in three schools representing a continuum from traditional to differentiated supervisory practice. The research intent is the identification of a means through which the supervisory process can serve to promote organizational learning.

Five indicators of organizational learning were derived from the convergence of cognitive theory, organizational learning theory, and new conceptions of supervision. These were as follows: 1) the application of constructivist principles of learning; 2) the evolution of mental models; 3) the prioritizing of metacognition and meaning through shared vision; 4) an emphasis on contextual learning; and 5) the practice of collective learning. In-depth interviews of teacher supervisors focused first on beliefs, then on actions, and finally on documented evidence of organizational learning.

The results revealed a wide discrepancy in the availability of documented evidence of organization learning within the three schools, with the greatest number of instances of documented evidence

available in the differentiated supervisory setting and the fewest in the traditional setting. A salient difference among the three schools was the variation in the balance of actions that were primarily initiated and carried out by the supervisor in the traditional school compared to those that were primarily teacher driven or collaboratively driven in the differentiated model. This shift in the genesis of leadership resulted in an increase in evidence of organizational learning in the differentiated schools. In the differentiated settings, new learning was accomplished, and change was managed more efficiently when facilitated through established processes for the reception and diffusion of information throughout the organization.

The researcher proposes that the supervisory process, if redefined as a vehicle for the establishment of a true learning community, might be transformed into a field of vast potential and contribution. The study offers evidence that the differentiated supervisory model can serve as a means of establishing the essential components of a learning organization.