Elementary *SuperVision* and the Supervisor: Teacher Attitudes and Inclusive Education

Thomas G. RYAN *
Nipissing University, Canada

Jodi GOTTFRIED
Nipissing University, Canada

Abstract: Evidence has emerged which suggests that as a supervisor, the importance of knowing oneself, and knowing those that he or she is supervising, is vital to the success of the group. We argue that when conflicting values, attitudes, and beliefs are present amongst the members of the group over an issue (inclusion), or over the behaviours of a member (non-inclusive), the entire group can break down. Therefore, to successfully implement a program, such as inclusion, knowing the attitudes of the staff is vital as a program such as this cannot be successful without positive support.

Keywords: Supervision, Inclusion, Attitudes, Self-Knowledge

Introduction

Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon (2010) describe the term *SuperVision* as a common vision "that is developed collaboratively and brought into reality together. It forms connections that focus organizational and individual goals, objectives and efforts into an overarching strategy" (p. 56). Capacity is built into the system as the supervisor encourages employees to reach their full potential, and helps to develop interpersonal relationships and a productive organizational culture (Dessler, Munro & Cole, 2011). These outcomes are achieved by daily informed supervision. The supervisor, by definition, is someone who assists, guides, directs, and oversees the people that he/she is managing, however there is much more to being a supervisor than simply overseeing the jobs that people are doing (Langton, Robbins & Judge, 2011). In order to be a successful supervisor, it is important that one understands not only their own beliefs towards education and approaches towards individuals and groups, but that they also understand the beliefs and approaches of their supervisees.

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* ✉ Thomas G. Ryan, Nipissing University, Faculty of Education, 100 College Drive, North Bay, Ontario, P1B 8L7, Phone: 1 705 474 3461 X4403 FAX : 1 705 474 1947. E-mail : thomasr@nipissingu.ca

One issue that has been controversial in most schools for many years is the issue of inclusive education. "Inclusion is primarily an overarching philosophy that advocates for the regular classroom as the first placement option for students with exceptionalities" (Edmunds & Edmunds, 2008, p. 24). Arguably, the successfulness of inclusive education relies heavily upon the attitudes and beliefs of the teachers. As a supervisor, it is necessary to have an understanding of the supervisee's belief systems in order to successfully implement inclusive education programs within a school because without the support of the teachers, these programs are destined to malfunction.
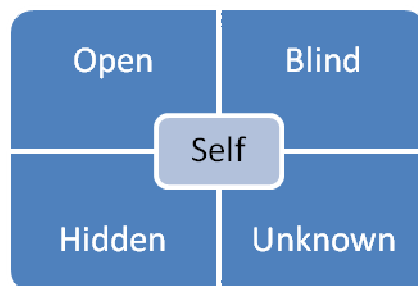
Know Thyself

In order to improve and advance our instruction, and hence improve student learning and experiences, we believe that we need to first look to ourselves to determine how our "present thinking, beliefs, and practices in the field of supervision interact with instruction and the assumptions about students… as learners" (Glickman, Gordon & Ross-Gordon, 2005, p. 78). We make judgements about our students on a daily basis whether we realize that we are doing it or not. We believe that these judgements can impact the way that we view that student and the level of interaction that we provide for that student, hence influencing the level and quality of learning that that student experiences.

The Johari Window

One way to recognize our personal thinking, beliefs, and practices is through the reflection that comes from the use of the Johari Window. The act of looking in or back is often misunderstood. Bolton (2010) suggests,

> Reflection is a state of mind, an ongoing constituent of practice, not a technique, or curriculum element. Reflective practice can enable practitioners to learn from experience about themselves, their work, and the way they relate to home and work, significant others and wider society and culture. It gives strategies to bring things out into the open, and frame appropriate and searching questions never asked before. It can provide relatively safe and confidential ways to explore and express experiences otherwise difficult to communicate. (p. 3)

The combination of reflection and a tool such as the Johari window can be a prominent and constructive approach to understanding ourselves and our experiences. This tool "provides a graphic way to look at what we know and do not know about our behaviour" (Glickman, Gordon & Ross-Gordon, 2005, p. 101). This visual tool allows us to reflect on the different levels of self and the attributes that we allow to be known. Four categories exist including the public self (open), the blind self, the private self (Hidden), and the unknown self.

The Public (Open) Self is where both the supervisor and the supervisee are aware of the behaviours. The Blind Self occurs where the supervisees are aware of what behaviours take

place, but the supervisor is unaware of these behaviours. The Private (Hidden) Self is the knowledge that the supervisor has about him/herself but the supervisees do not. Finally, the Unknown Self is the behaviours that both the supervisor and the supervisee are not aware of (Glickman, Gordon & Ross-Gordon, 2005).

The reasoning behind the use of the Johari window is that as supervisors, we cannot know if we are being effective for our team unless we know what we are doing (Langton et al., 2011). In an educational setting, this remains true for both principals and for teachers. We must first know ourselves, before we can be effective supervisors and effective educators for our students. The Johari window is based on the premise of communication and improving methods of communication through asking questions, or telling information (Armstrong, 2006). This exposure allows us to understand where the other person is coming from, what background experiences they have to shape their position, and what beliefs, values, and ideas they hold (Armstrong, 2006). This information cannot necessarily be shared without effective communication and provides great opportunities for understanding between a supervisor and a supervisee (Langton et al., 2011).

Although the authors have described the Johari window in terms of the supervisor, we believe that this process can begin with the supervisee. To first understand where I stand with my own beliefs, what I am willing to disclose to others, and what I choose to keep hidden, all effect my levels of communication with people, and how I choose to interact with people. We must first understand ourselves before we can begin to understand others. In order to understand myself, honesty and accuracy is vital (Bolton, 2010; Armstrong, 2006). If I am not being honest with my own beliefs and perceptions, cognitive dissonance can result between what I believe about myself, and what others believe about me.

Cognitive Dissonance

Cognitive Dissonance occurs when one has an image of themselves while others have a different image. "Cognitive dissonance may allow individuals to make their implicit conceptions explicit, and examine their implicit conceptions from a new light" (Olson, Colasanti & Trujillo, 2006, p. 282). To do this however requires an inner awareness and for those who lack this presence of mind cognitive dissonance may remain problematic. For instance, when considering the relationship between a supervisor and a supervisee, differing views of a person have the potential to cause confusion within a group. To illustrate this case in point, while on practicum, we had the opportunity to observe many teachers around the school and we were surprised to have a conversation with one colleague who had once been a teacher of ours. We did not have a good experience with this teacher, we found her to be intimidating, controlling, and basically, forbidding. This teacher, however, spent a great deal of time talking to us about the importance of building relationships with students, getting to know your students, and respecting your students. From our experiences with this teacher how we were taught, and what we observed, these were not traits that were being shown, and this teacher was in a state of cognitive dissonance. We found it difficult to then communicate with that teacher honestly, to ask questions, and to expect an honest response. We did not go back to that classroom to observe and instead moved on to observe other teachers who we felt comfortable with.

This short experience showed us how important it is to know yourself and how your actions move towards other people. We did not feel comfortable having a conversation with this particular teacher because we did not feel that she was a person who was unable to act upon this cognitive dissonance. It was very obvious that she did not see herself as being intimidating to students. We feel then, that in a group dynamic, it is necessary to be in tune with your personality, your beliefs, and your values and to ensure that these beliefs and

values are being acted upon through your actions and words. If cognitive dissonance results and perceptions do not match, then the group dynamic can be affected because honesty and accuracy are not being practiced. We find it difficult to be honest around people who are not being honest themselves, and we believe that this situation also occurs within groups of people. This makes it necessary for both supervisors and supervisees to know themselves so that they can portray an honest image to their peers.

Attitudes and Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is one issue which is consistently being debated; it is also an issue that is heavily reliant upon the positive support of teachers. In order to demonstrate the importance of being aware of personal attitudes and being aware of attitudes of other group members, we will use the issue of inclusive education to show how important attitudes are to the successfulness of these programs. As well, we will then show how the supervisor can help the reluctant teachers to feel more comfortable in these situations.

Prevalence of Teacher Attitudes in the Research

Studies which examine the attitudes of teachers towards inclusive education consistently state that the attitudes of teachers have a great effect on the successfulness of these programs. However, the present day literature does not consistently state that teachers are generally in favour of inclusion, or not in favour of inclusion indicating that a divide still exists amongst educators on whether students with special needs should be included within the regular education classroom.

Positive attitudes. Several studies published within the last several years have indicated that teachers generally have a positive attitude towards inclusive education. Subban and Sharma (2005) concluded, "teachers in Victorian schools may generally hold positive attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities into mainstream settings" (p.9). Mdikana, Ntshangase, and Mayekiso (2007) investigated pre-service educators' attitudes towards inclusive education and revealed that 60% of the 22 students surveyed responded positively towards inclusive education. As stated in Monsen and Frederickson's (2004) work, studies conducted by Janney, Snell, Beers and Raynes (1995) and Stanovich (1999) both discovered that teachers had very positive attitudes towards inclusive education. These attitudinal orientations are key since,

> inclusion is a philosophy that brings students, families, educators, and community members together to create schools based on acceptance, belonging, and community. Inclusionary schools welcome, acknowledge, affirm, and celebrate the value of all learners by educating them together in high-quality, age-appropriate general education classrooms in their neighbourhood schools. (Salend, 2005, p. 36)

Negative attitudes. The need to examine teacher attitudes can be linked directly to classroom cohesion and socio-emotional climate within classrooms (Mdikana, Ntshangase, and Mayekiso, 2007, p. 130). Ryan (2009) suggested,

> The cohesion and climate within the inclusive classroom is partly due to the fact that students begin to notice differential treatment as early as the primary grades (K-3) and at about age 8 most children become aware of differences in others and in the manner the adult acts towards students. . . . Children, at 8 can often now see clearly when people are being treated in a different way. Hence the actions of a (negative) teacher are not only sensed by young children they understand often that a teacher has assumed an unhelpful (negative) attitude toward certain children with or without

exceptionalities. Obviously, the impact and the effects can be detrimental to the development of all students in this classroom who sense this treatment. (p. 17)

Hammond, Helen, Ingalls, and Lawrence (2003) illuminated the attitudes of elementary school teachers toward inclusion and discovered "an overwhelmingly strong pattern of either a negative feeling or uncertainty toward inclusion," although the majority of the respondents had inclusive education programs operating in their schools (Hammond et al., 2003, p.3). Another study conducted in the United Arab Emirates studied the attitudes of general education teachers toward inclusion. This study concluded that "general education teachers in the UAE, in general, tend to have negative attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities" (Alghazo & Gaad, 2004, p. 97).

Implications of Teacher Attitudes

These studies show a general divide amongst educators concerning this issue of education. We have to then consider what the implications are for the programs, and for the supervision of groups of people with such differing opinions towards a single issue. First, we consider the implications for inclusive education programs considering the general attitudes of educators towards this issue. Second, we consider what a supervisor may need to do in order to alter the attitudes of his or her supervisees considering the attitudes of the staff and the implications that can result from these attitudes.

Effects on Student Learning

Advocates for inclusive education have argued that full inclusion of students with special needs aids in the learning of both the exceptional student, as well as the regular student. Dixon (2005) stated that "this learning is more genuine when students simply attend school together, rather than when students with disabilities visit regular classrooms" (p. 41). In addition to this, Dixon argued that inclusion has the power to teach all involved, students and teachers, how to understand and accept people with disabilities as a part of life. This idea is very positive for advocates and supporters of inclusion. Teachers who favour inclusion have the ability to expose and enlighten all students, exceptional or not, to what we can all teach each other.

A concern stemming from this idea is that those teachers who do not view inclusion positively will not recognize or embrace these opportunities to learn from our differences. Combs and Harper (1967) recognized that if a teacher's attitude towards a child is negative, that the behaviour of others could extend the students exceptionality rather than aiding the child. This idea is very troublesome when recognizing that negative attitudes towards students in the inclusive classroom still exist.

Effects on Teaching

As previously stated, the most obvious effect of negative attitudes towards inclusive education is that without teacher support, it is almost impossible to implement a successful inclusive education program. Hammond et al. (2003) stated that an unsuccessful inclusive education program "would only strengthen negative attitudes of uncertainty regarding inclusion and its benefits" (p.4). It seems then, that negative attitudes result in an unsuccessful program, and an unsuccessful program results in strengthened negative attitudes (Gottfried, 2007), showing a supervisor the importance of combating these attitudes within the group early on. This cyclical pattern could prove to be the downfall of inclusive education if educators' views continue to hold negative opinions. Therefore, it is necessary to first have a solid program in place, and then introduce and train teachers to be

successful in this program. With an unsuccessful program, teachers will only become more frustrated with the system and form a negative opinion of the concept as a result.

Kuyini and Desai (2007) sought to discover if educator attitudes towards inclusive education and educators' knowledge of inclusive practices were related to effective inclusive school practices. The study found that "attitudes towards inclusion . . . and knowledge of inclusive education . . . were predictive of effective teaching in inclusive classrooms" (Kuyini & Desai, p.109). This conclusion builds on the idea presented in Burke and Sutherland's (2004) findings that without positive teacher attitudes towards inclusion, inclusive classrooms would not be successful because teachers would not have the commitment to implement inclusive practices. Therefore, in order to present effective teaching in an inclusive classroom, a commitment to and a positive attitude towards inclusion must be present (Gottfried, 2007).

Teachers possessing a positive view towards inclusive education can become contribute to negative effect on teaching and learning. Talmor, Reiter, and Feigin (2005) concluded that teachers' attitudes towards inclusion were most significantly linked to burnout as compared to the other background variables (p.212). The authors go on to state that those who had a positive perception towards inclusion also had high expectations and realized that they could not meet these high expectations (Gottfried, 2007). They, therefore, experienced a higher rate of burnout as compared to those who did not have a positive attitude towards inclusion (Talmor et al.).

This trend is, perhaps, not a deficit in educator ability but a deficit of training and resources as the authors stated that "teachers seemed to feel that they hardly had any information at all, and once the student was enrolled in their classroom the help they received was minimal" (Talmor et al., p.222). This result seems particularly disturbing with educational policies increasingly moving towards inclusive education. With the teachers who favour the practice most favourably leaving the profession, it seems that implementing a successful inclusive education program with committed teachers could be a challenge (Gottfried, 2007).

The Role of the Supervisor

Using this example of inclusive education as an issue in schools, one can easily see how important it is to know your own beliefs, as well as knowing the beliefs of those around you. Our attitudes can easily influence others either positively or negatively and as a supervisor it's necessary to use those influences in order to help the group in reaching a common goal. In this scenario, the common goal is to implement inclusive education programs. In a world where a divide exists amongst educators towards reacting positively or negatively to inclusive education, it is realistic to assume that a supervisor will encounter a divide amongst his or her staff. When realizing the consequences of allowing negativities to prevail, including unsuccessful programming, negative teaching practices, and disadvantages to student learning, it is necessary for a supervisor to take hold of the situation and to build positive attitudes within the school.

Know Your Staff

The question remaining then is: how is a supervisor to turn around the personal attitudes of a staff in order to benefit from inclusive education programs? After reviewing the ideas behind knowing thyself and the consequences that can arise from differing attitudes, we believe that an obvious place for a supervisor to begin is with his or her own staff. To discuss through open communication the concerns that different staff members may have about inclusive education would allow for ideas to be shared, and, perhaps, for areas from the "private self" of the Johari window to be moved to the "public self" so that we can all better understand not only ourselves, but each other. Without open, honest, and accurate

communication, the benefits of the Johari window cannot be reached. We believe that it is the role of the supervisor to create an environment where the staff feel a level of comfort and trust that allows them to experience this open, honest reflection with their peers without fear of ridicule or disrespect. With this open, honest communication, some members may learn elements of their "blind self" that others were aware of that the individual was not. With these realizations, areas of cognitive dissonance may be rectified allowing for an individual to be aware of their own beliefs, behaviours, and actions.

After open communication has been established, and the supervisor is aware of the attitudes and beliefs that are held by the staff, we believe that input from the staff as to why they hold the beliefs that they do, and what they need to help with the situation would be invaluable. We believe that sometimes finding a solution can be as simple as asking what needs to be done and acting on that.

Professional Development

The literature concerning teacher attitudes and inclusive education showed an obvious reason why concerns toward inclusive education have continued throughout the years. A lack of knowledge and a lack of training were consistently cited in the literature stemming the 1970's to today. Brooks and Bransford (1971) felt that "from knowledge comes understanding and from understanding comes acceptance" (p. 259). They went on to conclude that reasons behind negative attitudes of the time stemmed from a lack of knowledge concerning the roles and functions surrounding special education. As well, Van Reusen, Anthony K., Shoho, Alan R., Barker, and Kimberly S. (2001) concluded in their study concerning high school teacher attitudes towards inclusion that levels of special education training, knowledge, and experience in working with these students were related to teachers having a positive attitude toward inclusion. Subban and Sharma (2005) included in their discussion towards understanding educator attitudes towards inclusion that "the most negative views about inclusive education are held by teachers with little or no training in special education" (Gottfried, 2008). If we assume that these concerns are general concerns amongst opponents to inclusive education, then this is exactly where the supervisor needs to begin: with knowledge and training.

In education, knowledge and training generally grow via professional development which is essentially, "the continuous education of educators" (Glickman, Gordon & Ross-Gordon, 2010, p. 276). Common characteristics exist as to what should be involved in successful professional development, these include, and are not limited to, the involvement of participants in planning, implementing, and evaluating the programs; developing programs based on school goals; and developing long-range plans (Glickman, Gordon & Ross-Gordon). Using the example of inclusive education, first the staff would need to be involved in the planning to consider what their needs are; this could come through open communication of teachers and staff explaining what they need in order to be more successful in this program. School-wide goals would need to be established to foster an inclusive environment for all students throughout all classrooms in the school. This could include school wide events, combining classes for different activities and subjects, and making values of inclusion for all students, including race, religion, disability, etc. a daily occurrence. Finally, these goals of inclusion would need to be factored into the long-range goals of the school to ensure that these values are continued and developed.

Considering that negative attitudes towards inclusive education can weaken the program and create strengthened negative attitudes, I feel that it is safe to assume that positive attitudes can strengthen the program and create strengthened positive attitudes. From the standpoint of the supervisor trying to implement professional development for his or her

staff, it would then be beneficial to use the positive attitudes of staff members to show those who are negative what benefits can come from inclusion and how inclusion can work in a classroom. The necessity of knowing ones staff is vitally important here as a supervisor would need to know not only the attitudes of the staff, but the needs of individual staff members and the leadership and training styles that best suit each person so that staff members are not left feeling uncomfortable or unwilling to participate when other staff members are highlighted for their teaching performances in inclusive classrooms.

Conclusion

As a supervisor, the importance of knowing oneself, and knowing those that he or she is supervising, is vital to the success of the group. When conflicting values, attitudes, and beliefs are present amongst the members of the group over an issue, or over the behaviours of a member, we believe that the entire group can break down. For a supervisor to successfully implement a program, such as inclusion, knowing the attitudes of the staff is vital as a program such as this cannot be successful without positive support. The only way that these issues can be managed is if individuals first understand their values and share these honestly. With this openness, shared goals, and collaborative decision making are next required to create professional development initiatives. Without this open understanding of each others concerns, these programs can become weak and ineffective leading to negative attitudes. These inclusive agendas are fated for failure without the positive support of staff however, it always begins with the individual values before it can become a collective value.

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