1 Introduction

A New View of Supervision

Imagine two very different conceptualizations of what a school might look like. On the surface, these two perspectives might first appear to be quite similar. Both involve a pair of circles. Actually, each picture includes a small, inner circle surrounded by a larger one, almost as if there are two targets and two bull's-eyes. But, there are major differences between the two diagrams. In one, the large circle is entitled "The Needs of Students," while the smaller circle at the center carries the descriptor, "The Priorities of the School." In the second picture, the titles are reversed. The larger circle carries the description "The Priorities of the School" while the center circle says, "The Needs of the Students." The diagrams, at a distance, look the same. But as one approaches and examines the two diagrams, there is a world of difference.

In the real world of education, the same observations can be made about schools. They tend to all look pretty much alike. All have organizational structures, with classes, teachers, administrators, support personnel, classified staff, students, and parents. All schools exist and operate within certain communities and environments, complete with laws, governance patterns, financial parameters, and so forth. But, as most people—whether professional educators or members of the lay public—realize very quickly, there are significant differences between schools that often appear on the surface to be quite similar.

Like the "Tale of Two Circles" that opened this chapter, we often see situations that appear to be similar to others, but we quickly learn that distinctions often contribute to the quality of one setting over another. Two

restaurants offer the same menu, but one restaurant is regarded as a place that serves great meals, while the other establishment has very little repeat business. Hotels seem to offer the same basic services, yet one place files for bankruptcy while its rival is classified as a "Five Star" hotel that draws continual rave reviews from guests.

Throughout this book, an assumption is made that, as a school leader, you are interested in ensuring that schools with which you are associated are perceived as "good schools" that deserve "Five Star" ratings and kudos from your clients. You want your school to be better than average, or a place that "makes a difference." Unlike the hotel operators or restaurateurs, you may not be concerned about making certain that you attract a lot of repeat customers or higher profits than your competitors. But, as an educational leader, you are vitally concerned about the importance that each and every one of your "customers" receives a positive experience. In your world, that is translated as learning, developing potential, and maintaining a positive self-image and quality of life.

This book is directed toward helping you achieve the goal of leading your school to become like the second circle described earlier. Instead of becoming the administrator or manager of a school where your role is simply one of requiring students to conform to the expectations and needs of the school, you will be provided with an alternative perspective that defines effective educational leadership as developing a school where the primary goal is always defined as putting the needs of learners at the center of all activity.

We will look at this approach to effective supervision through a number of different perspectives, both theoretical and practical. You will quickly appreciate an important assumption made here, and that is the fact that the kind of effort promoted here is not necessarily something that is easy to do immediately. The fact is, there are quite a large number of schools across the country that have operated for a long time using the model of the first circle, where learners must conform to the school. And this has been acceptable because there are many who view schools as nothing more than normative institutions that control student behavior. It may also be understandable because it is typically much easier to run an organization that always follows the same patterns for operating. On the one hand, if your goal is to run a school in a predictable, efficient, and uncomplicated way by doing little more than ensuring that all students comply with your rules, your regulations, and your needs for control, you find the whole premise of this book to be contrary to your own views and values.

On the other hand, if you believe that "schools are for kids" and "kids come first" are more than simplistic, overused slogans, you may find the following chapters to be very helpful to you in providing leadership in

your school. In Chapter 2, for example, a number of different historical views of supervisory practice are offered. Each is likely to be a tempting definition for an important part of supervision in schools. Depending on which view you find most consistent with your personal assumptions, you may begin to recognize which of the "two circles" is what you wish to see in a school.

This book, in a sense, is all about the values of leaders. First, there is the overriding orientation described in this chapter. It says, quite simply, that the most critical issue for anyone in education—whether classroom teacher or school administrator—must involve directing all activities in any school toward the needs of students. That theme is introduced in every chapter of the book. In each case, after you read through material designed to assist you in developing a personal awareness of a specific issue faced by an educational supervisor, you will be asked to consider an important "So what?" question. Here, the question is always posed in reference to how the material introduced in a chapter can be consistent with the over-arching theme of "children at the center of the circle." If you are not convinced that the driving force of a good school must be the needs of students, reading this book may be quite an uncomfortable experience for you.

Second, regardless of the type of organization, the most critical thing to be understood by an effective leader will always be his or her value orientation in the first place. Simply directing a school toward achieving high test scores each year will eventually become a meaningless, mechanical activity if the principal is not fundamentally convinced that student learning must be ensured, and that testing is a way to see if that goal is still in front of the school. In other words, if the leader does not truly value something, those expected to follow will be unlikely be swayed to perform stated goals and objectives.

Noting the importance of understanding personal leadership values has led many to suggest that a critical duty of anyone seeking success as a leader must be the periodic reflection on personal perspectives and orientation to issues that one will face as a leader. Argyris (1982) and later Sergiovanni and Starratt (1993) have noted that a leader's actions are guided when they are imbedded as part of a personal philosophy of action. In each chapter of this book, you will be asked to pause and reflect on the content that is presented, and measure that in terms of its effect on your personal values. By the conclusion of this book, it is expected that you will have considered many "planks" that traditionally constitute a platform statement.

The book is divided into three sections that are related to broad themes that need to be addressed by a leader developing a personal educational platform. The first section ("Views About the Job") contains individual

chapters that address your perceptions of various characteristics of administration and supervision in general. Chapters will ask you to reflect on issues that are related to certain realities that provide a fundamental definition of effective leadership. Chapter 2 challenges you to reflect on several possible traditional perspectives and alternative models as you develop a personal response to the question "What is supervision?" Chapter 3 then asks you to define "leadership" in terms that are consistent with your platform. In subsequent chapters, you will be invited to focus on many specific aspects of leading a school. You will reflect on what the concepts of power and authority mean to you as a fundamental reality of serving as a leader (Chapter 4) and how to deal with conflict (Chapter 5).

The second section of the book ("Views About the People Who Make Up a School") asks you to consider your stance concerning the "people side" of your world as a leader. For example, Chapter 6 presents information about the realities of the lives of teachers and asks you to assess your real views of who teachers are and how you value their work. Evaluation is a term often associated with supervisory practice, and so we look at it with a recognition that supervisors must come to some personal judgment of what their role is to be. That will be the central theme considered in Chapter 7. The last two chapters ask you to consider your personal stance regarding such matters as how to define effectiveness (Chapter 8) and the purpose of schooling (Chapter 9).

Each chapter follows the same basic pattern as it addresses its content. In every case, a brief case study will introduce the major issue of the chapter. Next, information concerning the main topic is provided to you in a way that asks you to participate in reviewing certain key concepts. In a section on building your platform, you will be invited to think about your personal responses to each of the points raised throughout the chapter. Every chapter includes a section in which you are provided with some ideas of how you might be able to apply what you have read to your work as an effective school leader.

This book supports the notion that educational leaders who are most successful have a clear sense of the purposes of schooling in general. They also have developed clear personal philosophies concerning the nature of the people with whom they work each day. And they have constructed a sense of purpose and reality in terms of the nature of the job of being a school leader in the first place. Effectiveness is based on the ability to do tasks and carry out responsibilities correctly. But it is also important that leaders construct a personal sense of why they do what they do in the first place.

School leaders are important people because they can create the conditions that are necessary to make schools into learning places, not simply

buildings where students are "warehoused" each day. You can appreciate that a number of key concepts will assist you not only in carrying out your assigned responsibilities in an orderly and effective fashion but, more important, acquiring insights into ways in which your work will have as great an impact as possible on learners.

IN REVIEW

Effective supervision and administration in education is to be directed toward the creation and maintenance of good schools. In turn, good schools are defined as those in which all efforts are made to support the needs of students. Too often, schools are operated as if the most important objective is to coerce students into complying with the expectations of the schools.

REFERENCES

Argyris, C. (1982). *Reasoning, learning, and action: Individual and organization*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
Sergiovanni, T. J., & Starratt, R. J. (1993). *Supervision* (5th ed.) New York: McGraw-Hill.