Language Teacher Supervision

A Case-Based Approach

KATHLEEN M. BAILEY

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To
Richard K. McMillan
(1951–2001)

First brother.
First friend.
First person I ever thought I supervised.

Preface

This book is about language teacher supervision – a profession that many teachers enter almost by accident. Teachers can be promoted into supervisory positions for many reasons: they are excellent teachers, they have experience, they have "people skills," they are seen as loyal to the administration, they have seniority, and so on. Seldom are teachers made supervisors because they have had specific professional preparation for the role.

Sometimes teacher supervision feels like a tug-of-war, a power struggle between the supervisor and the supervisee. At other times, supervision can be a very rewarding profession, full of teamwork. As I look back upon my own career, it appears that I have been working between the tug-of-war and the teamwork for more than 30 years.

This book is a combination literature review and casebook. It is not a memoir, although some of my experiences are woven into it. My first supervisory job was in Korea in the summer of 1973. I was hired to teach and coordinate a remedial reading component of an education program for American soldiers. The only requirement for teaching in this program was a bachelor's degree in any field. With my teaching credential and limited experience, I was seen as one of the best-prepared reading teachers in the region, so I was asked to be a supervising teacher for the program. A motley assortment of people taught these remedial reading classes, most with no preparation and all with no support except the textbooks and whatever advice I could give them. Some teachers were book-bound, droning on and on, telling the students to turn to the next page, complete the exercise, raise their hands when they were done. When I gave these teachers feedback, some complained about my lack of skills or training as a supervisor, just as I complained about their lack of skills or training as reading teachers.

In August 1976, I completed my master's degree at UCLA. My thesis was a small experiment about observation systems in language teacher education. Then, one month after I finished my degree, I was hired as the coordinator of the ESL program at UCLA. I found myself observing teachers (many who were more experienced than I), giving them feedback, and writing evaluations. Anxiety permeated my days, but gradually I developed a modicum of professionalism as a supervisor, although it was a slow and painful process.

I completed my doctoral coursework and started teaching in the new master's degree program in TESOL at the Monterey Institute of International Studies in September 1981. In five years, the department grew to a full-time faculty of five, plus some adjunct professors. I became department chair and was expected to observe and evaluate professors whose skills and knowledge bases were different from mine. Thanks to their professionalism and cooperative spirit, there were no supervisorial crises.

In September 1988, I became the director of the intensive English program at the Monterey Institute. For two years, during times of declining enrollment and tight budgets, I tried to keep the program alive. Watching the ESL teachers work with the students, I was constantly reminded of how many creative ways there are to accomplish instructional goals. The classroom observations and evaluations directly affected decisions as to which teachers would receive contracts during the next session, so it was very important for me to do a good job.

At the Monterey Institute, we began offering a Certificate in Language Program Administration in September 1993. For this program, a 30-hour seminar I had been teaching on language teacher education and supervision was split into two courses. At that point, I realized that about 70 percent of the former course had been on teacher education and only about 30 percent addressed teacher supervision. So I started reading, combing the literature for information about language teacher supervision. Such literature was very limited, and I turned to the work on supervision in business and industry as well as in general education. For six years, I taught the supervision course from a compilation of photocopied articles and not-quite-appropriate textbooks that were borrowed from other disciplines. A sense of coherence in language teacher supervision continued to elude me.

In September 1999, in an attempt to impose some order on the chaos, I began to write a manuscript on language teacher supervision. This book – a combination literature review and casebook – is the result. The cases came easily, born of experiences (mine, my colleagues', my MA students'). However, reviewing the literature was a daunting task because the books and articles about supervision come from such diverse fields. The literature includes research and opinion pieces from general education, psychotherapy, foreign language education, business and industry, and social work.

Now that the manuscript is done, a real, bound book, I hope you will enjoy and benefit from the results of this work. Perhaps for you, gaining knowledge about supervision and developing skills as a professional language teacher supervisor will be more purposeful and straightforward than the largely haphazard endeavor it has been for me and many others like me.

Acknowledgments

This book on language teacher supervision was written with the support of many helpful individuals. I am very grateful to all of them for their input and encouragement.

My colleagues at the Monterey Institute of International Studies contributed both explicitly and implicitly to the volume's production. In particular I want to thank the teachers in the TESOL-TFL Program, the English Studies Program, the language courses, and the Intensive English Program, who graciously allowed my graduate students and me to observe their classes and discuss their teaching with them over the years.

The graduate students in the Monterey Institute's seminar on language teacher supervision helped me refine the ideas presented in this book. I especially want to thank the members of the fall semester 2000 class, who read and discussed the draft cases with me. The students in the fall semester 2001 class read the entire book in draft form. Various iterations of the revised manuscript were used by the students in fall semesters of 2002, 2003, and 2004.

In the Monterey Institute library, Zooey Lober patiently processed hundreds of interlibrary loan requests, with assistance from Joan Ryan and Jennifer Waterson.

The writing of this book was supported by the Mark Award for Faculty Development, a grant from Joseph and Sheila Mark, who have helped many Monterey Institute professors over the years. I gratefully acknowledge both their financial assistance and their moral support.

The text as it emerged was word processed by my incredibly capable student helpers: Angela Dadak, Steven Hales, Sarah Springer, Bethany Alling, and Britt Johnson. Britt's key role as my editorial assistant was made possible by the Marks' generous donation. Her responsibilities during the time we worked on this volume ranged from word processing to library and Web-based research, to pointing out problems of clarity in the text and keeping me sane. When Britt graduated, Sarah Springer continued, with grace, patience, and skill. Then Melanie Anderson and Jessica Massie came back from their Peace Corps assignments (in Russia and Guinea, respectively) to help with the final manuscript preparation.

Toward the end of the revision process, three anonymous reviewers provided detailed suggestions for improving the manuscript. While I have

not incorporated all their suggestions, I hope that each of them will recognize evidence of their ideas in these chapters. I expect that all three are excellent supervisors, since their feedback was clear and supportive, striking a fine balance between criticism and encouragement. At Cambridge University Press, the book was guided into print by Angela Castro, Kayo Taguchi, and Kathleen Corley.

The work of many scholars, teachers, and teacher educators has shaped this book. In particular, the publications of Ruth Wajnryb, Michael Wallace, Jerry Gebhard, and Karen Johnson have influenced my thinking considerably. Reading the work of Donald Freeman, David Nunan, Bob Oprandy, and Leo van Lier, and talking directly with these authors, has been both challenging and fruitful.

And, as always, Les endured patiently while photocopied articles, sketchy figures, and books about language teacher supervision littered our home and our lives. I'm sorry you couldn't wait until it was done, sweetheart. The dining room table is cleared off now.

Contents

Preface xiii
Acknowledgments xv

Chapter 1 Doing supervision: Roles and skills 1
Case for analysis: Your new job as a language teacher supervisor 2
Supervision as a profession 2
What is language teacher supervision? 4
Supervisors' varied roles in professional contexts 6
Roles of teacher supervisors in general education 8
Supervisory roles in language education contexts 13
Supervisory skills 17
The case approach to teaching and learning 22
Concluding comments 27

Chapter 2 Awareness and attitude 34
Case for analysis: A question of varieties 34
Awareness and language teacher supervision 35
Attitudes, language teaching, and language teacher supervision 40
Sociocultural theory and language teacher supervision 42
Working with teachers' knowledge and skills 44
Attitudes, awareness, and teachers' journals 47
Promoting awareness and development 49
Concluding comments 50

Chapter 3 Autonomy and authority 54
Case for analysis: The "teacher's pet" issue 54
Autonomy in second language learning and teaching contexts 55
Autonomy, supervision, and power 60
Autonomy and self-regulated action 63
Autonomy in decision making and action taking 68
Authority 73
Concluding comments 77

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Chapter 4 Issues in observing language teachers 81
Case for analysis: Getting through the door 81
To observe or not to observe: That is the first question 82
To collect data or not to collect data: That is the second question 86
Key concepts in data collection 92
Concluding comments 95

Chapter 5 Manual data collection procedures 99
Case for analysis: Wrong place on the audiotape 99
Generating field notes as classroom data 100
Using observation instruments 112
Concluding comments 118

Chapter 6 Electronic data collection procedures 122
Case for analysis: Working with a transcript 122
Using audiotapes to collect observational data 123
Using videotapes to collect observational data 124
Advantages and disadvantages of electronic data collection 127
Using transcripts 129
Triangulation in data collection 131
Technological developments in supervision 132
Concluding comments 135

Chapter 7 The post-observation conference 140
Case for analysis: Classroom control issues 140
The role of feedback in language teacher supervision 141
Factors affecting supervisory discourse 148
Macroanalyses of the post-observation conference 150
Supervisors' nonverbal behavior during post-observation conferences 156
Concluding comments 157

Chapter 8 Mitigation and the microanalysis of supervisory discourse 160
Case for analysis: A tricky post-observation conference 160
Face-threatening acts in the feedback conference 164
Mitigation in supervisory discourse 166
Syntactic mitigation devices 171
Semantic mitigation devices 174
Indirect mitigation devices 177
Concluding comments 179

Chapter 9 Purposes, participants, and principles in language teacher evaluation 182
Case for analysis: Summative evaluation of two teachers 182
Purposes of teacher evaluation 184
Sources of input: Participants in the language teacher evaluation process 185
Principles for language teacher evaluation 192
Portfolio assessment 194
Problems in language teacher evaluation 198
Concluding comments 202

Chapter 10 Criteria for language teacher evaluation 206
Case for analysis: Letter of recommendation 207
Evaluative criteria 208
Problems in defining effective teaching 213
Factors influencing teacher effectiveness 217
Allocated time and engaged time 219
Concluding comments 222

Chapter 11 Supervising preservice language teachers 225
Case for analysis: The practicum student 225
The prevalence of research on preservice teacher supervision 226
Situational leadership and language teacher supervision 227
Participants in the supervision of student teachers 233
Problems in giving feedback to preservice teachers 242
Concluding comments 247

Chapter 12 Supervising teaching assistants 251
Case for analysis: Rater reliability 251
The work of teaching assistants 252
The central dilemma in supervising teaching assistants 253
International teaching assistants 257
Coordination and quality control 258
Strategies for supervising teaching assistants 260
Concluding comments 262

Chapter 13 Supervising in-service language teachers 267
Case for analysis: The curriculum issue 267
Teacher decision making and language teacher supervision 269

The induction years 276
Attitudinal factors in the supervision of language teachers 277
Research on supervision in in-service contexts 284
Concluding comments 289

Chapter 14 Supervising non-native-speaking teachers 293
Case for analysis: Working with less-than-proficient language teachers 293
Nativeness in the broader context 294
Issues in working with non-native teachers 297
Strategies for supporting non-native-speaking language teachers 298
Defining language proficiency standards for teachers 300
Language teachers' perceptions 306
Concluding comments 310

Chapter 15 Professionalism, paradigm shifts, and language teacher supervision 314
Case for analysis: Exploring our options 315
Teacher professionalism and language teacher supervision 318
Reflective teaching and language teacher supervision 325
Alternatives to supervision 332
Supervision in service to teaching and learning 340
Concluding comments 341

References 345
Author index 373
Subject index 379

1 Doing supervision: Roles and skills

This book is intended for people who might become language teacher supervisors, as well as for those who already have supervisory responsibilities. It reviews literature on supervision in a variety of settings, including applied linguistics, business and industry, psychotherapy, general education, social work, and an emerging body of work in language teacher supervision itself. The majority of the literature cited here comes from North American contexts, but I have indicated those parts of the text that draw on research and practice from other regions.

Writing this book as a traditional literature review would be like using only the physics of motion and gravity to explain the art of Olympic pairs figure skating. Theory and research alone cannot capture the complicated dynamics of a masterly performance. Nor would a literature review about ice-skating greatly help inexperienced skaters with buckling ankles and unsteady balance increase their skills.

While language teacher supervision is not as physically demanding as pairs figure skating, it is dynamic, emotionally charged, and interactive, and there are many trials involved in supervising well. For these reasons this book combines a literature review with the case approach; and since supervision involves interaction, the cases are designed to put you, the reader, into situations requiring communication.

Because this book is in part based on my experiences and those of my students and colleagues, it is necessarily personal, and full of my own opinions and recommendations. I have tried to flag the parts of the text that are opinion and those that result from research or theory. For instance, *I* and *me* indicate my opinion or personal experience. And *we* is not the royal or the editorial *we*; rather, it marks my shared experiences with readers (you), either as teachers or as supervisors.

Finally, because the purpose of this book is to help supervisors (or future supervisors) do their work better and more confidently, each chapter contains activities to help you apply the concepts presented. These activities consist of the Case Discussion (about the specific case presented in the chapter), Tasks and Discussion (related to broader supervisory contexts), and Suggestions for Further Reading (to help you pursue your interest in the topic).

This chapter begins with a case that is based on a true story. The chapter then discusses supervision as a profession, focusing specifically on language teacher supervision. It reviews the roles of supervisors in various professional contexts, including education, before discussing the particular skills supervisors need. A rationale is also provided for using the case approach for learning about language teacher supervision. We will begin with a case to contextualize the issues raised in this chapter.

Case for analysis: Your new job as a language teacher supervisor

You have just completed your postgraduate work in applied linguistics and language teaching at a university that provides both language instruction and teacher education. During your studies you had a teaching assistantship (TA-ship), which enabled you to make money and to gain experience by teaching language classes as you completed your degree.

Upon finishing your degree, you are hired on a part-time basis to teach and to assist the professor who will supervise the teaching assistants (TAs) in the coming year. You will observe classes, help the new TAs learn about the curriculum, hold office hours, and administer the final examinations. You feel well prepared for the language classes you will teach, but you view your supervisory role with some trepidation, as you have had only a little prior experience in observing teachers, and it was not entirely positive. Nevertheless, you feel that you may gain some skills that will be beneficial to you by assisting the professor in charge of the teaching assistants.

Three weeks before the semester begins, that professor resigns. The teacher education professors in the department don't want to supervise the TAs; they feel this job consumes time that they should devote to research and publishing. The department chair therefore appoints you to serve as the TA supervisor for the coming year. There is no formal job description, but you are given a temporary faculty appointment, including benefits and a reasonable salary. That's the good news. The bad news is that you will be supervising and evaluating some of your closest friends, as well as some language teachers who are older and more experienced than you are.

Supervision as a profession

The status of supervision as a specific profession has been discussed in many fields, including business and industry, psychology, social work,

and education. Writing about supervision in general education, Alfonso, Firth, and Neville have said:

> A major deterrent to full professional status of educational supervisors is an ill-defined knowledge base and a lack of an agreed-upon set of professional skills. Every profession equips its members with a conceptual and intellectual base from which skills are derived and expressed in practice. The skills of instructional supervision, however, have remained remarkably undefined and random, partly because the theoretical base is so thin. Moreover, the skills that are used are generally acquired on the job, rather than during professional preparation and internship. (1984:16)

Bernard has noted a similar situation in the preparation of clinical psychologists. She says that "unlike the literature that addresses counselor training, little has been said about the training of supervisors" (1979:60). Indeed, this lack of preparation for supervisors is a repeated theme in the literature of various professions. In recent years, however, publications in general education have suggested this situation is changing.

During the later decades of the past century, teacher supervision emerged as a career track in language education. Perhaps this trend developed because language teaching has become a commercial enterprise, and supervisors are needed to make sure that customers get what they pay for. Or maybe, in aspiring to establish language teaching as a profession, teachers have chosen to monitor their own programs' instructional practices (Nunan, 1999a, 1999b). On the other hand, perhaps so much language teaching around the world is done by people without professional preparation that there is a need for quality control mechanisms. Maybe language educators have simply adopted general education's traditional bureaucratic structures, including having certain employees be responsible for ensuring the quality of others' work.

Whatever the reasons, many language teachers find themselves working as supervisors. Their duties include visiting and evaluating other teachers, discussing their lessons with them, and making recommendations to them about what to continue and what to change.

Unfortunately, very few language teachers ever receive any formal preparation for carrying out supervisors' responsibilities. It is often assumed that teachers who are promoted to supervisorial positions will automatically know how to supervise because they have seniority or because they have displayed leadership qualities. Some are appointed as supervisors because they are stable, cooperative employees. Still others attain teacher supervision positions because they are recognized as effective teachers. If they continue to teach while in their supervisory positions, presumably they will serve as good role models. If their new duties mean they no longer teach, then they are expected to convey to

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