Applying Dialectical Dialogue to Instructional Supervision

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Abstract

The author argues for applying dialectical dialogue to instructional supervision in PK-12 education. After reviewing historical perspectives on both dialectic and dialogue, the author considers views for and against integrating the two and concludes that, if we take a broad view of both types of discourse, they can be combined in a process referred to as dialectical dialogue. The article next discusses the application of dialectical dialogue to supervision of instruction, including application to the selection of a supervision model, a supervision model in use, and the enhancement of instructional programs.

Introduction

Instructional supervision is a subset of educational leadership focused on assistance for the improvement of teaching and learning (Glickman, et al., 2018). A classic function of instructional supervision is clinical supervision, individualized assistance consisting of a pre-observation conference, classroom observation, and post-observation conference. Another function of instructional supervision is working with groups of teachers for the improvement of the school's instructional program (Glickman, et al., 2018; Sergiovanni, et al., 2014; Zepeda, 2017).

Dialectic and dialogue are two concepts discussed in the literature on educational leadership and instructional supervision. Cusher (2015), for example, defines dialectic as "a conversation in which two different views are expressed and subjected to rational scrutiny

alongside one another" (p. 198). According to Gordon (2008), dialogue "seeks common ground, identifies and critiques assumptions, creates openness to change, seeks to use the strengths of all participants, integrates ideas, and opens the possibility of better solutions" (p. 6).

Considering dialectic and dialogue in relationship to instructional supervision raises several questions. What are the similarities and differences between the two? Are dialectic and dialogue compatible? Are some versions of dialectic and dialogue more compatible than others? Can supervisors and teachers integrate dialectic and dialogue as they work together to improve teaching and learning? Although dialectic and dialogue are addressed in the literature on instructional supervision, none of the above questions are dealt with in that body of literature. To ponder such questions, we need to review scholarship on dialectic and dialogue from outside the field of instructional supervision, and reflect on how that scholarship might be applied to supervision. The purpose of this article is to initiate such review and reflection.

In the first two sections below, I discuss dialectic and dialogue, including several historical versions of both processes. In the third section, I address the issue of whether the two processes can be integrated and conclude that, if broadly conceived, dialectic and dialogue can be combined. In the last section, I describe the application of dialectical dialogue to three different aspects of instructional supervision.

Dialectic

For Socrates, dialectic consists of the teacher asking the student a series of questions about an idea presented by the student, with the teacher's questions and student's answers revealing contradictions in the student's argument, enabling the student to arrive at the truth concerning the idea in question without being directed by the teacher (Dafermos, 2018; Plato, 1961; Ravenscroft et al., 2006). Plato's fictional *Dialogues*, usually featuring Socrates as the teacher, were intended as models of dialectic inquiry. In the *Dialogues*, the teacher helped the student to reflect upon an idea presented by the student. The teacher asked questions to test the student's *idea* rather than the *student*, and in Socratic fashion, the process (not the teacher) revealed contradictions and weaknesses in the student's idea. Although the ideas examined in the *Dialogues* were philosophical ones, the real purpose was for the reader to learn about dialectic inquiry, after which the process could be used for self-discovery or to teach others (Fortunoff, 1998). Aristotle held that didactic inquiry should be reserved for complex issues (Montague, 2019a), and that provocateurs and emotional issues were

not compatible with the process (Montague, 2019b). Participants in Aristotle's dialectic inquiry tested each other's propositions with questions that could lead to the identification of contradictions within and refutation of propositions. This process also would lead to new propositions. Success was reached when the opponents reached agreement on a proposition (Montague, 2019a).

A number of luminaries brought dialectic to prominence in the 18th and 19th centuries. Kant proposed two types of dialectic, formal and transcendental. Formal dialectic relies on a combination of logic and reliable information. Transcendental dialectic relies on logic alone. Kant believed that transcendental dialect is legitimate, and moreover, "it is not only useful but even necessary for the maximal development of empirical research" (Loparic, 1987, p. 583). Kant offered a number of interesting insights on dialectic. He described dialectic skill as that needed to argue both for and against a statement (Rotenstreich, 1954). Kant argued that simply because an idea contains no contradictions does not mean that it necessarily is true (Loparic, 1987). And he proposed that it is premature to suggest contradictions if the range of possibilities is unknown (Rotenstreich, 1954).

Hegel believed that ideas shape the world—ideas come first. Furthermore, you must fully understand an idea before you can successfully apply it to the material world. According to Hegel, participants in dialectic propose concepts, make implicit contradictions within those concepts explicit, resolve those contradictions, and in doing so, develop new concepts. This cycle is recurring with a movement toward more and more sophisticated concepts, as well as more and more harmony among participants. Hegel's dialectic had a strong metaphysical dimension; he believed the ultimate goal of dialectic is to reach the absolute truth, "totality," or "the whole" (Dafermos, 2018; Ravenscroft et al., 2006: Williams & Ryan, 2020).

Marx and Engels took the opposite view of Hegel. They believed the material world shapes ideas rather than ideas shaping the world, hence the term dialectical materialism. According to Marx and Engels (1970), we learn about the world by interacting with it, and the ultimate goal is not to study the world but to change it. Like earlier philosophers, they believed that improvement comes about by recognizing and resolving conflict, but the conflict they proposed as the focus of dialectic was that between the bourgeoisie (wealthy class) and the proletariat. This conflict, according to Marx and Engels (2013), results in the dissolution of the existing capitalist state and the evolution of the communist state. Marx and Engels believed that everything in the material world is interconnected, and this means that for the tran-

sition from capitalism to communism to succeed related factors like competitive markets, division of labor, and private property all need to be abolished.

Numerous variations of the dialectic process are described in the literature (Farjoun, 2019; Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2017; Nielsen, 1996; Ravencroft et al., 2006; van den Berghe, 1963). Table 1 displays diagrams that summarize a few different versions of that process. All of the diagrams in Table 1, of course, are oversimplifications, but they provide an overview of various versions of the dialectic process that invites deeper exploration.

Table 1
Alternative Diagrams Summarizing the Dialectic Process

Affirmation →	Negation→	Synthesis
Concept →	Disequilibrium →	Emergence
Thesis →	Antithesis →	Synthesis
Theory →	Instability →	Union
Concept →	Contradictions →	New Concept

In the present, as in the past, there is no single version of dialectic. However, there are several broad themes of modern dialectic, many of which mirror earlier versions of the process. First, participants are expected to have different points of view over the proposition to be discussed, but the purpose is not to convince others to agree with one's point of view. Dialectic is not about a debate over whether to accept or reject a proposition in its totality or to argue about which participant's idea is the best; it is about expanding knowledge as well as combining and improving ideas (Cronenberg & Headly, 2019). Participants take turns asking questions, pointing out possible contradictions (within propositions, not colleagues), and providing new information. The group's goal is to consider multiple perspectives on the proposition under consideration, challenge aspects of the proposition when warranted, and consider new alternatives (Cronenberg & Headley, 2019). The group's discussion could lead to an entirely new proposition, but in the traditional dialectic process, a new proposition will include some aspects of the original proposition. Resulting propositions "retain some of the features of the precedents yet introduce novel elements as well, perhaps by drawing on additional inputs, leading to an ongoing progression" (Farjoun, 2019, p. 135).

Contradiction is an important aspect of dialectic on two levels. In

a dialectical discussion of a proposal, participants identify contradictions within the proposal with efforts to resolve those contradictions leading to a new proposal (Williams & Ryan, 2020). Dialectic also can involve examining and addressing existing contradictions within a society, organization, group, or personal relationship (Baxter, 1990; Benson, 1977). An example of this second type of contradiction concerns an historically bureaucratic organization that recently began to provide new services requiring workers to use a high level of creativity. Dialectic between the organization's leadership and new employees hired for their creativity led to a change toward more democratic leadership, and more freedom for the employees to express their creativity. Dialectic considers the presence and consideration of contradiction to be a necessary part of the change process (Baxter, 1990).

Dialogue

The concept of dialogue has, no doubt, been present among men and women since before the beginning of recorded history; however, the scholarship on dialogue as we have come to know it is more recent than much of the scholarship on dialectic. Buber's concept of dialogue is described by Scott (2011) as consisting of seven "virtues." *Becoming aware* includes focusing on the other; listening to and understanding the other's views; and self-awareness of our own thoughts, feelings, and words. *Confirmation* encompasses respecting the other, considering the other as an equal, and carefully considering the other's views even though we might disagree with those views. *Empathic inclusion* means placing ourselves in the other's situation and tying our own experiences to the other's.

Presence includes engaging with the other and providing an authentic response. The "person of presence" is committed both to learning from the other and expressing oneself to the other. Scott (2011) writes, "Persons of presence are the bearers of personal conviction who may have to show opposition to the other. But they still confirm the person with who they struggle; they still see the other as a partner" (p. 195). The person of presence, thus, is committed to a reciprocal relationship. *Holy insecurity* includes a willingness to suspend our assumptions, engage in collective analysis of alternative ideas, and allow new knowledge to emerge. In *unity of contraries* "either-or" is replaced by "both-and"; alternatives are integrated and complexity is accepted. *Synthesizing apperception* involves seeing all things as connected and part of a larger whole. Scott (2011) concludes, "The essence of Buber's message seems to be the fundamental sense of awareness of an overar-

ching connectedness, a synthesizing apperception" (p. 218). Possessing this virtue means seeing relationships, not only within the parts of a system, but also between ourselves and others.

Bakhtin, another proponent of dialogue, believed that one's own identity and development are only possible through one's relationship with others (Defermos, 2018). He believed that the world is made up of multiple voices and multiple meanings (Williams & Ryan, 2020), thus truth is found only through collective exploration and dialogue among interested parties (Defermos, 2018). For Bakhtin, "voice" certainly meant the voice of a person but also meant a theory, perspective, or proposition. Bakhtin believed that individuals should have their own voice, but also that individual voices should be merged to create a common perspective (Baxter, 2004).

Bohm (1996) argued that widely different assumptions influencing people have led to an incoherent culture, and that dialogue can start us on the path to a more coherent culture. He suggested starting with dialogue among small groups or "microcultures." Bohm's guidelines for a dialogue include no agenda, no acceptance or rejection of others' ideas, no efforts to solve a problem, and no group decisions. During dialogue, members of the group serve as mirrors for one another, building on each other's ideas. One goal of Bohm's dialogue is for participants to recognize the destructive nature of partial understanding and false assumptions with such understanding leading to a change of participants' thought process. Another goal is to help members of the group to a deeper understand of each other. Finally, allowing a free flow of ideas can allow new, creative, and holistic meanings to emerge.

Freire (1970) viewed dialogue as a combination of reflection and action for the purpose of transformation:

> … since dialogue is the encounter in which the united reflection and action of the dialoguers are addressed to the world which is to be transformed and humanized, the dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person's "depositing" ideas in another, nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas to be "consumed" by the discussants. (p.77)

Freire proposed preconditions for dialogue, including love for others, humility, and faith in others. He believed that these three conditions would lead the participants in dialogue to trust each other and deepen their partnership. Freire also argued that dialogue needs to involve critical thinking focused on needed change. Finally, Freire believed that dialogue was the only path to authentic communication and education.

Although the various scholars who have advocated dialogue have not always agreed on all of its aspects, we can identify a number of

common elements. In authentic dialogue the participants treat each other as equals, show respect for each other and each other's ideas, and display trust for one another. Participants' behaviors during dialogue include active listening, suspension of judgment, and taking others' perspectives. Relationship building, collective analysis, and collaborative reflection all lead to a growing sense of collegiality. Results of successful dialogue include increased self-understanding and understanding of others, emergence of new perspectives and new meaning, synthesis of ideas, increased recognition of relationships, and an emerging sense of the whole.

Can Dialectic and Dialogue Be Integrated?

There is a difference of opinion in the literature concerning whether dialectic and dialogue can be integrated. Wegerif (2008) argues, "Dialogic and dialectic imply incompatible assumptions about meaning: dialogic presupposes that meaning arises only in the context of difference, whereas dialectic presupposes that differences are contradictions leading to a movement of overcoming" (p. 359). Bohm's (1996) views on dialogue appear to rule out integration:

> In the dialogue group we are not going to decide what to do about anything. This is crucial. Otherwise we are not free. We must have an empty space where we are not obliged to do anything. It's open and free. It's an empty space. (p. 19)

Bakhtin's (1986) often repeated quote about dialectic makes his feelings clear:

> Take dialogue and remove the voices (the partitioning of voices), remove the intonations (emotional and individualizing ones), carve out abstract concepts and judgements from living words and responses, cram everything into one abstract consciousness—and that's how you get dialectics. (p. 147)

Clearly, *some aspects* of *particular versions* of dialectic are incompatible with dialogue. These include:

· A prescribed step-by-step method for discussion.

· A discussion aimed at selecting the best of several predetermined options.

· A discussion searching for a strategy that will apply in all situations.

· An expert helping participant(s) to arrive at "the truth" concerning an issue.

· A final conclusion resulting from a discussion or series of discussions.

Additionally, *some aspects* of *particular versions* of dialogue are incompatible with dialectic, including:

- No topic for discussion

- No analysis

- No efforts at problem-solving

- No personnel opinions

- No decisions

The bulleted lists above represent incompatible elements of particular versions of dialectic and dialogue. However, this does not mean we should conclude that broader conceptions of dialectic and dialogue cannot be integrated.

A number of scholars have proposed an integration of dialectic and dialogic. Rule (2011) concludes that, for Freire, dialectic "is the way dialogue works itself out in an authentic relationship" (p. 928). He continues that Freirean dialogue "does not eliminate difference but troubles it, in an attempt to deepen understanding" (p. 930). Freire's integration of dialogue and dialectic mirrors his concept of praxis, which combines reflection and action. Indeed, HoIst (2017) concludes that Freire's dialogue, which includes dialectic, "is the realization of praxis" (p. 5).

Ravenscroft et al. (2006) argue that dialectic and dialogue are consistent rather than contradictory. They propose that the two concepts focus on different but critical aspects of the learning process. Ravenscroft et al. consider dialectic to be the cognitive dimension and dialogue to be the social and emotional dimensions of that process. They maintain that the need to understand one another and the need to reach a rationale consensus are not in opposition, but are synergistic. Ravenscroft et al. propose that the relative emphases on dialectic and dialogue in successful learning vary, depending on the situation.

Williams and Ryan (2020) do not see a decision made in a dialectic as an endpoint, but rather as something that participants will test out in practice, with that testing accompanied by continuing dialogue and change. Similarly, Dafermos (2018) argues, "Dialectical thinking is ongoing and unfinalizable as is dialogue. Both dialogue and dialectics historically change. Opening up new spaces for sharing and mutual enrichment between dialogue and dialectics may give rise to unpredictable transformations" (p. 14).

Our discussion thus far indicates that some of the more dogmatic versions of dialectic and dialogue cannot be integrated. For example, Aristotle's *Gymnastic Dialectic* (Duncombe, 2014) required the ques-

tioner to ask only questions that could be answered by the respondent saying "yes" or "no," clearly not an approach consistent with any version of dialogue. For another example, Bohm's no-topic, no-analysis, no decision-making version of dialogue could not be integrated with dialectic. The previously discussed arguments for integrating broader versions of dialectic and dialogue, however, are sound. The remainder of this paper will focus on the application of a combination of dialectic and dialogue—what I refer to as dialectical dialogue—to instructional supervision.

Applying Dialectical Dialogue to Instructional Supervision

In my view, dialectical dialogue between supervisors and teachers, and among teachers, can be applied to a number of aspects of supervision, including the selection of a supervision model, the implementation of a supervision model, and the enhancement of instructional programs. In the following discussion, I share some ideas on how dialectical dialogue can be applied in each of these arenas.

Applying Dialectical Dialogue to the Selection of a Supervision Model

Some examples of traditional supervision models include clinical supervision, developmental supervision, and differentiated supervision. In recent years, the field of supervision has been expanded to include other functions for the improvement of teaching and learning, such as professional development, curriculum development, and action research (Glickman et al., 2018), with scholars proposing multiple models within each of these functions. Supervisors choose models of supervision for use in schools in a number of different ways. A supervisor may have been introduced to a model at a conference, become familiar with a model through interaction with superiors or colleagues, or discovered a model through independent study.

One thing that supports the adoption of a supervision model is external research indicating that the model has been successful in other schools; however, as many supervisors and teachers can attest, the positive effects reported in external research often do not transfer to local application. This is because each school is unique with its own history, culture, teachers, students, assets, and challenges. The immediate clients of supervision are teachers, and since no supervision model can succeed without the support of teachers, it makes sense to involve teachers in the selection and adaptation of a supervision mod-

el. Dialectical dialogue is a powerful way for supervisors to collaborate with teachers in the selection of a supervision model. To illustrate, I present a scenario below in which a supervisor asks teachers to consider the supervisor's use of developmental supervision in individual conferences with teachers.

To briefly summarize the model, developmental supervision involves the supervisor using one of four supervisory approaches—directive control, directive informational, collaborative, or nondirective—with a teacher, with the chosen approach based on the teacher's levels of abstraction, expertise, and commitment. The supervisor using the directive control approach defines the instructional problem the teacher is experiencing and tells the teacher what steps to take to solve the problem. The directive informational approach consists of the supervisor defining the problem and suggesting a solution with the teacher given the option of whether to act on the supervisor's suggestion. The collaborative approach involves the teacher and supervisor sharing responsibility for defining the problem and identifying a solution. The supervisor using the nondirective approach actively facilitates the teacher as the teacher defines the instructional problem and generates a solution. The model also calls for incremental movement toward higher levels of teacher autonomy and decision making with the supervisor gradually moving from directive to collaborative or from collaborative to nondirective supervision.

Consideration of this model by teachers would begin with the teachers being provided readings on developmental supervision, including readings that both support and critique the model. The first meeting of the supervisor and teachers would begin with the establishment of ground rules to be followed by everyone. Ground rules would include the supervisor as facilitator rather than authority; all participants being considered equals and being free to state whatever opinions they wished to share; showing respect for and considering others' ideas; open-ended discussion; an understanding that the group's decision on the model could be to accept, modify, or reject it; and agreement that no decisions would be permanent.

The first part of the dialogue would be for participants to help each other understand any aspect of developmental supervision that needed clarification. Next, participants would share their perceptions of the model's strengths and weaknesses (without arguing with each other about the validity of those perceptions). This part of the dialogue would include discussions of possible contradictions on three different levels. The first level of possible contradictions has to do with the model itself. For example, are directive supervisory behaviors really consistent

with teacher growth toward autonomy? Are nondirective behaviors really supervision? The second level of possible contradictions discussed would be those between developmental supervision and teachers' beliefs, values, and concerns. One teacher might not be comfortable with the supervisor determining her developmental level. Another teacher might be uncomfortable with the possibility that he would need to respond to nondirective supervision. The third level of contradictions to be addressed would be contextual. Would developmental supervision fit in with the district's new professional development initiative? Given that developmental supervision is not intended to be used for teacher evaluation, would the supervisor have the time to carry out developmental supervision on a regular basis while also carrying out required teacher evaluations?

With the dialogue over strengths, weaknesses, and potential contradictions as background, the supervisor and teachers would work together toward a consensus on how to proceed. The decision might be to reject or postpone the use of developmental supervision, or to implement the model as it is presented in the literature. It also is possible that the group would come to consensus on a modified version of developmental supervision. The possibilities here are many. The participants might decide that the directive approach would only be used with beginning teachers and the collaborative and nondirective approaches would be used with experienced teachers, or that the supervisor and teacher would reach a mutual decision on which approach the supervisor would use with that teacher, or that different approaches would be used with the same teacher depending on the specific situation.

If either the traditional model or a modified version of developmental supervision were dopted, the model selected still would need to be tested in practice. Dialectical dialogue would need to continue as the "theory" was put into action in order for teachers and the supervisor to address any problems teachers or the supervisor experienced with the model. Even if the model worked well initially, changes in the school population, culture, and instructional needs over time would require continued dialectical dialogue to adapt developmental supervision (or any other supervision model) to the changing school context.

Applying Dialectical Dialogue to a Supervision Model in Use

Let us now turn from the idea of selecting a supervision model to that of a supervision model in use. Clinical supervision is a traditional and still popular model of direct assistance that is non-evaluative in nature and consists of several steps. In the pre-observation conference,

the supervisor and teacher discuss the plan for a lesson to be observed, the teacher's concerns or curiosities about the lesson, and what data the supervisor will gather during the observation. The supervisor gathers the agreed-upon data during the classroom observation. The supervisor analyzes the observation data and plans for the post-observation conference. The supervisor shares the observation data during the post-observation conference, and the teacher and supervisor discuss the meaning of the data, how the teacher can use what has been learned from the data to improve future instruction, and what types of follow-up will be needed. In the post-process critique, the supervisor asks the teacher for feedback on the quality of the supervision during the earlier steps and requests teacher suggestions for improving future supervision.

Clinical supervision, in my view, is an ideal framework for dialectical dialogue, but before discussing how these two concepts can be integrated, let us shift our attention for a moment to the idea of the educational platform. The development of a platform, originally proposed by Sergiovanni and Starratt (2007), assists educators to reflect upon and articulate their educational beliefs. Glickman et al. (2018) have proposed questions to help both teachers and supervisors write their educational platforms. Some of those questions, especially relevant for clinical supervision, follow:

- Who should control the learning environment?

- What should be the relationship between teacher and students?

- Under what conditions is student learning most successful?

- What motivates students to do their best in school?

- What is your definition of effective teaching?

- What personal characteristics are possessed by a successful teacher?

- How should the teacher assess student learning? (pp. 96-97)

Glickman et al. also propose questions to help develop a *supervision* platform. Selected questions especially appropriate for clinical supervision are listed below:

- What should be the ultimate purpose of supervision?

- What knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values are possessed by successful supervisors?

- What are the most important needs of teachers?

- What makes for positive relationships between supervisors and teachers?

• What should be changed regarding the current practice of instructional supervision? (p. 98)

The writing and sharing of platforms early in the supervisor-teacher relationship can benefit dialectical dialogue during different steps of the clinical cycle, as illustrated in the following scenario.

In clinical supervision relying on dialectical dialogue, discussions of consistency and contradiction would be an important part of the pre-observation conference. First, whether a lesson plan is formal or informal, there are basic components to be discussed: What does the teacher want students to learn? What will be the learning activities? How will the learning be assessed? One level of discussion in the pre-observation conference could be whether there are any contradictions among the upcoming lesson's purpose, learning activities, and assessment. The idea here would not be for the supervisor to point out perceived contradictions but to ask questions that would facilitate the teacher discovering contradictions and revising the lesson plan accordingly. Another level of discussion could center on the teacher's educational platform. Is the lesson plan consistent with that platform? Again, the teacher, facilitated by the supervisor, would make that decision, and revise the lesson plan accordingly.

The data gathered by the supervisor in the observation (only the data agreed upon in the pre-observation conference) would be used in the post-observation conference for the teacher and supervisor to identify consistencies and contradictions in the lesson. Is the lesson taught consistent with the lesson plan? Were any teacher behaviors inconsistent with the lesson plan necessary changes based on the teacher's reflection-in-action, or were they due to misapplication, misjudgment, or omission? More generally, is the teacher's instruction consistent with her or his educational platform? Any contradictions that surface would need to be based on the observation data and identified by the teacher, but the supervisor could ask the teacher to compare the lesson taught to the lesson plan, and to compare particular teacher behaviors in the lesson to specific "planks" in the teacher's platform. The supervisor would encourage the teacher to identify contradictions as well as to reflect on possible reasons for those contradictions. Based on changes in instructional practice the teacher wished to make, the supervisor would collaborate with the teacher to create an action plan designed to reduce dissonance between desired and actual teaching behaviors.

In the post-process critique, the supervisor and teacher would reflect on consistencies and contradictions in the supervisor's behavior during the clinical cycle. In reflecting on the pre-observation conference, did the supervisor focus on the teacher's concerns about the les-

son plan? Did the supervisor facilitate the teacher in identifying contradictions within the plan as well as contradictions between the plan and the teacher's educational platform? Did the supervisor assist the teacher to improve the lesson plan? Was the plan for gathering observation data that emerged from the pre-observation conference consistent with the teacher's concerns about the lesson? Was the data gathered in the classroom observation the data that had been agreed upon in the pre-observation conference? In reviewing the post-observation conference, did the supervisor facilitate the teacher in determining if there were any contradictions between the lesson plan and the lesson, or between the teacher's platform and the lesson? Did the supervisor effectively assist the teacher in formulating a plan to reduce dissonance in future lessons?

Throughout the clinical supervision cycle, were the supervisor's behaviors consistent with her or his supervisory platform? If there were any contradictions between the supervisor's platform and behaviors, what can the supervisor do to overcome those contradictions in future clinical supervision cycles? At least in the early stages of using the post-process critique in this manner, it is probably best for the supervisor to ask these types of questions, with the teacher then identifying contradictions in the supervisor's behavior and the supervisor inviting the teacher to engage in collaborative dialogue on how the supervisor could establish more consistency between the supervisor's platform and behaviors.

Applying Dialectical Dialogue
to the Enhancement of Instructional Programs

In addition to direct assistance to individual teachers, supervision also needs to focus on the enhancement of the school's instructional program, and dialectical dialogue can further that purpose. To address this topic, I present a short case about a school committed to project-based learning (PBL).

Pat Garcia was a new supervisor who had been asked by her superintendent to assist Woodland Middle School, a school the district had designated as a PBL school. The school was beginning its third year of implementing PBL. In a meeting with Supervisor Garcia during the previous summer, the superintendent told her that the model of PBL the school was using had been developed by the teachers themselves after they had reviewed various models of PBL. Initially, according to the superintendent, there had been widespread enthusiasm over PBL among the faculty, but now approximately half of the faculty had become disillusioned with the program.

Supervisor Garcia began by recruiting an action team made up of teachers and parents. The teachers on the team consisted of delegates from existing content-area and grade-level professional learning communities (PLCS) that, taken together, represented all of the school's teachers. The team's first task was to conduct a program review with a dual purpose: to find out exactly how PBL was being implemented and to determine effects of PBL on students and teachers. The review included surveys of students, teachers, and parents, as well as dialogue within the PLCs.

The program review found that most of the teachers were using projects based on PBL materials that had been purchased by the district or downloaded by teachers from the Internet, and that many students were not fully engaged in these projects. The school's PBL program called for small student teams to work on projects, and another problem identified was the difficulty some teams had working cooperatively. Teachers and students reported that one reason for this was some students "sponging" off of their teammates, and another cause was some students dominating the group because they did not trust in the quality of their teammates' work. A related problem was grading individual students for group projects in light of the fact that student contributions to projects were uneven. The review also revealed the inability of some student teams to complete quality projects because of confusion about how to proceed and student frustration about a lack of progress. A final problem revealed by the program review was a conflict between the district's curriculum standards (which reflected the state standards) and the PBL materials that had been made available to the teachers. Teachers who taught in content areas addressed by the state's high-stakes achievement tests were worried that PBL would lower student performance on the test. Because of this concern, the content area teachers had agreed upon what they called a "hybrid" instructional program, with some direct instruction focused on district standards and some PBL not necessarily focused on the standards. Content-area teachers also reported using worksheets, quizzes, and unit tests in the format of the state test in order to prepare students for that test.

After the results of the program review had been discussed with the review team and all PLCs, the dialogue shifted to what actions the school needed to take. Some suggestions originated in PLCs and were brought to the review team by PLC delegates. Other ideas originated within the review team and were brought back to the PLCs by delegates. This two-tiered dialogue and two-way communication continued throughout the project.

One recommendation put forward by a number of teachers was to

create more student engagement by allowing students to select their own projects. Several stakeholders pointed out potential problems with this approach, including difficulty identifying student interests, students selecting problems that were too easy or too difficult, or initial student engagement that might dissipate before the project was complete. Another concern was that students allowed to choose their own project might choose new topics but simply repeat the same process from project to project, which over time would diminish student engagement.

After considerable dialogue, the action team agreed upon a set of recommendations intended to increase student engagement that, if approved by the faculty, would allow students to choose their own projects but had a number of other components that would address concerns about student choice. Teachers would work to develop relationships with students from the beginning of the school year in order to be better able to identify student interests. Also, both teachers and students would follow several "ground rules" for choosing a project. The project would be related to student lives inside or outside of the school. The project would need to be one that, if successfully completed, would make a real difference in the students' lives, the school, and/or the community. The project would need to be one that would challenge the group, but also could be completed successfully over a designated period of time. Each student team would brainstorm to select a project under an additional set of selection guidelines agreed upon by teacher and students. Students would recruit community partners to collaborate with them on a project with the idea that regular interaction with, progress reports to, and feedback from partners would increase student engagement. The processes used for PBL would vary from project to project and could include a service to be provided, an experiment to be conducted, an invention to be tested, or a proposal to be made to an outside audience.

Another set of recommendations by the action team addressed problems with teamwork in PBL. The first recommendation in this area was for teachers with a new group of students to build a cooperative classroom culture. This would include direct teaching of communication, collaboration, and problem-solving skills. Several teachers stated they did not have the expertise to teach these skills, and after some discussion of this issue, supervisor Garcia and three teacher leaders who had been trained in cooperative learning agreed to provide professional development sessions to assist teachers in teaching cooperative skills. Another recommendation for improving teamwork was for students to discuss and agree on group norms and to post those norms in the classroom. One observation shared by teachers on the action team

was that student teams of four members were better able to collaborate than larger teams, so a recommendation was made that teams have no more than four members. Also, teachers would ask teams to assign each student on the team responsibilities for the project, based on student interests and assets relative to the project. Individual students would keep track of their contributions to the team by maintaining activity logs to be shared with the teacher. The teachers would regularly observe teams specifically to assess the level of team collaboration and provide feedback to the group and individual members.

A third set of recommendations was related to increasing productivity and success with PBL. One of these recommendations was that teachers taking a "hybrid" approach to teaching (a combination of PBL and didactic instruction) shift to a primary focus on PBL. Teachers on the review team were concerned that some classrooms were not organized for "full-time" PBL, and some teachers did not have adequate resources for the shift. Supervisor Garcia was confident that the superintendent would be willing to support increased PBL at the school since it was a district priority, and that she would be able to negotiate funding for work tables and resource centers for each classroom. Another recommendation was that teachers ask student teams to develop performance rubrics for their projects and use those rubrics to assess their progress.

Concern by some stakeholders that some students would not be able to develop such rubrics led to a decision that teachers would review the rubrics, give students feedback, and then ask students to make any needed revisions. Student teams also would receive regular feedback and suggestions from other teams, community partners assigned to the team, and the teacher. The feedback and suggestions would center on (a) the teams progress to that point, (b) how to address any problems the team was experiencing, and (c) next steps to be taken. Mistakes would be viewed by teachers and students as learning opportunities. Teachers would be encouraged to keep a log on each team's progress and provide assistance as needed. Traditional quizzes and tests would be replaced with assessment by team portfolio with portfolios including project artifacts and reflections. Culminating presentations would include the results of the project, as well as a discussion of what the students had learned while completing the project.

The final set of recommendations was about connecting PBL with district standards. Because a number of teachers did not believe they had the time or expertise to do this, the action team suggested that teachers devote time in their PLCs to become thoroughly familiar with district standards. Another proposal was that PLCs work to convert

district standards to "student-friendly" standards—written in a way that middle school students could readily understand and work with. An early phase of each project would be for student teams to use the student-friendly standards to develop matrices that connected the standards to their projects, followed by teacher feedback and matrix revision. Team portfolios would connect project activities and products to relevant standards. Team projects would be linked to standards but not to high-stakes achievement tests.

The action team and Supervisor Garcia requested and received a commitment from the superintendent to support implementation of its recommendations, provided those recommendations were approved by the faculty. This support would encompass additional classroom resources, as well as onsite professional development to assist teachers with implementation, participation in a regional PBL network that would include online sharing of ideas and intercampus visits, and funding for ongoing PLC activities related to implementation. After PLCs reviewed the recommendations and offered some final revisions, the faculty approved the school review group's recommendations to be initiated at the beginning of the following school year.

A number of contradictions in Woodland's PBL created the need for the school community, facilitated by Supervisor Garcia, to engage in dialectic dialogue on the instructional program. PBL is supposed to promote student engagement, but at Woodland it was promoting apathy among many students. PBL is intended to increase student collaboration, but at Woodland, teamwork was a challenge. The primary goal of PBL is higher-level student learning, but Woodland's version of PBL was hindering learning for many students. Another type of contradiction—or at least perceived contradiction—was between PBL as it was being implemented and district standards. The changes to be implemented at Woodland resulted from dialectical dialogue leading to a synthesis between the old and a new model of PBL, with that dialectical dialogue addressing contradictions in the old model, concerns about new proposals, and modifications of those new proposals, all of which contributed to the overall synthesis. The implementation of the approved recommendations, however, might well lead to new, unanticipated contradictions that would require additional dialectical dialogue and additional change. This is why it would be important for structures and processes promoting continuing dialectical dialogue at Woodland—the action team, professional development, membership in a PBL network, and a PLC focus on PBL—to remain in place.

Conclusion

This article, hopefully, will initiate a discussion among scholars and practitioners on the use of dialectical dialogue by instructional supervisors and teachers in their efforts to improve teaching and learning. The article's review of outside literature on dialectic, dialogue, and their integration indicates that such integration is possible. The scenarios of supervisors applying dialectical dialogue to selecting and applying different models of supervision are meant to draw others into the conversation and ultimately into testing the viability of supervisors and teachers use of dialectic dialogue to improve instruction.

The field of instructional supervision would benefit from research to determine the value of engaging teachers in dialectical dialogue concerning the selection of a supervision model that, once in place, would impact the professional lives of those teachers. The field also would profit from research on the employment of dialectical dialogue in the use of existing supervision models. Assessment and enhancement of instructional programs should involve teachers, and research could document the effects of dialectical dialogue on the quality of program assessment and resulting program revisions. Finally, to invite attention to a topic not addressed in this paper, since the improvement of teaching and learning is the sine qua non of instructional supervision, the field of supervision would benefit from research on the process and effects of teachers and students using dialectical dialogue at the classroom level.

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