EXAMINING THE WAYS A CRITICAL FRIENDSHIPS COULD IMPROVE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF INSTRUCTIONAL SUPERVISION IN CAPE COAST METROPOLIS BASIC SCHOOLS

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Abstract
This study is an action research conducted at the Aboom circuit of the Cape Coast Metropolis. It was aimed at exploring the idea of critical friendship between supervisor and supervisee to find out whether it can be useful in the Ghanaian context. The sample consisted of 31 participants comprising one circuit supervisor, 26 teachers and 4 headteachers. One out of the six circuits in the Cape Coast Metropolis was selected and four schools from the circuit were randomly sampled for the study. The circuit supervisor and headteachers were interviewed while questionnaires were administered to the teachers. Relationships and instructional practices in the school were also observed. The data were analysed using percentages.

The main findings of the study were that critical friendship in instructional supervision increased the trust between the circuit supervisor and teachers, increased supervisor's support for teachers and teachers' commitment to their work. It was recommended that the Metropolitan Education Office educate circuit supervisors on the idea of critical friendship in supervision

Introduction
In recent times, there has been increasing public worry about the challenge of addressing the problem of poor student performance in the Basic Education Certificate Examination (B.E.C.E.) in the Central Region of Ghana. The summary of the analysis of the results of the B.E.C.E. in the Central Region over a period of two years depicts that the percentage of students who failed to qualify for Senior High School increased from 38.0%, in 2007 to 44.7% in 2008, (G.E.S, Metro office Cape Coast). A letter circulated by the Central Regional Directorate of the Ghana Education Service dated 5th November, 2008 and captioned

'Crisis meeting on BECE results in the central region' suggests that the situation continues to worsen. In this light the Regional Director invited all Metro, Municipal and District Directors, Circuit Supervisors and Heads of basic schools in the region to a meeting to examine the causes and coping strategies. Increasingly, issues related to supervision appeared to emerge as a stronger contributory factor.

Some writers are confident that since student learning is the primary function of a school, effective supervision of instruction is one of the important functions of the school administrator.   Research findings also suggest that student learning improves when school administrators pay close attention to instructional supervision (Gensante, 1994). Moreover, according to Mankoe, (2007), supervision seeks to improve methods of teaching and learning, creates physical, social and psycholo-gical climate that is favorable to learning and to coordinate and integrate all educational efforts and materials in order to ensure continuity.   The Ghana Education Service circuit supervisors' handbook encourages clinical supervision. Thus, the circuit supervisor's supervision process today includes pre–observation conference, observation and post–observation conferences. However, most districts in Ghana are far from achieving

effective instructional supervisio One challenge facing education authorities is how best the relatior ship between supervisors an supervisees can be improved.

In the Western countries, one strateg that has emerged as a viable tool fc creating meaningful relationshi between the supervisor and staff o the school is critical friendship Critical friendship emphasizes supportive yet challenging relation ship between the supervisor and the supervisee. According to Swaffield (2004), a critical friend is an outside who helps schools through questioning, reflecting back anc providing another view point. Costa and Kallick as cited by Swaffield (2004) also offered the following definition for a critical friend as:

A trusted friend who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers a critique of a person's work as a friend. A critical friend takes the time to fully understand the context of the work presented and the outcomes the person or group is working towards. The friend is an advocate for the success of that work (p. 50)

Swaffield, (2004) argues that although education officers consider teachers as colleagues, however, they possess some degree of formal power over teachers and always bring to the school specific external agenda

These imposed agenda, power differentials and accountability to others for reporting on specific targets, are all against the essence of critical friendship. Swaffield likened Counselors to critical friends, but explained that while their interest focuses on an individual's feelings and personal issues, a critical friend is concerned with organizational matters, and with outcomes, effects and implications for many different people, as well as the personal well-being of individuals, and this is the crux of the study.

The Concept of Critical Friendship
External support for schools has been identified by many researchers as one of the most important ingredients for school improvement. Fullan (2001) in Swaffield, (2004) sees the involvement of outsiders as key to school improvement.

Critical friendship according to Swaffield is one of the ways in which schools receive such support. In the diverse literatures of organizational change, school leadership, action research and reflective practice, critical friendship has been adopted by educators as a form of support for colleagues who wish or need to make improvements in what they do. The term is used in different contexts, although not consistently and most of the time misunderstood. Critical Friendship is at times considered as an oxymoron - two words of opposite

meaning placed together for effect. (Hill, as cited in Koo, 2002); and, commented as a dilemma posed by merging norms of friendship with those of critique (Achinstein & Meyer, as cited in Koo, 2002).

However, Towndrow, (2007) argued that critical friendship is not an oxymoron. He believes that it is entirely possible for friendship to include a productive critical edge so long as the relationship is partici-pative, mutually-informing and collaborative. Critical friendship is a relationship in which someone (a critical friend) provides both support and challenge for the partner or other people in the group if more than one, (Swaffield, 2008). The key elements of critical friendship include trust, provocative questioning, an alternative perspective, constructive critique and advocacy (Costa and Kallick 1993 in Swaffield, (2008).

Critical Friendship in Supervision of Instruction
The idea of critical friendship in supervision is a high extensive support for school colleagues performing leadership activities (Swaffield). With this form of support, the supervisor acts as a critical friend to the headteacher or the teachers (school colleagues). The critical friend possesses three basic skills that have a powerful influence on the practice of supervision. Consulting skills helps to specify the

roles of the individuals in the relationship and the boundaries within which they are working, interpersonal skills is key in gaining the trust of school colleagues, and technical skills to get in-depth knowledge of the school so that he or she will be in the position to ask provocative questions, make an informed critique and to provide alternative perspective to problems, (Swaffield, 2004) Typical contexts for critical friendship in education according to Swaffield, (2008) are school improvement projects, professional development and research.

Who a Critical friend is

The two words in the phrase, 'critical friends' are considered by many writers as opposite to each other. Or it is seen as the point between a total friend and a total critic. Thus, Wathing, Hopling and Colleagues (1998) consider the term as providing the proper balance between support and challenge. However, other writers have realized that there is more to it than balancing the role of a critic and friend. Swaffield, (2008) explains the term 'a critical friend' as someone who provides both support and challenge within a relationship that involves two persons (a critical friend and the partner) or involves a critical friend working with a group of people. Swaffield asserts that a critical friend is a neutral person from outside who assists through questioning, reflecting and providing another viewpoint, prompting honest reflection and reappraisal, and seeing anew that may be challenging and uncomfortable, yet enhancing. Together, Critical friends are also concerned with both the learning of the person or people they engage with directly, and the success of whatever project is the focus of the work (Swaffield, 2002) believes that a critical friend "summarizes the role as professional challenge and personal support" p.65. Macbeath and Jardine (1998) think of the term as 'marrying unconditional support and uncondi-tional critique.

Although it has been established that student learning improves when school administrators pay close attention to instructional supervision (Gensante, 1994), the kind of relationship that exists between supervisors (district directorate circuit supervisor, and heads of schools) and supervisees (head teachers, teachers, and pupils) makes the effectiveness of supervision of instruction far-fetched. Prejudices misunderstanding of the role of supervision, lack of good communi-cation and mistrust between educa-tional officers and the schools appear to be responsible for the situation Besides, supervisors often visit to schools with their own objectives This obviously creates tension conflicts and breads supervision phobia teachers. In some countries

the idea of critical friendship has been found to help develop trusting relationship between supervisors and teachers and thus; makes supervisors understand their role as providing total and unconditional support for the teacher's professional development. However; this idea is quite foreign to Ghana in that, there is no local literature on critical friendship so one wonders if it can make any difference in reducing the tension associated with supervision. It is this context that necessitated an action research using critical friendship as an intervention to see if it can improve upon the relationship between circuit supervisors and teachers.

The main objective of the study was to examine the extent to which the relationship between circuit supervisors and teachers in the Cape Coast Metropolis can be enhanced through critical friendship. It is to explore how the activities of a 'critical friend' can improve the effectiveness of instructional supervision in the participating schools. Specifically, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What kind of relationship exists between circuit supervisors and teachers?
2. In what ways will a critical friend improve the effectiveness of instructional supervision?

The Area of Study
The Cape Coast Metropolis was used for the study. Cape Coast is the capital of the Central Region of Ghana. It is situated 165 km west of Accra on the Gulf of Guinea. It has a population of 82,291 (2000 census). Cape Coast was the seat of governance in Ghana until Accra became the capital in 1877(Tetty, 1985; Ephson, 1970; Baku, 1991 as cited by Cape Coast - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. mht). The traditional occupation of the people of Cape Coast is fishing. The city is endowed with some of Ghana's finest secondary and technical schools, a polytechnic and Ghana's leading university in teaching and research, University of Cape Coast (UCC). Although the Metropolis is the citadel of formal education in Ghana and so is endowed with prominent educational institutions at all levels, the performance of the basic schools in the Metropolis is relatively low. The Metropolis was chosen because recently, there has been teacher outcry on the manner in which supervisors relate with teachers in the Metropolis.

Method
Participants

The sample consisted of 31 participants comprising one circuit supervisor, 26 teachers and 4 headteachers. Four schools were randomly sampled from the Aboom

circuit in the Cape Coast Metropolis. The circuit supervisor and the entire headteachers and teachers in the four schools were studied because the population was small. The Aboom circuit was purposively selected for the study because it met the criteria I had set for participating circuits. The criteria are that the researcher worked as a classroom teacher in the circuit and have observed incidents of conflicts between teachers and their circuit supervisors.

Instrument

The design that was used in this study is action research. There searcher used questionnaire, interview, and observation to collect data from headteachers and teachers of the four selected schools in the Aboom circuit of the Cape Coast Metropolis. The data were collected in two folds.

The first phase which was done in a week focused on pre intervention activities. Data were collected on the existing supervisor-supervisee relationships in the schools. The questionnaires were distributed among respondents on the first day and were given three days to return the completed questionnaire. The interviewing of the circuit supervisor and the headteachers was done in the same week alongside the administration of the questionnaire.

The intervention of this study, which involved the researcher acting as a critical friend to the sample selected, (School colleagues) was applied over a period of five weeks. The intervention was designed to expose teachers to the kind of instructional supervision where the supervisor is a total unconditional professional friend and at the same time a critic to the supervisee. The foundation of this relationship was trust. The research acted as a critical friend to the head teachers and teachers of the selected schools over period of five weeks.

The post intervention data was collected in the sixth week to ascertain the effect of the introduction of the intervention. The same instrument was re administered to find out whether there was any change in response from the sample selected.

Results and Discussions

In order to understand the kind of relationship that existed between supervisors and teachers in the participating schools, views were solicited from respondents on how friendly, trusting, supportive their supervisors were. The research question also sought information on the extent to which circuit supervisors were prepared to listen to what teachers had to say about their teaching. The data is analyzed using descriptive statistics as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: The relationship between supervisor and teachers

Statement	Very much%	Not so much %	Not at all %
The circuit supervisor is friendly	34.8	65.2	8.7
The circuit supervisor demonstrates trust in teachers	21.7	60.9	17.4
Supervisor is prepared to listen to teachers	34.8	47.8	17.4
Supervisor motivates and supports teachers	13.0	43.5	43.5

From Table 1, responses on how friendly the circuit supervisor was, suggests that a greater percentage (65.2) of the respondents was of the opinion that their circuit supervisor was not friendly. About 78.3 percent of the respondents were of the view that the supervisor did not exhibit trust in teachers. And also it is seen from the table that 65.2 percent of the respondents said the supervisors did not listen to what teachers had to say about their teaching. With regards to motivation, a greater percentage (87.0) of teachers felt they were not motivated nor supported to work.

From the interviews that were conducted however, all the four head-teachers and the circuit supervisor viewed the relationship between themselves and the teachers in their schools as very cordial. The circuit supervisor, for example, explained as follows: "The relationship between me and the teachers is very, very cordial, I respect their views, I listen to them to find out their problems and see how best I can help them. The teachers are also very comfortable with me." Further probing however revealed that the cordiality was linked to personal relations. In matters of functional relations relating to the supervision processes however the common response was that confrontations between supervisors and supervisees were prevalent. One headteacher disclosed: "Some teachers don't make it easy for me at all. Some even have open confrontations with me. They think I'm imposing my ideas on them". Another headteacher said, 'some of the teachers get angry with me, they say I am too strict, at times some even think I am wicked'.

From the perspective of teachers, the conflict associated with supervision was not different. Teachers' responses from the questionnaire indicated that supervisors were a threat to their

professional freedom and that the supervisor's visits always triggered fear among teachers. When asked about the kind of professional support they give to their teachers, three out of the four headteachers said they give in-service training on lesson notes preparation. One headteacher explained that he gives advice, words of encouragement and motivation. Thus, from the perspective of the supervisors (headteachers and circuit supervisors), they offer support to teachers. Responses to probing questions that were posed to the circuit supervisor however suggested some limitations. The circuit supervisor said even though support was offered to teachers, some of them (teachers) appeared not to be very comfortable with his presence: "Some teachers see me as coming to find fault and so are ready to challenge me. Others lack self-confidence so will quickly summarize their lessons as soon as I show up, to prevent me from observing them." (Remarked the Circuit Supervisor). The circuit supervisor identified the teachers' uncomfortable attitude as a major challenge with which he had to grapple in the process of carrying out instructional supervision.

From the data above it is evident that the kind of relationship that existed between the teachers and their circuit supervisor was more of personal than professional, consequently;

possessing significant amount c mistrust, unfriendliness and non supportive when it comes t improving instruction. Obviously unhealthy relations between super visors and teachers have advers implications for teaching an learning. In this light, a question wa posed to explore how the existing relationship in the schools affected teaching and learning. The response are presented below:

Main Challenge Associated with Supervision in the Schools

A critical analysis of the dat presented above, suggests that 'relat ionship' plays a vital role in th supervision process. The main challenge facing supervision in the participating schools therefore relate to strategies for enhancing superviso – supervisee relationship towards enhancing teaching and learning. One strategy that appears very helpful in creating a friendly atmosphere fo supervision in schools is 'critical friendship'. It has succeeded in most western cultural contexts, especially in the United Kingdom. One wonders though, whether the application of critical friendship in school superv ision could make a difference in terms of reducing the tension associated with supervision and promoting healthy relationship in the super vision process. In this light, critica friendship was used as an intervention for enhancing relationship between supervisors and supervisees in the

participating schools. The intervention therefore sought to answer Research question 2: In what ways will critical friends improve instructional supervision?

Impact of Critical Friendship

Although critical friendship is being used to improve supervisor - supervisee relationship in other countries, my interaction with teachers and their circuit supervisor during the pre intervention data collection stage convinced me that the idea is not known in Ghana, especially in our education sector. Thus; the relationship between teachers and their circuit supervisor lacked collegiality and trust. Any friendship that existed was more of personal than professional as against what is suggested by critical friendship. The main challenge identified therefore was how to create professional friendliness between supervisor and teachers in order to enhance teaching and learning.

The intervention which took place over a period of five weeks therefore sought to explore ways in which critical friendship could improve instructional supervision. Post intervention data collection was done using the same instrument after two weeks to find out whether there had been any change in response.

Table 2: The relationship between the circuit supervisor and teachers

statement	Pre intervention			Post intervention		
	Very much	Not so much	Not at all	Very much	Not so much	Not at all
Supervisor is friendly towards teachers	34.8	56.5	8.7	28.6	71.4	0.0
The circuit supervisor demonstrates trust in teachers	21.7	60.9	17.4	38.1	52.4	9.5
Supervisor is prepared to listen to teachers	34.8	47.8	17.4	38.1	42.9	19.0
Supervisor motivates and supports teachers	13.0	43.5	43.5	23.8	38.1	38.1

Table 2 shows that the percentage of respondents who believed the circuit supervisor was very much friendly reduced from 34.8 to 28.6 while the percentage who thought he was friendly but not so much increased from 56.5 to 71.4 percent. However; whereas 8.7 percent thought the supervisor was not friendly at all, none of the respondents believed that

he was not friendly at all after the intervention. On the circuit supervisor's exhibition of trust in the teachers, the pre interaction data revealed that 60.9 percent of the respondents were of the view that the circuit supervisor did not trust teachers so much, whereas, 17.4 percent thought he did not trust teachers at all. However, after the intervention these percentages reduced to 52.4 and 9.5 respectively. Besides, the percentage that believed that the supervisor trusted teachers very much rose from 21.7 to 38.1.

With regards to how much the circuit supervisor was prepared to listen to teachers, the pre intervention data depicts that the percentage of respondents who thought that the supervisor listened very much increased from 34.8 percent to 38.1 percent while the percentage that were of the view that the supervisor did not listen to teachers so much reduced from 47.8 percent to 42.9 percent. The responses on how much the circuit supervisor motivated and supported teachers from the table shows that the percentage of respondents who were of the view that the supervisor motivates and supports teachers raised from 13.0 percent to 23.8 percent. Whereas the percentage who thought they did not do these very much and at all decreased from 43.5 to 38.1 in each case.

From the comparisons discussed above, it is evident that the vital ingredients needed to build professional friendliness between the supervisor and teachers such as preparedness of the supervisor to listen to what teachers have to say about their own teaching, exhibition of trust in teachers and the motivation and support given to teachers has seen some improvement after the intervention. The head-teachers that were interviewed after the intervention still maintained that the relationship between themselves and their teachers was 'cordial' and they also relate very well with the circuit supervisor. One headteacher explained:

The relationship between us is cordial. I feel more comfortable dealing with teachers now and most of my teachers are also more comfortable with me especially when I observe their lessons and offer suggestions I believe teachers now understand that supervision brings about effective teaching and learning.

An interview with the circuit supervisor on the relationship between himself and his teachers after the intervention confirmed this:
We have a cordial relationship. Teachers respond to me well. I offer my support and criticisms when necessary and most teachers now take my criticisms in good faith and even some confessed I have helped them.

The relationship between the teachers I had confrontations with before and I have improved and I believe that if this continues, we are going to enjoy our work.

This finding is significant because it plays a very important role in building a healthy relationship. Although the post intervention data suggest a decrease in the percentage of respondents who believed that the supervisor was very friendly, there was improvement in supervisors listening practices, support and exhibition of trust which could with time, effect change in response for the better since according to Costa and Kallick (1993) and Swaffield (2004) trust is a paramount feature of critical friendship. Swaffield also explained that critical friendship is dynamic relationship that integrates critique and friendship which evolves over time. Moreover, there is a possibility that the decrease of percentage of respondents who believed that the supervisor was very friendly may be due to the cultural definition of a friendship between a superior and a subordinate and what teachers expected from such friendship. This presupposes that critical friendship in supervision was not fully understood by the teachers in the selected schools because comparing what the circuit supervisor said with teachers' views on the relationship between them, one realizes that due to the gap between the supervisor and the teachers, the teachers are practically passive in the building of this relationship. They expected the supervisor to initiate everything. In other words, the teachers wanted to be befriended. Swaffield (2004) explained that dependency and passivity on the part of one partner is not a feature of critical friendship.

Discussions

A number of findings emerged from the study. These findings answer the research question two: In what ways could critical friendship help improve instructional supervision?

The relationship that existed between the circuit supervisor and teachers at the pre intervention stage was more of personal than professional. Their professional interaction was devoid of collegiality and trust. Trust improved after the intervention although most teachers were still of the view that the supervisor was not friendly.

It can also be deduced from the data that close supervision does not really have much influence on the performance or effectiveness of the teacher. Rather, helping teachers to be self-directive could motivate teachers and improve teaching and learning. Moreover, it was established that teachers really trust and respect supervisors who are knowledgeable and have the ability to help teachers solve their instructional

problems. Teachers expect supervisors to give practical demonstrations as a means of support rather than verbal explanations.

Interaction with teachers during the intervention period revealed that the circuit supervisor visits schools on fault finding missions. Teachers complained that the circuit supervisor criticized them all the time and hardly praised any teacher.

Finally, the results of the study revealed that the idea of critical friendship helped the supervisor to listen more to what teachers had to about their work and exhibited trust in teachers, an act which boosted teachers' morale. This made teachers appreciate the supervisor's visits to their schools.

Conclusions

This study has shown that critical friendship in instructional supervision has contributed in building a trusting relationship between the circuit supervisor and the select headteachers and teachers of the Aboom circuit of the Cape Coast Metropolis. The study revealed that, the supervisor was perceived by teachers as someone who does not listen to what teachers had to say about their work nor trusted nor supported them. However, at the post intervention stage, many more teachers were of the view that, the supervisor exhibited some trust in

teachers. The trusting relationship between the teachers and the supervisor helped increase teachers confidence and commitment towards their work.

The intervention was also an eye opener for both teachers and the supervisor the purpose of instructional supervision. For instance the school visits and interaction with teachers informed me that, teachers perceived supervisors to be fault finders who are quick to criticize teachers and reluctant in praising good work done. The supervisor on the other hand had a pre conceived idea that teachers found excuses to be lazy.

However, after the intervention, the supervisor was willing to listen more and praise before criticizing teachers. Besides; teachers response to instructional supervision improved since most teachers researcher interacted with admitted they feel more relaxed during supervision process.

Although it helped increase trust between the circuit supervisor and the teachers, the idea of critical friendship is not fully understood in the Ghanaian context. Its barrier may be our cultural understanding of friendship especially between a worker and their superior, that is, 'to befriend'.

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