Research on the Roles of the Supervisor in a Board of Education for the Development of School-based Practical Researches : Based on the Ideas of Consultation

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to clarify the role of the supervisor in a board of education for the development of school-based practical researches (SBPRs). Semi-structured interviews were conducted to the principals and teacher leaders in four schools to collect the data about the outline of their SBPRs, the relationships with and the expectations for the supervisors. In addition, we conducted the semi-structured interviews for the supervisors to gather the data about their supports for the development of SBPRs in the schools. We analyzed the interview data using the ideas of four steps of consultation and the role of the consultant in general. The data indicates that the supervisors played many kinds of role for the development of the SBPRs. They are 1)creating good relationship with school administrators and teacher leaders, 2)collecting the data on the process of SBPRs through daily school visits, 3)helping teachers understand the goal of the SBPRs, 4)advising how to improve the practices, 5)providing the good practices and learning materials for them, 6)caring for the teachers' emotion, 7)assessing the practices, 8)encouraging teachers to build the SBPR network, 9)preparing opportunities for the teachers to learn SBPRs and 10)encouraging the teachers to share the process and results of the SBPRs with teachers in other schools.

Keyword: supervisor, board of education, consultation, school-based practical researches(SBPRs), professional learning communities (PLCs)

1. Introduction

Incessant reforms are demanded for schools these days. Such a situation requires schools to continue learning systematically as a "Professional Learning Community(PLC)" (Westheimer 2008). "School-based practical researches (hereafter, SBPRs)" are major PLC activities in Japan. The development factors for SBPRs are already modeled and it is confirmed that "Network building between a school and

external organizations" is the key to the development of SBPRs.

While there may be various forms of collaboration between a school and external personnel or organizations, the most important external personnel that contributes to SBPR development in Japan today (hereafter, external personnel) are considered to be the supervisors in boards of education (hereafter, supervisors).

Though personnel and organizations other than supervisors, such as local expert teachers and researchers at universities, are also observed to be engaging in such works, their activities are often limited to providing advices on lesson planning, implementation and assessment for local expert teachers, and lecturing on theories or models and commenting on research lessons for researchers at universities. In contrast, because supervisors are in a position to be involved with relevant schools as a whole and in practical matters, they most probably have closer access to SBPRs. This is in concert with the assertion by Oshida(2009) and Tsujimura(2013) who pointed out the importance of the supervisors' role in establishing a certain policy in schools by mediating between educational administration and the schools through human networks and technical knowledge about school education.

However, only a few demonstrated the detailed roles performed by supervisors for the development of SBPRs(Kobayashi 2014). Furthermore, these studies lacked demonstrative discussions and limited themselves to making suggestions, leaving issues unresolved.

Because of these reasons, we set this study's objective to empirically clarify the supervisory roles that specifically contribute to the development of SBPRs.

2. Method

2. 1 Participants

The participants of the study were four schools that promoted SBPRs with a continued problem-solving attitude, such as serving as a designated pilot school in tackling contemporary issues of school education, and supervisors among others were involved with these schools.

Elementary school A served as a designated model school of the "ICT Utilization for School Education" project, promoted by the Board of Education of City O for two years from FY 2013 to 2014. The external personnel who were involved in Elementary school A were the general supervisor and a supervisor in the city's Education Center, ICT supporters, supporters for lesson design, teachers of other pilot schools in the city, corporate staff, and university educators.

Junior high school B served as a designated pilot school for two projects in FY 2013: the "S City Community-wide Academic Achievement Promotion Project" and the "K

Prefecture Practical Disaster Prevention Education Promotion Project." External personnel involved in Junior high school B were a supervisor in the Board of Education of City S, a section chief, a chief and a supervisor in the Board of Education of Prefecture K, a supervisor in Education office C, and university educators.

Junior high school C engaged in a SBPR on ICT utilization, specifically as the host school of a conference on audiovisual education at junior high schools in Prefecture H in FY 2013. External personnel involved in Junior high school C were a supervisor in the Board of Education of Prefecture H, a supervisor in the Board of Education of City M, a supervisor in Education Office T of Prefecture H, and university educators.

Elementary and junior high school D engaged in a SBPR through its participation in the "School Innovation Project" promoted by a corporation in FY 2013. External personnel involved in Elementary and junior high school D were a section chief and a supervisor in the Board of Education of City T, a supervisor in the Education Center of Prefecture S, a senior supervisor and a supervisor in Education Office T, corporate staff, and university educators.

2. 2 Data Collection

First, we gained an understanding of outlines of the SBPRs promoted by the four schools and the external personnel involved by reading bulletin articles and materials prepared by the respective schools.

Then, from January to April 2014, we interviewed the staff of the four schools in addition to the supervisors and the others who were involved in the respective schools. At the schools, semi-structured interviews were conducted with principals and teacher leaders in charge of SBPRs on the following: a) the outline of their SBPR, b) involvement with the supervisors, and c) expectations on the supervisors. Interviews at each school took 65-79 minutes.

With the supervisors and the others, semi-structured interviews were conducted on the following: a) expectations for SBPRs and their assessment of them, b) involvement with SBPRs (actions taken such as guidance and advices), and c) special considerations they took while they were involved with the SBPRs. The interviews with the supervisors and others took 47-63 minutes each.

2. 3 Analytical Perspective

To analyze the roles of supervisors involved with SBPRs who are externs of the schools, this study utilized the perspective of "consultation." For example, indicating that in-school trainings are expected to contribute not only to quality improvement of individual teachers but also to organizational development of schools, Sano(2010, p.140) states that an intervention by a consultant brings positive effects to organizational

development and the work of a consultant is the following: "an intervention or to extend a supportive hand in the form of action which helps the client to solve a problem."

As mentioned above, supervisors are external personnel who are in a position to be involved with SBPRs closely and to support them in practical matters. In this sense, a supervisor can be regarded in the same position as the consultant mentioned above who plays the role of an intervention.

Based on prior knowledge, Kobayashi(2009) divides the process of consultation into four steps: a) relationship building, b) data collection/assessment, c) intervention, and d) assessment/conclusion. Furthermore, based on an earlier study that sorted the consultation process specific to schools in Japan, Kobayashi(2009) sorted out the roles of a consultant in the respective steps. On the basis of this principle and procedures, we established an analysis framework as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: *Four Steps of Consultation and the Roles of a Consultant*(Kobayashi 2009)

Four steps	Roles of a consultant
Relationship building	Advance preparations (Scheduling, preliminary assessment, etc.)
	Guidance (Briefing on the stance of the consultant, etc.)
	Building of collaborative relationship as partners
Data collection /assessment	Grasp of the details of the issue (Data collection)
	Confirmation of resources
	Coordination of images (Data sharing)
Intervention	Selection/decision of problem solving measures
	Provision of information
	Support/assistance (including emotional support)
Assessment/ conclusion	Assessing the practices
	Modification of measures/adoption of new measures
	Emotional/informational support
	Promotion of voluntary problem solving

3. Results

Through interviews with staff of the four schools and those with supervisors and others, the following roles were observed as played by the supervisors in more than three of the four schools. Details of the roles played by the supervisors and others that were observed in more than one school are as follows.

3.1 Specific Roles of the Supervisor and Others Performed in the Four Steps of Consultation

Relationship building

In the step "relationship building," all the supervisors and the others interviewed performed actions that were classified as "building of collaborative relationship as partners." In particular, relation building with key persons of SBPR planning and management, such as school administrators and teacher leaders, were observed in all the four schools. This was especially true for relation building with principals.

Data collection/Assessment

In step b) data collection/assessment, all the supervisors and others interviewed performed actions that were classified as "grasp of the details of the issue" and "coordination of images."

Regarding "grasp of the details of the issue," the supervisors and the others actively collected information through daily visits and participation in research lessons and school events. For example, the section chief in the Board of Education of City T put greater importance on visiting Elementary and junior high school D when a research lesson was conducted in his/her continuous effort to grasp the situation of school D and that of the SBPR.

> *When there was a research lesson, the chairman and I visited it as much as we could. We also informed other board members about it and brought them together. Like that, we made it normal to visit research lessons before the SBPR started. […] On other occasions, the supervisor or I visited the school irregularly for a kind of scouting.*

In addition to data collection through direct visit to relevant schools, the supervisor in the Education Center of City O collected information on the SBPR of Elementary school A through the ICT supporters of the school, and the supervisor in the Board of Education of Prefecture K through the supervisor in the Board of Education of City S. That is, supervisors tried to grasp the situation of the relevant schools through more than one method.

"Coordination of images" indicates "the procedures through which a consultant and a consultee coordinate their ideas about a client so that they can share the same image" (Kobayashi 2009, p.16) . In this study, we interpreted this as sharing of information about the direction of SBPRs with school staff and provision of support for problem solving in SBPR practice. For example, in addition to checking of the school's administration policy and research policy, the section chief of the Board of Education of City T had a close contact with the vice principal of Elementary and junior high school D to have a shared idea about the direction of problem solving. On the other hand, on a request from Junior high school B, the supervisor in the Board of Education of Prefecture K held a workshop about goal settings and an annual planning for disaster prevention education at the beginning of the fiscal year.

Intervention

In the step "intervention," the supervisors and others performed actions corresponding to "selection/decision of problem solving measures" and "provision of information" in all four schools and to "support/assistance" in three schools.

As for "selection/decision of problem solving measures," all the supervisors and others provided guidance and advice on teaching plans drawn up for research lessons and research presentation meetings.

Concerning "provision of information," the supervisors and others provided information

about teaching and other materials or information about practices of ICT utilization and disaster prevention education, depending on the SBPR themes of the relevant schools. For example, the supervisor in the Board of Education of City M commented,

> *I collect varied information (on ICT utilization and audiovisual education) and study it myself. I bring the latest information as soon as possible to the school.*

Concerning "support/assistance," the corresponding actions were observed in the comments of the supervisors in the Boards of Education of Prefecture K, City S, City M, and City T. For example, the supervisor in the Board of Education of City S often asked teachers, "Isn't it tough these days?" and gave them affirmative words about children's growth. The supervisor in the Board of Education of City M tried to "admit and praise good points while refraining from simply criticizing weak points." He tried to "make them think about it, think together, and find measures to overcome the problem." In the same manner, in all the cases that applied to the "support/assistance" category, emotional support from the supervisors and others was observed

Assessment/conclusion

In the step "assessment/conclusion," the supervisor in the Board of Education of City M symbolically represented the role of "assessing the practices," where the supervisor paid close attention to the continuous development of SBPR practice at Junior high school C, always checking on results and problems while also determining the next themes. However, with respect to the other roles in this step, no supervisor performed the corresponding actions. In other words, the roles of the supervisors and others concerning assessment/conclusion were limited.

3.2 Roles of Supervisor and the Others Other than Those Included in the Four Steps of Consultation

In addition to the roles mentioned above, supervisors performed other roles that did not fall into any of the categories of the analytical framework shown in Table 1. These roles were the following: "encouraging teachers to build the SBPR network," "preparing opportunities for the teachers to learn SBPR," and "encouraging the teachers to share the process and results of the SBPRs with teachers in other schools (acquisition of external evaluation)."

Concerning the role of "encouraging teachers to build the SBPR network," all the supervisors and the others interviewed performed corresponding actions. For example, the supervisor in the Board of Education of Prefecture K promoted relationship building between school staff and local residents by attending the "Open School Promotion Committee" to appeal for cooperation with the SBPR practice at Junior high school B.

As for "preparing opportunities for the teachers to learn SBPR," some actions taken by the supervisors of the Education Center of City O and the Board of Education of City T

fell into the category. As part of the "ICT Utilization for School Education" project it operated, the Education Center of City O regularly held workshops for model schools, including Elementary school A, about operation and utilization of ICT equipment in classes, as well as information exchange meetings for principals and teacher leaders.

Regarding "encouraging the teachers to share the process and results of the SBPRs with teachers in other schools," the supervisor in the Education Center of City O and that in the Board of Education of City T provided opportunities for teachers to share the results of their SBPR practice and to receive external evaluations through it.

Though not direct, these roles which do not fall into any of four steps serve as "indirect support" for further enhancement of SBPRs in a sense that they facilitate interconnections between a school and other organizations.

4. Discussion

Based on these results, the authors illustrated the roles of supervisors in contributing to SBPR development as shown in Figure 1. It is based on the following procedures. First, we extracted the 10 roles of the analytical framework shown in Table 1 which had actions corresponding to more than one role: "building of collaborative relationship as partners," "grasp of the details of the issue," "coordination of images," "selection/decision of problem solving measures," "provision of information," "support/assistance," "assessing the practices," "encouraging teachers to build the SBPR network," "preparing opportunities for the teachers to learn SBPR," and "encouraging the teachers to share the process and results of the SBPRs with teachers in other schools."

Next, since these role titles express the general roles of a consultant, we modified them as needed to express more appropriately the roles specifically performed by supervisors. For example, regarding the role of "building of collaborative relationship as partners," taking into account the fact that supervisors built relationships with school administrators and teacher leaders, who would be the key persons of SBPR planning and operation, we decided to use a new title, "creating good relationship with school administrators and teacher leaders" so that it can describe the contents of the role more specifically.

Lastly, we examined relevancy among individual roles. Here we would like to consider relevancy among three roles: "creating good relationship with school administrators and teacher leaders," "collecting data on the process of SBPRs through daily school visits," and "helping teachers understand the goal of the SBPRs." As mentioned above, "creating good relationship with school administrators and teacher leaders" was given much value in the step of relationship building. At the same time, however, the need for "collecting data on the process of SBPRs through daily school visits" was also

mentioned for the same step.

According to prior knowledge on consultation (See Table 1), "creating good relationship with school administrators and teacher leaders" is classified in the step of relationship building, while "collecting data on the process of SBPRs through daily school visits" and "helping teachers understand the goal of the SBPRs" are in the step of data collection /assessment. In short, the former role and the latter roles belong to different steps of consultation. However, the first role and the second role are considered to be linked to each other in a sense that the supervisors' and the others' regular visits to schools for data collection create the school's favorable impression such as, "the supervisor understands our situation," thus facilitating relationship building between them. Furthermore, as the comment by the section chief in the Board of Education in Prefecture K, "I can talk about specific topics," this kind of relationship building and data collection are considered to be linked to the role of "helping teachers understand the goal of the SBPRs," too. Based on these ideas, we arranged these ten roles as shown in Figure 1.
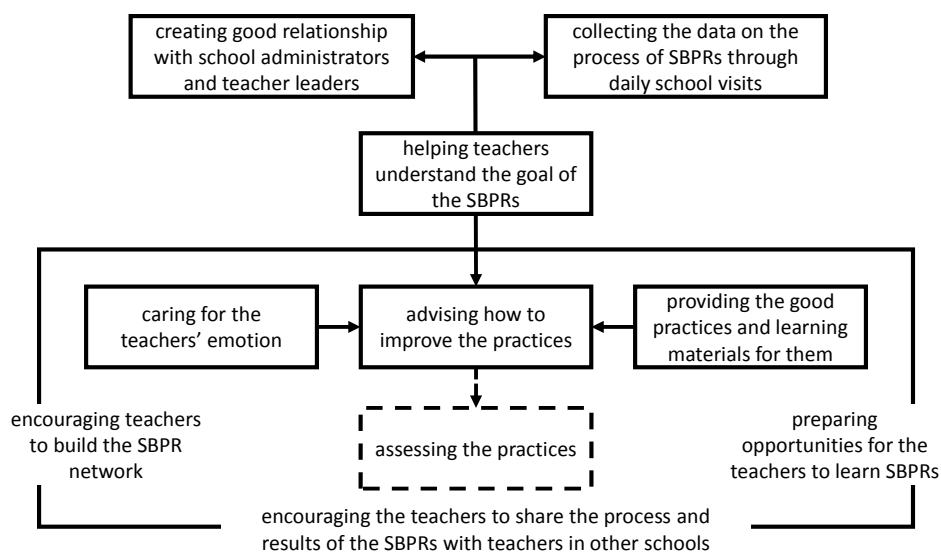

Figure 1. Roles of Supervisors Contributing to SBPR Development

According to prior knowledge that consultation is a process of problem solving, the whole process of consultation is considered to be centered on the role "advising how to improve the practices" in the step of intervention. As for "providing good practices and learning materials for them" and "caring for the teachers' emotions" classified in the same step of intervention, they are both regarded as roles that enhance advices for the improvement of practice.

Concerning the role of "assessing the practices," though we must admit that it is a limited one as observed through this study analysis, some examples were observed, including the one where the Board of Education of City O tallied the questionnaire on

the SBPR practice of Elementary school A. However, considering that we confirmed only limited evidence of actions corresponding to "assessing the practices" through investigations and analysis in this study, this role is framed with a dotted line in Figure 1.

Though not indicated in previous studies on the process of consultation and the roles of a consultant, the supervisors and others were observed to be playing the following roles: "encouraging teachers to build the SBPR network," "preparing opportunities for the teachers to learn SBPR," and "encouraging the teachers to share the process and results of the SBPRs with teachers in other schools" to enhance SBPRs further. For example, the action by the above-mentioned Board of Education of City O to hold workshops and information exchange meetings regularly ("preparing opportunities for the teachers to learn SBPR") and the support by the respective Boards of Education for the hosting of research presentation meetings ("encouraging the teachers to share the process and results of the SBPRs with teachers in other schools") observed in all the four schools were, though indirect ones, particularly contributing to further enhancement of SBPRs in the steps, "intervention" and "assessment." For this reason, these three roles are shown on the square as framing all other roles in the "intervention" and "assessment" steps to indicate an indirect link with them all. Accordingly, the roles of a supervisor as contributing to SBPR development appeared, as shown in Figure 1.

5. Conclusion

In this study, the involvement of supervisors and others with SBPRs was sorted and analyzed based on the theory of consultation. In particular, the study elucidated the roles played by the supervisors and others and the structure of their roles through the comparison of several SBPR cases with different attributes.

The 10 roles of supervisors extracted from this study are needed to be examined for their reliability by applying them to other cases. In particular, possible changes in roles required of a supervisor depending on the situation of a particular school or SBPR must be considered. For this reason, our next step will be to choose schools with different stages of SBPRs from those we investigated in this study and verify whether the roles of a supervisor elucidated through this study also apply to different cases.

Furthermore, in the cases of the four schools in this study, external personnel other than supervisors such as university educators were also involved with SBPR practices. It will be necessary to examine the differences between the roles performed by supervisors and the other external personnel to obtain a more detailed illustration of the roles specific to supervisors.

Acknowledgement

Additional Remark

This article is a translation of a part of the original one. It is as follow;

Shimada, N., Kihara, T. and Terashima, K.(2015)Gakko Kenkyuu no Hatten ni Shisuru Kyoiku Iinkai Shidoshuji no Yakuwari no Kento: Konsarute-shon no Gainen wo Mochiite[Research on the Role of the Supervisor in a Board of Education for the Development of School-based Practical Researches：Analysis by the Concept of Consultation]. *Nihon Kyoshi Kyoiku Gakkai Nenpo[The Bulletin of the Japanese Society for the Study on Teacher Education],* 24:106-115.

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