

Kim Marshall

**RETHINKING
TEACHER
SUPERVISION
AND
EVALUATION**



**How to Work Smart, Build Collaboration,
and Close the Achievement Gap**

SECOND EDITION

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More Praise for Rethinking Teacher Supervision and Evaluation

“Kim has written an important book, a must-read for anyone who believes that school can be and must be greatly improved. His argument is clear, cogent, and buttressed by endless practical ideas borne of his long work on the front lines of urban education. But his message applies to all educators: pay attention to what does and doesn't work; build upon a rich curriculum; and, most of all, redefine supervision and evaluation to ensure that they are ongoing, efficient, and always focused on staff learning about learning. Marshall has written a thoughtful, practical, and hopeful book that should play a vital role in ending the fatalism that is a cancer in American education.”

—Grant Wiggins, president, Authentic Education, Hopewell, New Jersey

“Kim Marshall is quickly establishing himself as a preeminent voice in the field of school leadership. He does what few authors have done before: integrate the critical tasks of observation, curriculum planning, and data-driven instruction to drive real student achievement. His combination of real-world experience and visionary thinking creates a road map that has the potential to alter the national landscape on teacher supervision.”

—Paul Bambrick-Santoyo, managing director, North Star Academy Network, Uncommon Schools

“Classroom teachers and principals alike will decorate the pages of this insightful book with notes and underscored passages that offer inspiration and the kind

of down-to-earth advice you seek from the best teacher you know. Kim Marshall is a visionary thinker with his finger right on the pulse of how good teaching transforms thinking, and how deep concern for students transforms teaching; in direct, compelling language, he describes the magical synergy that happens when educators at all levels work together to prepare students for life—not just for tests.”

—Vicki Spandel, author, *Creating Writers and The Nine Rights of Every Writer*

“Kim Marshall brings the wisdom of a seasoned principal and the insights of a scholar-researcher to this analysis of instructional leadership. His work is practical, smart, and, most of all, clear and accessible. Any educational leader seeking to find ways to improve the quality of instruction will find in this book an invaluable resource. Marshall writes with the authority of someone who understands what needs to be done to create successful schools because he has already done so himself.”

—Pedro A. Noguera, Ph.D., Peter L. Agnew Professor of Education, Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Development, executive director, Metropolitan Center for Urban Education, New York University

“Kim Marshall's invaluable book is more than a new view of supervision and evaluation—it offers a broad-based map of the multiple paths that a principal must consider if teaching and learning are to be improved deeply.”

—Jon Saphier, author, *The Skillful Teacher*

“In this useful volume, Marshall draws upon his years of experience doing the work as a principal, coach, and principal-educator to offer a clear-eyed critique of both business-as-usual teacher evaluation as well as a number of faddish proposed approaches. In their place,

Marshall offers administrators a pragmatic, concrete, and effective system for carrying out supervision and evaluation that can genuinely move the dial on teaching, learning, and student achievement. Far from a dull primer, this text reads like a coach at the school administrator's side. I am already drawing upon Marshall's proffered system and strategies with my own aspiring educators and their university supervisors."

**—Scott Seider, assistant professor of education,
Boston University**

RETHINKING TEACHER SUPERVISION AND EVALUATION



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and Close the Achievement Gap**

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Cover design: Michael Cook

Cover illustration: © Boris Hajdarevic/iStockphoto

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Published by Jossey-Bass

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One Montgomery Street, Suite 1200, San Francisco, CA 94104-4594— www.josseybass.com

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Marshall, Kim, 1948-

Rethinking teacher supervision and evaluation: how to work smart, build collaboration, and close the achievement gap / Kim Marshall.— Second edition.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-118-33672-4 (pbk.)

ISBN 978-1-118-41661-7 (ebk.)

ISBN 978-1-118-41997-7 (ebk.)

ISBN 978-1-118-43415-4 (ebk.)

1. Teachers— Rating of. 2. Teachers— In-service training. I.
Title.

LB1728.M26 2013

371.14'4— dc23

2012051513

For Lillie and David,
skillful and intrepid teachers

The Author

Kim Marshall was a teacher, central office administrator, and principal in the Boston public schools for thirty-two years. He now advises and coaches new principals, working with New Leaders (formerly New Leaders for New Schools); teaches courses and leads workshops on instructional leadership; and publishes a weekly newsletter, the *Marshall Memo*, which summarizes ideas and research from sixty-four publications (www.marshallmemo.com). Marshall has written several books and numerous articles on teaching and school leadership. He is married and has two children; both are teachers, one in Boston, the other in California.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I am grateful to my wife, Rhoda Schneider, for her support, wise counsel, and keen eye, and also to Lillie Marshall, David Marshall, Katherine Marshall, and Laura Marshall.

Christie Hakim at Jossey-Bass believed in this book from the beginning and persuaded me to write it, and she and her colleagues contributed mightily to the final product, including Leslie Tilley (special thanks for helping reformat the rubrics), Julia Parmer, Hilary Powers, Kate Gagnon, and Pam Berkman. The second edition has benefited from close attention from Kate Gagnon and Tracy Gallagher.

A loyal group of friends and thought partners have helped encourage and shape this book over the years: Jon Saphier, Mike Schmoker, Doug Reeves, Roland Barth, Paul Bambrick-Santoyo, Larry Cuban, Jay McTighe, Grant Wiggins, Jeff Howard, John King, Rick DuFour, Dylan William, Charlotte Danielson, Mike Lupinacci, Mark Jacobson, Jenn David-Lang, Andrew Bundy, Andy Platt, Barney Brawer, Barry Jentz, Mary Ellen Haynes, Lorraine Cecere, Dick Best, Lois Jones, Bill O'Neill, Bill Henderson, Bob Weintraub, Doug Lemov, Ellie Drago-Severson, George Hill, Gerry Degnan, Vikki Ginsberg, Jay Heubert, Joan Dabrowski, Karen Drezner, Kathleen Flannery, Mairead Nolan, Mark Roosevelt, Mary Grassa O'Neill, Mary Russo, Maureen Harris, Michael Fung, Emily Cox, Sandi Kleinman, Pamela Seigle, Pedro Noguera, Vicki Spandel, Penny Noyce, Pete Turnamian, Jamey Verilli, Rick Weissbourd, Sandy Mitchell-Woods, Ted Dooley, Diane Lande, Toni Jackson, Maria Palandra, Betsey Useem, and Mike Useem. I'm especially grateful to Paul Bambrick-Santoyo for a thoughtful critique of the new Chapter Nine in the second edition.

Finally, I am grateful to the teachers at the Mather School, who tutored me as these ideas germinated, and to the budding principals, seasoned coaches, and honchos in New Leaders for New Schools, who have contributed in ways they cannot imagine: Jon Schnur, Monique Burns, Ben Fenton, Cami Anderson, Jann Coles, Kris Klasby, Stephanie Fitzgerald, Vera Torrence, Mark Murphy, my coaching colleagues in New York; Washington, D.C.; Chicago; and the Bay Area; and all New Leaders principals.

And my special thanks to Athie Tschibelu, who went above and beyond the call of duty to help launch one of the first components of this book.

Introduction

Principal evaluation of teachers is a low-leverage strategy for improving schools, particularly in terms of the time it requires of principals.

—Richard DuFour and Robert Marzano



Write-ups have low to medium leverage on influencing teaching practice.

—Jon Saphier

To many educators, these two quotes from three of America's leading authorities on instructional improvement are shocking and counterintuitive. For decades, the assumption has been that if we want to improve teaching, supervision and evaluation are effective levers. Surely, the argument went, inspecting classroom performance and giving teachers feedback and formal evaluations would make a positive difference.

But when educators take a few minutes to reflect on what DuFour, Marzano, and Saphier are saying, it begins to make sense. I frequently ask groups of administrators to think back to when they were teachers and raise their hands if an evaluation ever led them to make significant improvements in the way they taught. Typically, around 5 percent raise a hand. When I ask if the evaluations that principals themselves have written produce significant classroom improvements, I get a similar response. Most principals sheepishly admit that after all the work they put into all those pre-observation conferences, classroom visits, write-ups, and post-conferences, they rarely see much difference in what teachers do—much less in student achievement.

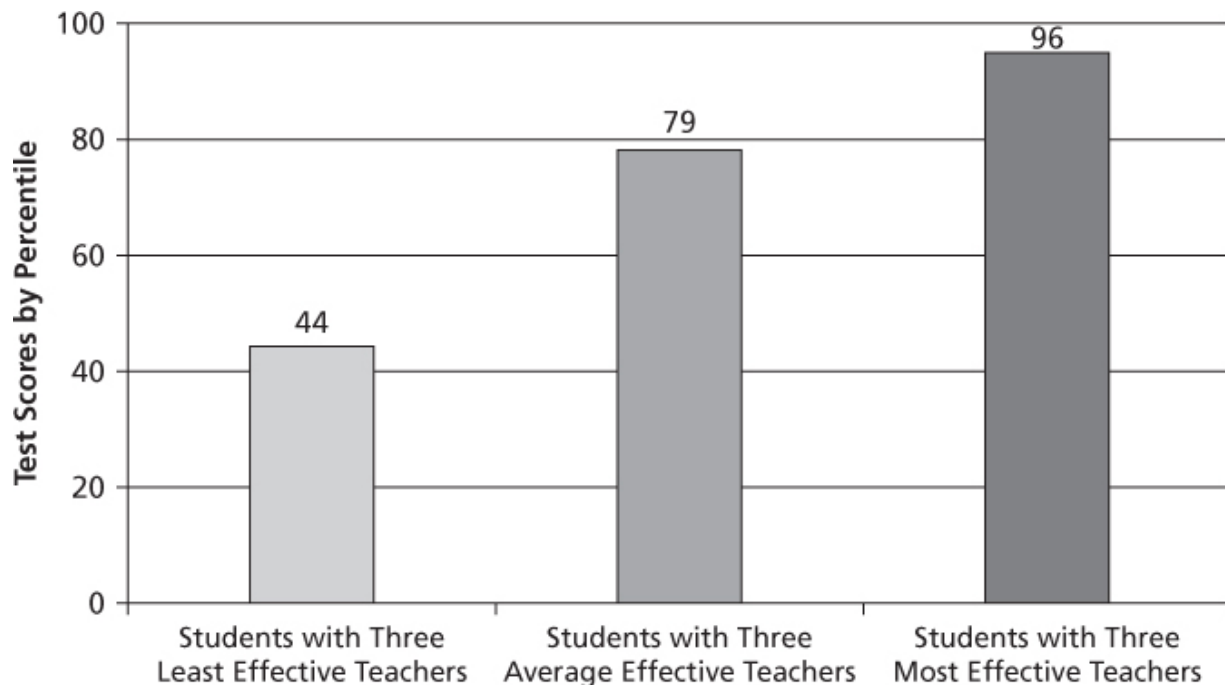
This is disturbing. It means that school leaders are spending huge amounts of time on a process that rarely improves classroom teaching. And teaching, after all, is the heart of the matter. Research has shown that the quality of instruction is the single most important factor in student achievement (Ferguson & Ladd, 1996; Sanders & Rivers, 1996; Sanders, Saxton, and Horn, 1997; Haycock, 1998; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005; Whitehurst, 2002; Hattie, 2002; Rice, 2003; Nye, Hedges, & Konstantopoulos, 2004; Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2007).

Good Teaching Really Matters

This was not always the conventional wisdom. For years, factors outside the schoolhouse were believed to be the main determinants of how children did—social class, innate intelligence, family background, community dynamics, negative peer pressure, racism, and discrimination. But now we know that good classroom teaching can overcome the disadvantages with which many students enter school, and that children who grow up in poverty are not doomed to failure. [Figure I.1](#) shows the dramatic difference in the achievement of students who have three years of effective, mediocre, or ineffective teaching.

[Figure I.1](#) Fifth-Grade Math Scores on Tennessee Statewide Test: The Difference the Quality of Teaching Makes as Similar Students Move from Grade 3 to 5

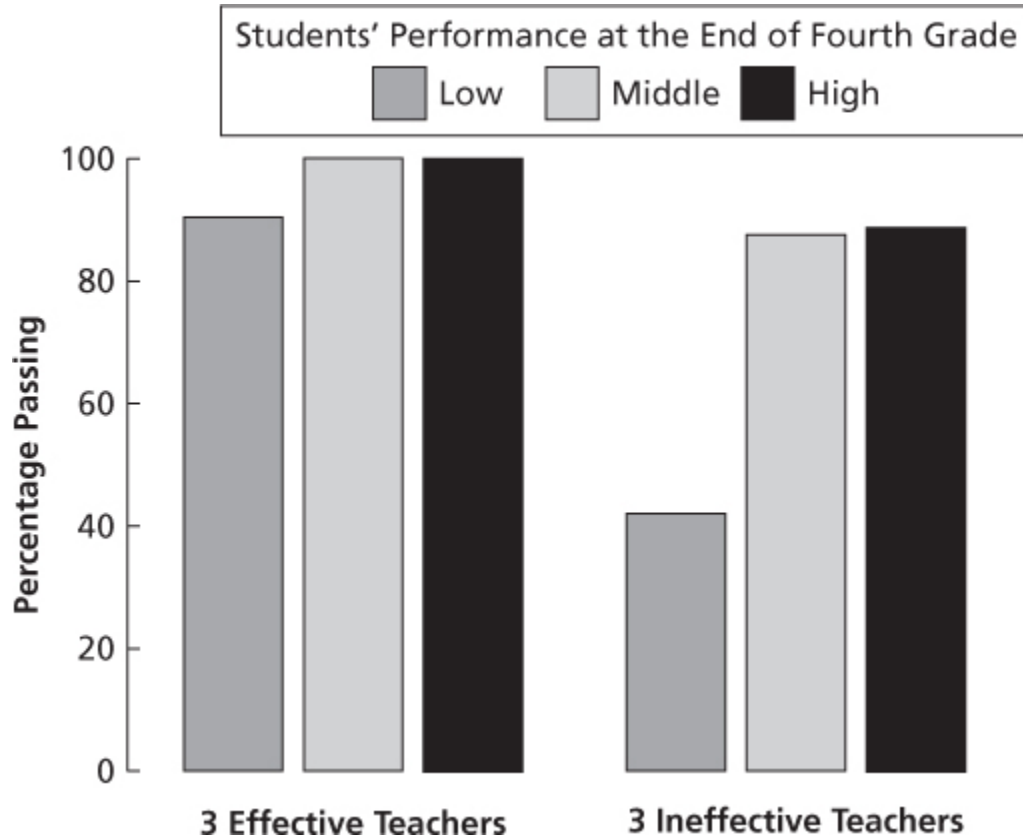
Source: Sanders and Rivers (1996).



Good teaching helps all students, but it turns out that it makes a bigger difference for some than for others. [Figure 1.2](#) shows the results of a study that compared the impact of effective and ineffective teachers on students as they moved from fifth to seventh grade. Students who were lucky enough to have effective teaching for three years in a row achieved at almost identically high levels, even though some started with much lower achievement than others. But a matched sample of students who had three years of ineffective teaching fared quite differently: those who started out with high and average achievement were still doing quite well at the end of seventh grade, but students who started out with low skills did much worse. This study and others like it show that low-achieving students benefit disproportionately from good teaching. Unfortunately, the children who need good teaching the most—those who are economically disadvantaged, members of minority groups, and those with special needs and language deficits—are more likely to attend schools with an inexperienced, transient teacher corps and unfavorable, sometimes chaotic learning environments.

Figure I.2 The Impact of Effective and Less Effective Teachers on Grade 5–7 Students with Different Levels of Entering Proficiency

Source: Bracey (1996).



So here's the logic of the preceding paragraphs: (a) teaching really matters, (b) not all teaching is equally effective, (c) teaching quality is unevenly distributed by class and race, and therefore (d) there is an inexorable, day-by-day widening of the achievement gap across the nation.

Some broad societal challenges flow from this analysis: how to get our most effective teachers teaching our neediest students; how to create working conditions that will attract them to some pretty embattled schools; and how to create an esprit in the national teacher corps similar to that among firefighters, among whom the “best and bravest” want to work in firehouses with the “best” fires—that is, the most challenging ones.

But for the short term, we can draw a conclusion with which almost every parent would agree: every principal's most important job is getting good teaching in every classroom.

Which brings us to the subject matter of this book: What is the best way to get effective teaching for every child? For starters, hiring and firing. Removing *ineffective* teachers is critically important, as is hiring talented and hard-working teachers, since each vacancy is a golden opportunity to upgrade the team. But vacancies don't occur that frequently. So while hiring and firing are tremendously important, this book will focus on strategies for supporting and improving the teachers (ranging from excellent to ineffective) who are in classrooms now.

In recent years, schools and districts have tried a variety of approaches for improving teaching:

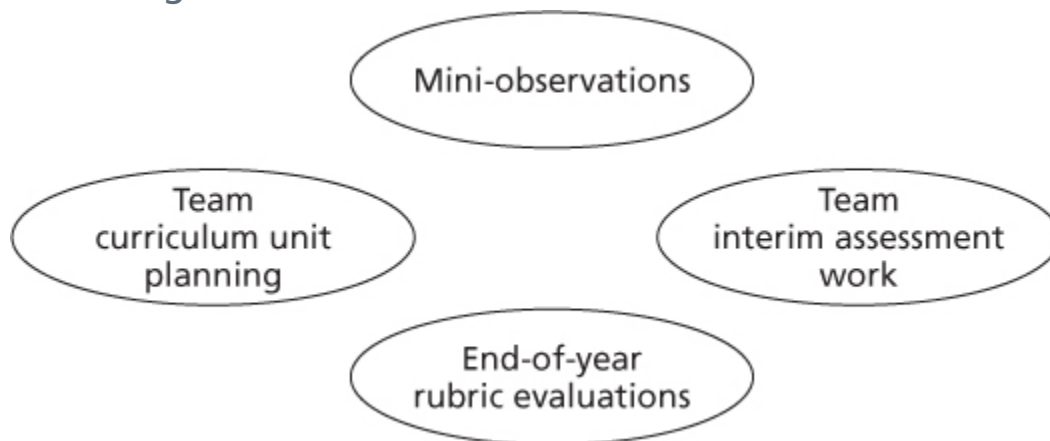
- More aggressive supervision and evaluation
- Using test scores to evaluate teachers
- Publishing teachers' test scores in newspapers
- Merit pay for high-performing teachers
- Revamping the teacher evaluation forms that principals fill out
- Doing “learning walk” or “instructional rounds” tours of schools with feedback to the staff
- Getting teachers to visit exemplary classrooms and schools
- Having teachers analyze student work
- Requiring teachers to use highly scripted curriculum programs
- Providing laptop computers for every student
- Encouraging teachers to use the Internet to find effective ideas and materials
- Setting up “critical friends groups” in which teachers read and discuss articles and books

- And the old standby, getting teachers to attend workshops and courses inside and outside their schools

Each of these approaches can contribute to the quality of instruction under the right conditions, and they all have proponents. But I believe there is a much more powerful way to improve teaching and learning and close the achievement gap.

This book will present four closely linked strategies centering on specific actions principals can take: (a) making short, unannounced classroom visits followed by one-on-one feedback conversations, (b) participating much more actively in the curriculum unit planning process, (c) working with teacher teams to analyze and follow up on interim assessment results, and (d) using rubrics for end-of-year teacher evaluation. I believe these are the most effective ways for a principal to exercise instructional leadership and make a real difference at the classroom level. [Figure I.3](#) is a diagram that will evolve over the course of this book to show how the four strategies interact.

[Figure I.3](#) The Four-Part Strategy for Improving Teaching and Learning: Basic Elements



Implementing these four strategies involves fundamental changes in the way principals handle supervision and evaluation and the professional dynamic within schools. School leaders shift in these ways:

- From periodically evaluating *teaching* to continuously analyzing *learning*
- From infrequent announced classroom visits to frequent unannounced visits
- From taking extensive notes on one or two lessons a year to watching for key “teaching points” in each of a number of visits
- From guarded, inauthentic communication with teachers to candid give-and-take based on authentic classroom observation
- From formal yearly or twice-yearly evaluations to continuous suggestions and redirection, culminating in an end-of-year evaluation
- From inadvertently sowing envy and division among teachers to empowering and energizing teacher teams
- From teachers saying “Let me do it my way” to everyone asking “Is it working?”
- From administrators doing most of the work to teachers taking on real responsibility for improving teaching and learning
- From evaluating individual lessons to supervising the effectiveness of curriculum units
- From one-right-way evaluation criteria to constantly looking at new ideas and practices
- From focusing mainly on ineffective teachers to improving teaching in every classroom
- From cumbersome, time-consuming evaluations to streamlined rubrics
- From being mired in paperwork to continuously orchestrating schoolwide improvement

This book comes from my own experience, extensive research, and close observation of scores of effective and ineffective schools. Thirty-two years as a Boston teacher, central office administrator, and principal were the starting point. Since leaving the Boston schools in 2002, I have

continued to develop my initial insights and practices and have presented them in hundreds of workshops and consultations in a wide variety of schools and districts. These ideas have been adopted in part by a number of schools.

Although there is no gold-standard research on the model, I believe the combination of all four elements is the key to dramatic gains. Mini-observations have a powerful logic, and I challenge readers to present a better system for seeing what is really going on in classrooms on a daily basis and coaching teachers throughout the year. Curriculum unit planning has a strong track record all over the world, thanks to the work of Grant Wiggins, Jay McTighe, and their colleagues. Interim assessments have robust research support and a number of successful practitioners. And teacher evaluation rubrics, while they are very recent arrivals in schools, just make sense.

Here is a chapter-by-chapter overview of the book:

- **Chapter One** tells the story of my fifteen-year Boston principalship, during which my colleagues and I struggled against significant obstacles and realized quite late in the game that major gains in student achievement are difficult without external standards linked to good assessments.
- **Chapter Two** describes the design flaws in the conventional supervision and evaluation process that explain why it rarely improves teaching and learning.
- **Chapter Three** gives the blow-by-blow of my initial failure as a principal to get supervision and evaluation working well, and my discovery of mini-observations—an effective way of getting into classrooms and giving teachers feedback.
- **Chapter Four** is an analysis of twelve key factors for implementing mini-observations successfully.

- **Chapter Five** broadens the usual definition of supervision to include principals working with teacher teams as they clarify learning goals and “backwards design” curriculum units—all of which helps teachers draw on each others' insights and wisdom and makes the principal a more perceptive and helpful thought partner during and after classroom observations.
- **Chapter Six** broadens supervision further still, describing how principals can direct and support teacher teams as they look at interim assessment results, figure out learning problems, help struggling students, involve students in improving their own performance, and continuously improve instruction.
- **Chapter Seven** returns to a major flaw in traditional year-end teacher evaluations—how time-consuming and disrespected they often are—and presents a set of teacher evaluation rubrics that are more time-efficient and give teachers succinct, detailed, and constructive end-of-year feedback.
- **Chapter Eight** deconstructs the time management challenge that all principals face and suggests ten ways school leaders can survive, do first things first, and get the engine of improvement humming in their schools.
- **Chapter Nine** suggests ways that superintendents can support and direct the work of principals as they implement this four-part model; the chapter includes a principal evaluation rubric.
- **Chapter Ten** sums up, describing how mini-observations, curriculum planning, interim assessments, and teacher evaluation rubrics interact and build on each other. By successfully orchestrating these four components, principals can build collaboration with and among teachers and foster continuous improvement of teaching and learning aimed at closing the achievement gap.

- **Appendix A** is a model of a slim curriculum outcomes booklet—a clear statement of what students need to know and be able to do by the end of the year.
- **Appendix B** is a sampling of short write-ups to teachers after mini-observations and follow-up talks. These were written by a principal and assistant principal in New York City who are using the approach described in this book.
- **Appendix C** is a comparison of my teacher evaluation rubrics with Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Learning.

Throughout this book, the word “principal” is used as shorthand for all school-based administrators. Readers should take this to include assistant principals, deans, department heads, and any other professionals who supervise and evaluate teachers.

Chapter One

The Challenge

Closing the Achievement Gap

Knowledge powers a global economy that is utterly unforgiving to the unskilled, uneducated young adult.

—Joel Klein, former New York City Schools Chancellor
I became principal of Boston's Mather Elementary School late in the summer of 1987, absolutely determined to boost achievement and convinced that supervising and evaluating teachers was at the core of my role as an instructional leader. But had I reflected more carefully on the preceding seventeen years, when I was a teacher, graduate student, and central office administrator, I might have anticipated some of the bumps that lay ahead.

Supervision as Seen by a Rookie Teacher

Fresh out of college in 1969, I began teaching at Boston's Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School. Supremely ill-equipped to handle a class of twenty-five energetic sixth graders, I had a rough first year. A supervisor from Boston's central office visited several times and was highly critical, so my first exposure to teacher evaluation was one in which my job was on the line. I was one of a number of first-year teachers at the King, and we all regarded this man with fear

and loathing. We grouched about how the only things he cared about were quiet students, a clean chalkboard ledge, and window shades pulled down at exactly the same height. Disdain for this vision of good teaching was fiercest among those of us who were having the most trouble with classroom discipline. Imagine our glee when students turned the supervisor's Volkswagen Beetle upside down in the parking lot one spring afternoon.

But the supervisor was right to criticize my teaching, and the point was driven home when I invited a professor from Harvard's Graduate School of Education to observe. He sat patiently through a couple of lessons and said afterward that he hadn't seen "one iota of learning" take place. This was not exactly what I wanted to hear, but the comment, from a somewhat more authoritative source, was right on target.

One of the school's assistant principals was assigned to the sixth-grade corridor, and he knew I was struggling. But there were so many other crises in the building that he wasn't able to give me detailed feedback or substantive help.

Somehow I got through the year without being fired—perhaps an acute teacher shortage in Boston helped—and spent the beginning of the summer writing an article vividly describing my experiences (Marshall, 1970, "Law and Order in Grade 6E," published a little later in the *Harvard Bulletin*). After it came out, I received perhaps the most devastating evaluation an idealistic young urban teacher could receive:

Your article clearly shows that whites do NOT belong in Black schools. With all your woes and problems, you forget that the 25 Black students you "taught" have had another year robbed from them (and people wonder why when they become adults they can't "make it" in society). It is unfortunate that you had to "gain your