



Courtesy Santa Barbara (Calif.) Schools

How Should We Supervise?

Chosen for special consideration here are but three of the many and complex aspects of supervision. These three have been persistent, nagging problems for many supervisors for years—teacher-rating, the “supervisory visit,” and helping teachers to know and understand children.

☞ *Teacher-rating is not supervision*

RATING—BOON OR BOOMERANG?

FANNIE W. DUNN

TEACHER-RATING is too broad a topic to be treated here in its entirety. This

Unfortunately “teacher-rating” is still an issue in some schools. Discharging one’s supervisory duties by checking items on a rate sheet is much simpler than working and playing with teachers and pupils, solving problems through mutual effort, and maintaining a healthy give-and-take of suggestions and criticism. But rating is far from satisfactory, writes Fannie W. Dunn, professor emeritus of Teachers College, Columbia University, and as a supervisory technique it is wholly without merit.

discussion therefore will be limited to the rating of teachers in service by supervisors, and rating will be understood to mean determining, recording, and reporting to the administrator a single score, such as A, fair, superior, unsatisfactory, on the teacher’s general merit; or component scores on several elements of the teacher’s adequacy, such as discipline, loyalty, or skill in teaching. Within this scope the question of widest interest to

us is, Should supervisors rate teachers at all? Subordinate questions are concerned with purposes, values, effects, and methods or means, and the final answer depends upon the accepted concept of supervisory function and relationship.

Teacher-rating has existed ever since the early days when selectmen or school trustees visited the school to examine pupils in the three R's and approved or disapproved the teacher on the basis of the results. Supervision in that day was inspection, pure and simple; its purpose was selection of teachers for retention or elimination, or at least reproof and warning; and there were just two alternative scores, satisfactory or unsatisfactory.

Results Are Unimpressive

In essence, the nature of teacher-rating remains the same today, but it has been elaborated both as to ends and means. Ratings have been distributed on a scale of four or five points, expressed in letters or descriptive words. Elaborate scales, tests, and techniques have been devised to make the ratings objective, impersonal, and just. The results are not impressive. Says Barr:

The ultimate measure of teacher effectiveness, particularly in his teacher-pupil relations, will be found in the changes produced in the pupils under his direction. Hence it seems sound to attempt the evaluation of teaching efficiency on the basis of pupil growth, *but a practical procedure has not yet been developed.*¹ (Italics mine, F. W. D.)

Of the various tests and scales for measuring teachers' traits and procedures, Barr reports uniformly low validity, the best that he can say for them being that in spite of shortcomings they are more valid than merit ratings made without the aid

¹ Barr, A. S.: "Teaching Efficiency," *Encyclopedia of Educational Research*, Macmillan, 1941, pp. 1280-1281.

of scales. Apparently we are not much further along than the colonial selectmen, except that they did not question their procedure, and we do question ours.

But what has all this to do with supervision? It has been many a year since supervision has been identified with inspection. It was in 1918 that W. J. Holloway, a state supervisor in Maryland, expressed a concept that was even then being widely held:

To criticize, to inspect, is not the aim The main purpose is to get the teacher beyond where she is; to find out where her strength lies and to build it up.

This constructive emphasis persisted and developed.

Johnnie's Needs Come First

Today we think of the supervisor-teacher relationship as a partnership, of the two as working together. The one contributes especially on the basis of her deep, first-hand contacts with the group of children in her charge, the other from opportunities for a wide range of contacts with teachers and children at work and for a more flexibly scheduled day. Neither is concerned with criticizing the other; teacher and supervisor have a common function—the development of a group of children for whom they are mutually responsible.

No good supervisor makes a practice of focusing attention on the teacher. The teacher is one and a very important factor in the children's growth, the supervisor is another, and there are very many others—physical conditions at home and school, parent-child relationships, socio-economic factors in the community, the total school program, equipment, materials, and so on. Together, in a constructive supervisory program, teacher and supervisor explore and exploit all the factors in the case.

Rating, as the term has been defined in this discussion, has no place in such a program. The most important thing is not whether the teacher is in general an A or a C teacher. What matters is whether the needs of Johnnie and Susie and Sam are being met and, if not, what constructive measures teacher and supervisor together can devise to better meet the needs they together discover. What matters is that both supervisor and teacher are continually finding new challenges in their work that keep them growing together as they mutually pursue the ideals that ever fly ahead of them.

Rating Is a Barrier to Growth and Understanding

With all the research that has been done on rating, the writer knows not a single study of the values accruing from a program of rating. It is commonly assumed to be deeply distasteful to teachers, and to interfere with the mutual understanding, confidence, and helpfulness essential to wholesome teacher-supervisor relationships. At least one research testifies to the ineffectiveness of rating. McGinnis, from a questionnaire answered by 2848 teachers and 212 supervisors, found 86.2 per cent of the teachers and 50 per cent of the supervisors opposed to the rating process.²

Granted that rating does have some negative effects, are there perhaps overbalancing positive values that justify the cost in supervisory time and teachers' discomfort? Functions which teacher-rating has been claimed to serve include supplying administrative officers with the information they need for properly placing teachers, making salary increases, promotions, and dismissals; promoting teaching

efficiency; and stimulating teachers to improve themselves in service.³ The first group of these are clearly administrative, not supervisory, in nature; and, moreover, the use of ratings as basis for salary increments has been found very difficult because of the questionable validity of the ratings, as already pointed out. Just how ratings would aid in teacher placement is not clear. The quality of the stimulation to improvement which rating gives is certainly not of high order. Nor is there any evidence from research that rating improves the efficiency of teachers, while there is considerable opinion to the contrary.

The most appealing argument for rating is that, scientifically administered, it affords a somewhat objective basis for dismissals and promotions. It is highly doubtful that it is usually scientifically administered. But, granting that it is, does this justify the regular rating of all teachers? Figures on teacher turnover justify a rough guess that not more than 5 per cent of teachers are dismissed from their positions.⁴ No figures are available as to the number of promotions which are based on scientific rating. Does the probable total of dismissals and promotions warrant the enormous time cost and anxiety involved in rating all teachers?

Cooperative Appraisal of Teaching

Among factors generally accepted as essential to as just a rating as is now possible are the use of a definite, objective rating sheet, preferably one prepared with the cooperation of the teaching staff, and certainly known to them; and the par-

² McGinnis, W. C.: "Supervisory Visits and Teacher Rating Devices," *Journal of Educational Research*, September 1934, pp. 44-47.

³ "Use of Teacher-Rating Blanks to Measure Improvement in Teaching," *The Superintendent Surveys Supervision*, Eighth Yearbook, Department of Superintendence, NEA, 1930, p. 144.

⁴ Butsch, R. L. C.: "Teacher Turnover" and "Causes of Turnover," *Encyclopedia of Educational Research*, Macmillan, 1941, pp. 1269, 1270.

ticipation of at least two persons in at least four definite ratings of the teacher under consideration. Obviously such a process as this would be costly, but it would probably be less costly, if applied to only a few teachers, than the present system of unnecessarily rating all teachers, by much less sound methods.

Rating of this nature might come to be viewed as a privilege to be enjoyed and applied for, not an imposition to be endured. The teacher on probation has a right to expect it as a basis of decision of her fate; the teacher desiring promotion might request it, as a sort of civil service examination; to many teachers it might have value similar to a thorough physical examination, although its findings would be not as reliable, our present measures being what they are. Is it not reasonable to say that no teacher should ever be rated except for such purposes as these, by the best methods available, and with her full cooperation?

As rating is conducted today, there is no evidence that it serves supervisory ends, but rather that it is a hindrance to effective

supervision. It is essentially an administrative function in any case. Whether the supervisor should participate in it is a debatable question, with arguments for and against. On the whole it is probable that, when for administrative ends some rating has to be made of some teachers, there should be available for the purpose a specially qualified committee of teachers and administrative staff, with the supervisor as a member only when conditions seemed especially to require his participation.

All this is not to say that there are no supervisory values in the outlines which teachers and supervisors develop together for the study and evaluation of *teaching*. Some of these analyses are of great value in improving the work of the classroom. But these are a different matter, although it is they which some persons have in mind when they claim that rating teachers improves their efficiency. Means and methods of evaluating one's own work, and help in doing it, are not to be confused with teacher-rating, and their discussion is outside the province of this article.

Understanding and cooperation replace inspection

THE "SUPERVISORY VISIT"

ELSIE COLEMAN

THERE WAS A DAY when visiting classrooms, taking notes, and conferring with individual teachers was the sum total

There are no benefits derived from awed, embarrassed silences, from painful minutes that stretch interminably, or from youngsters' frightened, stilted responses. Yet some "supervisory visits" may be summed up in just that way. The answer is not to throw out the "visit" entirely, but rather to employ it in a more significant way and to place it in its proper light as merely one segment of the whole supervisory plan. In this article, Elsie Coleman, who is elementary supervisor of Chesterfield County (Virginia) schools, makes some sound suggestions for effective use of the "visit."

of supervision. Fortunately, for the supervisor in a modern school system that day is long since past. The old type of "supervisory visit" has broadened to include a wide program of in-service education and cooperative planning. This does not mean that supervisors never visit classrooms. Quite the contrary. They do visit, and often. But seen as a part of a larger plan, the visits take on a new aspect.

The supervisor today recognizes the complexity of a visit to the teacher, and utilizes every possibility to make it a mutually satisfying and worthwhile ex-

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