

A Plan for High School Supervision

PAUL W. PINCKNEY

SUPERVISION in the high schools is much discussed at the present time. Some educators believe the head of a department to be the most effective person to carry on such supervision; others turn to the subject-matter supervisor; others reject both and are beginning to look to the general supervisor; still others are attempting to combine two or more of the above.

In this discussion the head of a department is defined as a person in charge of a subject field in a single school with the responsibility for improving the teaching within his field and his school. The subject supervisor is a person having such responsibility for improving teaching in one or more schools. The whole purpose of supervision—and of administration—in our schools is to improve the educational opportunities provided for all young people. Although the following statements appear contradictory, most educators will agree that in them is contained much of the valid criticism of present-day secondary education.

The unsolved problem, the Jacksonian task, of the high school is to reach the students who do not read well yet who are not skilled in hand, whose backgrounds are a prey to a thousand mercenary interests—the kind of young people who, as said, in other times would have left school early and found self-respect in work but who now, if they leave school, are simply unemployed.¹

¹ Paul H. Buck. *General Education in a Free Society*. Report of the Harvard Committee, p. 29.

Your answer to the oft-debated question of special supervisors versus general supervisors probably depends on whether you place major emphasis on HOW we teach or WHAT we teach. Whichever your conviction, you will find thoroughly stimulating Paul W. Pinckney's analysis of this subject and his practical proposal for a supervisory plan for secondary schools. Mr. Pinckney is director of secondary education in Portland, Ore.

So far, our schools have done little or nothing to meet the educational requirements of America's gifted children. . . . In far too many instances we don't even know who our gifted children are. Teachers quickly learn to spot the slow-witted among their charges, and send them to the school psychologist for the extra help they may need. But the gifted child can pass right through the grammar grades unnoticed, unless—as sometimes happens—he rebels against the boredom of his too-easy class-work and becomes a behavior problem.²

We are reaching the average student, but we know entirely too little about how to teach those who differ greatly from the average. Unless we learn how to educate all these groups more efficiently we will have failed to educate for democratic living.

Let it be understood from the outset that it is the contention of this writer that the planned improvement of the instructional program of a school should stem directly from the principal of that school. Although in a large school a principal must be able and willing to delegate responsibility to others, he must never delegate so much of this—his most important responsibility in his school—that he loses touch with it. The principal is the key person in any program directed toward the improvement of instruction and to a large degree its success or failure will depend upon his interest and competence.

The principal of a secondary school should, above all else, be aware of the research in the fields of anthropology, biology, psychology, and sociology that deals directly with the important problem of how people learn. He should, at the same time, be a master teacher—that is, he should be able to apply his knowledge in working with supervisors, teachers, and pupils so that they will profit from his guidance and at the same time enjoy their association with him. He must help to make the supervisors and teachers with whom he works see the problems of education in their entirety.

² Harvey Zorbaugh. "Are You Throttling a Future President?" *American Magazine*. Vol. CXL, No. 6, Dec. 1945, pp. 47 and 99.

Supervision by Specialists

In most high schools the principal carries on too few activities directly related to the improvement of the educational program of his school. Supervision in the large high school has been carried on mainly by two groups—the department head and the subject-matter supervisor—often with only the most cursory interest on the part of the principal.

One result has been self-evident. Supervision in the high school has been and still is in the hands of the subject-matter specialist. Content rather than method has received major emphasis. We have spent untold hours in trying to make courses of study that would assure us that certain ground would be covered—that children would be exposed to certain content. We believed that if we could expose the children to the “right” content and secure its memorization we would have educated our children. Such matters as whether United States history should be taught in the eleventh or twelfth grade became very important.

Another result of the division of supervision into rigid subject-matter fields has been the retention and stabilization of teaching within logically developed subject-matter areas. It has hindered greatly the development for young people of areas of experience based upon interests aroused regardless of the subject-matter fields involved.

“Subject” Teachers

The situations touched upon here have been aided and abetted by the institutions that train secondary teachers. Most such institutions are controlled by the faculties of the colleges within the institutions. These faculties often have a supreme contempt for education as a special field and for the schools of education within their own institutions. At the same time they are convinced, almost to the point of worship, that anyone who knows a subject can teach it. The results have been:

1. Most institutions that train secondary teachers are doing far too little to bring about on the part of *all* the young people entering the field of education an understanding of the real problems of education—those concerned with anthropology, biology, psychology, and sociology.
2. The understanding of young people—

how they live and learn—has been of very secondary interest to most college professors.

3. Most college professors, including those in education, when working with prospective teachers make little or no use of the principles of education which they profess.
4. Practice teaching in most institutions that train secondary teachers is a stereotyped and perfunctory part of the education required.

Because of the reasons outlined in the first part of this article, it is the writer's belief that at the present time most schools need the help of specialists in “how to teach” much more than they do in “what to teach.” All the subject-matter specialists we need are available among the teachers of almost any large high school. They have had practically the same background in subject-matter as the department head or supervisor. We can and should make use of this training in the development of a program for the improvement of instruction, but it matters little what subject-matter is to be “taught” to children if conditions of learning are such that they do not profit from its study.

Supervision That Helps

If the thesis of this article is correct, that is, that teachers need more help in general understanding and method than in content, then general supervisory help will be of more value to the principal than will subject-matter help. It then becomes the job of the writer to outline a plan for giving such help. Before doing so I should like to state some assumptions upon which the plan is based:

1. That it is the duty of the public secondary school to provide an education for “all American youth.”
2. That the public secondary school is interested in the development of the “whole” child.
3. That for some time to come our schools that educate secondary teachers are going to emphasize subject-matter more than general understanding and methods.
4. That the principal of each school should be the chief supervisor of that school.
5. That, in a large school, the principal must delegate much of his supervisory work.

With the foregoing in mind, I present the following plan of organization for a large secondary school or school system:

1. That the school be divided into a number of schools within the school:
 - a. Each of these "schools" would have a faculty of teachers large enough to care for most of the needs of one group of children—who in the early years of high school would be "block" programmed to this faculty.
 - b. One member of this faculty would be responsible to the principal for the administration and supervision and guidance in his "school." He could be called a coordinator if a title is necessary.
2. Supervisors for the school system would be general supervisors. They would work directly with coordinators and teachers.
3. Supervisors and principals would be in-

terested in the development of better understanding on the part of teachers, coordinators, principals, and supervisors of how we learn and of how to teach.

4. Matters of content within subjects and of methods within a specific subject would be referred to committees of interested teachers for recommendations.
5. Subject-matter specialists would be encouraged in every way possible to gain the background that would make them general supervisors and coordinators.

The program outlined above may seem idealistic. It is not. It is very practical. It follows good practice as developed in many elementary schools and in colleges preparing elementary teachers. Its development can and should be the first order of business in secondary schools and in colleges preparing secondary teachers.



Committees Carry Forward DSCD Program

DSCD COMMITTEES, which function as an important part of the Department of Supervision and Curriculum Development, are at work throughout the country on various projects related to the improvement of our schools. The Committee on Basic Education in Secondary Schools, under the chairmanship of Paul W. Pinckney of Portland, Ore., is being enlarged to include new field committee members from over the nation. Committee members are engaged in evaluating basic education as it exists in present high-school curriculums.

The first day of the national DSCD convention (to be held in St. Louis, March 21-23; see page 151 for further details) is to be a working period devoted to considering the activities and plans of the various DSCD committees. All persons attending the convention are invited to take part in committee meetings and to share in the discussion and planning which will be in progress. A list of the more than fifteen Department committees will be published in next month's EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP and persons planning to attend the convention will have an opportunity to decide ahead of time which group or groups they wish to work with.

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