

Can a Supervisory Leopard Change His Spots? _____

HAROLD SPEARS

THE STORY of the supervision of instruction in the American high school to date has been well recorded in the literature of our profession. In neither its nature nor its extent has supervision revealed the Horatio Alger progress that has been attributed to school administration. The story is one of narrow conception and limited reception. That the average principal has neglected his obligation to supervision may have been as much the fault of the concept as of the principal. We leave it to the history of education to make the decision.

The Early Concept

Most of the educational books discussing the supervision of instruction were published between 1920 and 1933, and the more recent ones are for the most part restatements or elaborations of the subject made by some of the authors of the earlier period.

Stripped of its interest in the temperature of the classroom, waste paper on the floor, the position of the blinds, the posture of the pupils at their assigned seats, and the mechanical score cards used by the supervisor to check student response to teacher inquiry, that earlier concept of supervision now stands out as rather bare and forlorn, inadequate to cope with the currently accepted ideas of how youth develops, what our democratic society asks of its schools, and what classrooms should be like in recognition of these individual and social demands.

Supervision was seen primarily as the improvement of teachers through classroom observation of their performance, with emphasis upon weaknesses, and follow-up con-

ferences set up by the supervisor to effect improvements. The classroom situation which was conceived in this earlier interest in supervision was the fixed recitation in which the teacher spent the bulk of the time directing questions about subject matter that was assigned the previous day. Elaborate check sheets, sometimes called classroom management score cards, were devised as aids to the supervisor as he set out to record "scientifically" the participation of each student in the recitation at hand. The great emphasis placed upon the economies of time in starting the class, making the assignment, calling the roll, and distributing materials gives further evidence that the pattern of supervision that has been so commonly upheld was one specifically designed to fit a formal classroom situation. Among the weaknesses of this earlier notion of supervision that mark it as totally inadequate for the modern school are these:

1. It was based on the assumption that the main road to the improvement of instruction lay through the weaknesses of individual teachers, these to be spotlighted and then treated by experts.
2. It again represented an attempt to ignore human nature by reducing supervision to a few well-formulated, so-called scientific techniques to be applied by the supervisor in any classroom in any school under any conditions.
3. It accepted the curriculum as satisfactory as it emphasized improving the methods of teachers in establishing facts and skills determined by others as the curriculum.
4. It reflected the intense interest of the school administration in efficiency of school operation, rather than representing a program that had grown up naturally from the instructional needs of the youth in the school.
5. In its eagerness to clutch at impressive methods of working, supervision strayed from the path of pupil needs and followed the new testing movement to the extent of limiting its attention to those outcomes of instruction, facts and skills, for which tests had been developed.

The question of whether supervision according to modern educational practice can become a reality in secondary schools is asked in this article by Harold Spears, head of the integration department, State Teachers College, Montclair, N. J. The answer stresses the need for shelving the dictatorial supervisor in favor of the intelligent and sympathetic counsellor.

6. It handicapped the one who was to do supervision by charging him with the responsibility of rating teachers for the purpose of making salary distinctions among them and thus stigmatizing him as inspector rather than helper.

7. It placed the supervisor on a level of importance above the teacher, a situation which invited directions from above rather than ideas from below.

8. Supervision was something done *by* a superior officer *to* a teacher.

A Turn in Thinking

In the past decade or so the high school has definitely turned a corner in its point of view and is so near to adopting practices to serve such views that there seems to be little place for these earlier notions of the supervisory function. Supervision will be needed more than ever before, but it must be of a type that is true to such acceptances as these:

1. Education has ceased to be merely the task of handing on society's findings and experiences to a new crop of youth.

2. Fixed instructional programs are in disrepute, and not only are teachers being given a major responsibility in determining their instructional programs but they in turn are sharing the planning with their students.

3. As high schools repudiate the fallacy that youth *learns* by reciting back what its elders assign for study, they endorse an active conception of learning which revamps classroom procedures as well as incorporating student experiences out of and beyond the classroom.

4. The sudden realization by the schools that democracy needs to be nurtured if it is to exist has meant a profound change in school procedures.

Reflecting this type of educational thinking is an emerging high school quite different from the one for which the common supervisory program was planned. Classrooms are becoming workrooms instead of reciting rooms—rooms where students and teachers work cooperatively on projects that have meaning for all of them. As students help teachers plan and as teachers respect the differences that exist among these youth before them, learning activities fan out in a dozen different directions, as contrasted with the one-assignment-for-all classroom that su-

per vision was originally planned for. The school plant proper is no longer the sole dispensary of knowledge, but instead acts as the hub of the network of learning activities in which high school youth engages under the guidance of teachers. Participation in a project for community betterment, actual work experience outside the school, and first-hand study of social conditions in the school's locality are a few of the facilities for the development of youth which are being added to the schoolbooks that once acted as the curriculum.

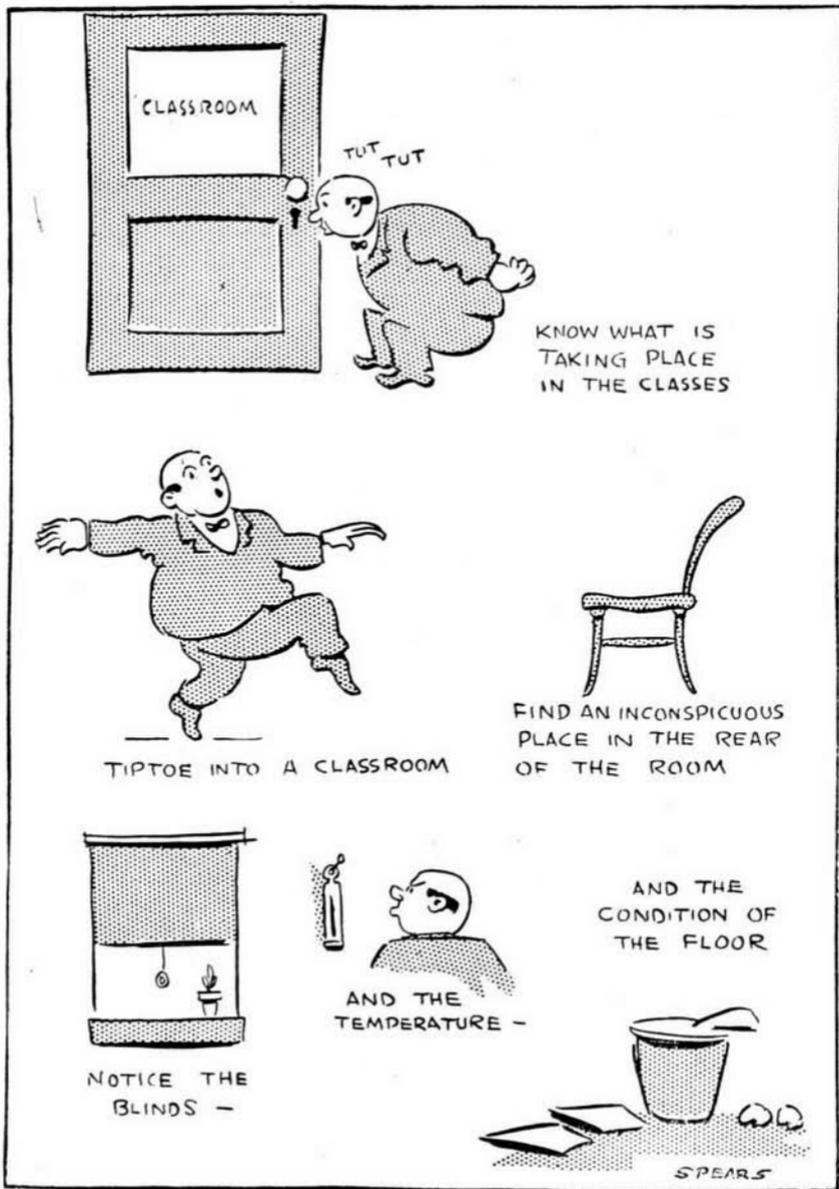
The New Supervision

At the moment the high school has accepted this modern view of its job, but it is still lacking the leadership that will put it into practice. The schools are too few and too far between that are doing the things teachers are becoming interested in and want to observe in operation. If supervision has lost its position for checking the teacher in the performance of yesterday's classroom task, certainly it has the opportunity to accept this new position of leadership in curriculum change.

Teachers need to be brought together to work out new school programs cooperatively. Curriculum reorganization, under professional guidance, means new challenges, new responsibilities, and new horizons for teachers who once worked alone in their separate classrooms under the influence of a passive conception of learning. Supervision is concerned with the improvement of instruction, and if such improvement is seen as influencing both the material and the personal aspects of the teaching situation, then the attention should be focused on the whole of the teaching situation and not just on the individual teacher as has been the case. The teachers' best contribution will come through their cooperative participation in the continual improvement of the curriculum—the curriculum being conceived in its broadest aspects. Supervision becomes interested in all of the learning situations about the school and does not limit its influence to the classroom alone. Teachers have a right to grow through participation in the supervisory program of the school.

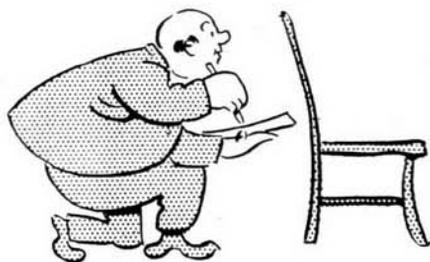
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Yesterday's Supervisory Formula (Part I)



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Yesterday's Supervisory Formula (Part II)



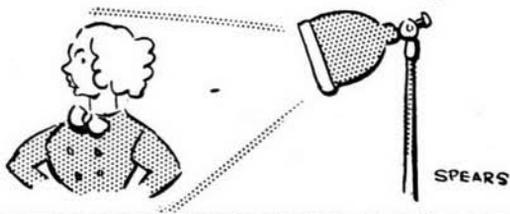
BE AS INCONSPICUOUS
AS POSSIBLE IN
TAKING NOTES - LEST
THE TEACHER
BECOME NERVOUS

SAY NOTHING
BUT RECORD
EVERYTHING



IN CONFERENCE
FIRST PRAISE
THE TEACHER,
THEN POINT OUT
HER FAULTS -

LET THE
SUPERVISORY
SPOTLIGHT
PLAY UPON
TEACHER
WEAKNESSES



view of the curriculum as a collection of unrelated subjects, the concept of education just discussed cannot be implemented until supervisors first cooperate closely to reconceive their functions. This challenge to organization for supervision has been treated by the writer at length in another article.¹

The supervisor becomes a helper of teachers and students, a resource leader who does not have all the answers but is highly enthusiastic in cooperating to find them and a human individual who commands the highest respect of those with whom he works. This respect comes from ability and training in his field—yes, but that alone cannot make him the respected leader. If he is the leader who is demanded, he in turn will respect the fact that leadership is not something that comes from just one member of a group. It is usually the inadequate school administrator or supervisor who is worried about whether those who work "under" him will accord him the proper respect.

While the larger school systems face the problem of establishing a broad point of view with supervisory staffs set up around subject emphasis and distinction, the smaller high schools have an equally disconcerting problem in establishing proper supervision for the modern school. Fully 90 per cent of the 28,000 secondary schools in the country are single units with no supervisory positions as such, the full responsibility falling upon

the principal or the superintendent. While such an administrator may have an advantage over a special-subject supervisor in being able to see more clearly the whole program, he has certain disadvantages, one of which is the pressure of other duties.

In some instances with smaller school units, the administrator is turning to a nearby school of education or teachers college to send a curriculum leader to work with his teachers. There are possibilities in such extension courses or workshops, but in the approach the local administrator cannot escape the hard work ahead of him. He can coax or force his teachers into a study program, but it takes something more to change the curriculum of the typical American high school. He is really the in-service leader. The campus representative is an adviser.

Who will champion the new supervisory program? Whoever has the educational point of view that invites it, for its establishment will depend upon a way of looking at education rather than upon a specific pattern of operation. Supervisory techniques will not be techniques in the earlier mechanistic sense, but will be highly perfected ways of working with people. In a particular school situation if the satisfaction with yesterday's narrow educational program is found in the administrative and supervisory staffs, then it will be indeed difficult for the supervisory leopard to change its spots. If it is with the teaching staff only, administration will still face the challenge of offering leadership.

¹ Harold Spears, "How Can Instructional Leadership Be Unified," *Educational Method*, 20:343-349, April, 1941.

Your 1946 Yearbook Is in the Mill

The role of supervisors in the modern school is the theme of the 1946 Yearbook of the Department of Supervision and Curriculum Development. The Yearbook manuscript has already gone to the printers, and the completed volume is expected to come from the press early this spring. Dealing specifically with the status and function of supervision, the Yearbook will present a broad picture of supervisory duties and their relationship to the total school program and the community. The various chapters of the Yearbook are being written by outstanding persons in education, under the co-editorship of Lelia Ann Taggart, director of education in Santa Barbara County, California, and Fred T. Wilhelms, assistant director of the Consumer Education Study of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, NEA.

The Yearbook is received automatically by DSCD members as a part of their membership. Non-members may purchase the volume for \$2.

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