

Charting the Supervisory Course

W. T. EDWARDS

Many of our readers will feel with W. T. Edwards, professor of education, Florida State College for Women, Tallahassee, Fla., that the degree to which supervision is judged to be necessary to good instructional programs "will depend upon the purpose and quality of the activities in which supervisors engage now and in the years immediately ahead." Mr. Edwards reminds us that, "Past experience has shown that in periods during which there is any tightening of the national economy, supervision comes under fire. The evaluation which the profession and the lay public places upon supervision *now* will determine, in large measure, the status of supervision in the *future*." Moving forward from this approach, Mr. Edwards warns those concerned with supervisory programs to evaluate critically and select carefully those tasks on which time and effort are expended.

IF one were to make a check list of the scope of supervisory activity, he would obtain an almost unending number of items—assisting emergency teachers, helping faculties select textbooks, handing out forms and information pertaining to school lunch, interpreting regulations dealing with high school graduation, promoting Junior Red Cross, speaking to PTA groups, visiting classrooms, holding group or county-wide meetings, developing visual-aids centers, distributing reports developed by committees, assisting and promoting health examinations, making supervisory reports . . . on and on the list might be expanded.¹

The experienced supervisor, therefore, comes ultimately to feel the necessity for subordinating minor activities within the framework of total activity related directly to carrying out primary supervisory functions. Broad areas of

activity similar to the following seem to have merit, at least in helping the supervisor focus upon common, persistent "blocks-of-activity-with-a-purpose" rather than upon almost innumerable details:

- Activities related directly to the improvement of instructional processes
- Activities related to the improvement of instructional opportunity for pupils
- Activities related to development of local leadership for instructional planning
- Activities related to facilitating desirable interaction between school and community

A part of the evaluation of a supervisor's work is to be found in a description of the major things which command attention. To keep supervision from going off at a tangent, there must be constant evaluation to determine the extent to which balance and continuity, in the work program of the supervisor, have been respected. It would be possible for the supervisor (in an all-out-effort to improve the teaching and

¹ See also "Activities of Supervisors" reported in (1946) Yearbook of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

learning in every classroom) to become interested exclusively in work with individual teachers. Again, the supervisor may look upon public relations as the all-important phase of his task, to the neglect of all the other areas of activity. Supervisors are under pressure constantly to begin a large number of projects. Groups interested in pushing certain ideas—educational or otherwise—see in the supervisor a “key” individual who can promote their cause. The fact that the cause is worthy does not in itself give validity to acceptance. If supervisors begin many things with “gusto” but fail to carry any of them to successful conclusion, they jeopardize the effectiveness of their leadership.

Teachers Must Be Partners

Instruction is improved to the degree that teachers understand, and act upon, acceptable social and psychological principles. Improving the instructional process is, therefore, one of deepening the insight of teachers. If the supervisor becomes too interested in having certain activities and procedures followed, without developing with the teacher a proper understanding of *why* such activities and procedures are desirable, ludicrous situations sometimes develop. It is, therefore, possible to obtain “surface change” without any real change in purpose or direction. There are many techniques which supervisors may use in deepening understanding of what teaching and learning is all about, and how it should proceed. These are but a few:

1. Stimulate the study of individual pupils—particularly those which

represent a fair sampling over the entire range of abilities, interests, and needs.

2. Stimulate the improvement of the classroom setting and atmosphere to bring it in harmony with objectives sought.
3. Analyze with teachers procedures that take advantage of factors favorable to learning.
4. Provide opportunities for teachers to see other types of approach and to discuss their advantages and disadvantages.
5. Encourage broader means of evaluating pupil progress, including the collection of types of information and utilization of techniques not previously considered.

Through such activities in which many individual teachers participate, the supervisor *may succeed* in deepening insight—but *not necessarily so*. Study of individual pupils may stop on the level of prejudice and half truth; efforts to improve environmental conditions may, as has been pointed out above, lead no further than the making of a physical change. Where there is real purpose, the supervisor can use any of the five approaches suggested (or one of his own choice) which best fits each situation, and through its use attain many of the values which could have been realized through the others. It is the totality of the process and not the number of independent approaches which counts most—provided, of course, balance and continuity are maintained, consistent with over-all purpose.

Youngsters Are the Recipients

Employing a supervisor ought to mean, in the long run of things, that there would be *steady progress toward better instructional opportunities for*

boys and girls. To be sure, the supervisor can not be expected to make the administrative decisions or to plan for financial support of such enterprises. It does seem reasonable to expect, however, that partly as a result of supervisory activity, both the program and facilities of the schools would improve.

As the program of the schools expands and facilities are more abundant, however the need for curriculum planning in accordance with some general framework grows daily more apparent. In guiding such planning the supervisor may decide to take steps similar to the following:

1. To stimulate a study of the community and its resources. (Some teachers who have lived in communities for years have been *in* the community and not *of* it.)
2. To stimulate studies of the needs of pupils. (It is one thing for a teacher to read the book "Youth Tell Their Story" and quite a different thing to find out the "Story of the Pupils in School X.")
3. To work with key groups of teachers and administrators in an attempt to design the curricular areas in which experiences must be provided to meet the situations and needs of (1) and (2).
4. To decide in a cooperative manner with those involved and in terms of purpose and of the exigencies of the situation which phases will be given priority in immediate planning without neglecting total and long-range planning.
5. To develop ways and means whereby individual teachers may contribute to the over-all planning and may, in turn, make their own plans consistent with the values accepted in the general plan.

Supervisors may easily dissipate their

energies in pushing "short-lived campaigns" for improvement of reading, handwriting, health, citizenship. Such programs, while valuable from the standpoint of specific attack, must be "caught up" within the broad stream of on-going curriculum development or perish. Not to particularize steps for improving the curriculum to the point that progress in specific areas can be projected, planned and evaluated is equally detrimental to lasting improvement.

Leadership is a Joint Function

Supervisors bear a responsibility to the instructional staff similar to that which the instructional staff bears to the pupils. Just as is true with teacher-guidance of pupils in the classroom, best results can not be obtained by the supervisor's playing either a "dominant" or an entirely "passive" role. Rather, the key to success may lie in stimulating others to the acceptance of responsibility.

Mere talk or pleading will not stimulate others to be active for any extended period of time. *Purpose implemented by careful planning and organization is necessary.* Planning and organization became even more significant in view of the fact that leadership is developed in and through the on-goingness of the planning and organizational process. Among the types of planning which are highly essential to the development of a continuing long range program and for the development of leadership among the instructional personnel are those related to improvement of instruction:

1. On a county or city basis

2. On a school-wide basis
3. In particular fields or at particular developmental levels
4. In a particular classroom
5. Given by a teacher with reference to a single individual or group of individuals

Where the supervisory load is extremely heavy, as for example in a situation where one general supervisor is asked to give guidance to 300 or more teachers, it is not possible, as a rule, to operate to any large extent in terms of assisting with the types of planning suggested under (4) and (5). If the planning suggested under (1), (2), (3) never becomes pointed enough to affect the situations covered by (4) and (5), the charge can be made by the classroom teacher that "the supervisor is dealing in glittering generalities and not helping me." If on the other hand, the supervisor gives almost exclusive attention to (4) and (5), certain factors in the "larger framework of things" may negate almost his every effort in the specific area.

The type of planning suggested under (3) has long been a favorite approach of supervisors; usually (for what reason is not always clear) it is reading and arithmetic that are chosen first. Teachers are organized for study either in subject-interest groups or by grade levels taught. While there are some advantages, this type of planning can lead to a disregard for continuity, balance, and consistency in the overall program of instruction.

Community-School Interaction is a Must

A very important part of the education of children and youth takes place in the home and in the community. In

a real sense, they bring the home and community into the school. The interaction is inescapable; whether or not positive values will accrue to the home, community, and school through this interaction depends upon wise planning and a sense of direction. The supervisor interested in a functional program of education must, therefore, exercise leadership within this general area. >

It would appear that the following are some of the more important types of activities under this general area in which the supervisor may profitably engage:

1. Stimulating the instructional staff informally or through study groups to center attention upon the character of home and community life as these affect teaching and learning
2. Bringing to the attention of parents and lay citizens, through formal or informal means, information about the character and purposes of the teaching and learning going on within the school
3. Encouraging the setting up of co-operative planning or study groups in which both professional persons and lay citizens participate and wherein each discovers the problems and needs of the other
4. Enlarging the concern of the school personnel as to ways and means of rendering a wider service to the community and of contributing improvement of home-community conditions (as these affect pupils)
5. Taking necessary steps to bring about a careful consideration by the school personnel regarding what is involved in a desirable type of public relations program.

The supervisor can not, personally, carry out all of the activities listed. In no one of the four general areas of activity suggested in this article will the

supervisor be more in need of the co-operation of the entire instructional personnel. None of the areas can be more productive of results than this, if there is a follow-through on plans to the point of execution and discovery of additional values; no other area can be so wasteful of the supervisor's time as this, where such planning has not taken place. Public relations programs of the past are not good enough for the future. If steps similar to those suggested above are taken, mutual understanding and concern and not mere "telling followed by uncritical acceptance" should result. Lay and professional groups need to participate in such cooperative planning.²

² See ASCD Bulletin *Laymen Help Plan the Curriculum* for experiments in this area.

Main Highways or Bypaths

The supervisor is tempted to follow hundreds of interesting bypaths; some of these are consistent with over-all purpose, while others may prove to be mirages in the desert leading nowhere. Even though each separate activity performed by the supervisor may have some value, maximum return on the time and effort expended depends upon relating activities to each other and within the scope and direction of a central unifying purpose. If pupils need to center attention upon major goals and to see the details in the light of larger wholes, and if teachers need to guide activities so that attention is focused upon major understandings, it seems reasonable to insist that supervisors critically analyze their activities from a similar standpoint.

The South Looks at Its Elementary Schools

ROY W. MORRISON AND R. LEE THOMAS

The work conference in the south has been examined by many educators as one example of a regional attack upon the school program. This brief account by Roy W. Morrison, professor of education, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; and R. Lee Thomas, Director, Division of Elementary Schools, Tennessee State Department of Education, Nashville, illustrates the way the organization as a whole and each community are trying to provide better educational programs for boys and girls.

THE FEDERAL CENSUS shows that approximately one-half of the nation's functionally illiterate adults live in the Southern Region. Comparison of elementary school enrollment, attendance, and retardation figures clearly reveals

the low quality of educational opportunity which is provided in this group of states. In one southern state from thirteen to forty-three per cent of various school age groups was not enrolled in school. In another state the

Copyright © 1947 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.