

# Complaints of a Much-Supervised Teacher

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SYMMIE GOUGH

The title of this article indicates its theme. Miss Gough points to some of the qualities she would like to find in the person charged with supervising her work, and to this end uses illustrations of situations and people she has known—although scrambled beyond recognition. Symmie Gough is a teacher in Wooldridge School—a demonstration school jointly sponsored by the Austin public schools and the University of Texas.

COOPERATION, according to Webster, means acting jointly with another. The several varieties of so-called cooperation I have experienced should cause Mr. Webster to revise his definition.

There was Mr. Easy who believed in democracy. He believed cooperation meant letting you do what you wanted to do, or could get by with doing. If you asked for assistance or for a conference to discuss policies, he was too busy. If any trouble arose over your decisions, may Heaven have mercy on you—he wouldn't. Then there was his counterpart, Mr. Hard, who definitely laid down the line and you walked it.

## Can't We Practice What We Preach?

I would have no complaint against either of these supervisors, or the order they represent, if lip-service hadn't been paid to democratic cooperation. In too many cases cooperation has become one-sided through unquestioning submission of teachers to those in authority.

I have worked under strictly autocratic systems and have had more real cooperation and freedom than I have had under several so-called democratic

systems. Perhaps all that I'm trying to say about cooperation is that I like people to live according to the principles they claim to have. As a teacher working under a democratic organization I would like—and I expect—to know just what my duties and responsibilities and what those of the supervisor are. A lack of this understanding leads to frustration on the part of the teacher.

I suppose no one will challenge my statement that the quality or degree of leadership possessed by a supervisor will, to a large measure, determine his efficiency as a supervisor. I wish to qualify the term *leadership* in this case to mean *democratic leadership*. It should be so interpreted throughout this discussion.

The ability to stimulate thinking on the part of others is one quality of a good leader. Mr. Heil was probably the one who stimulated my thinking the most. He just "loved" to have teachers give him suggestions for ways to improve conditions—so that he could do the opposite. He stimulated me enough that I tried suggesting exactly what I didn't want—so I usually received what

I did want. This succeeded for the two years we worked together. You could also get what you wanted done by sometimes casually bringing up a point in a discussion and dropping it until, a few weeks later, he might act on "his" brilliant idea. If that is leadership, deliver me from it.

I have had democratic leadership only a few times, but during those times I have come nearer to being at peace with myself because I truly began to do a good job as a teacher and because I no longer felt like a hypocrite.

#### Cooperation Can Be Assured

I realize that even the best leaders can do little if they fail to get cooperation from their coworkers. Perhaps it's due to some deficiency in the leader if, in a *democratic* discussion, all the staff apparently agree on a plan and then about half of them fail to cooperate in carrying it out. I have seen this happen when the leader failed to take enough time to build up in the teachers confidence in himself, the leader. Teachers will not believe in one or two meetings that a previously autocratic leader really recognizes any merit in their ideas and that he really intends a democratically conceived plan to go into effect.

I shall be very happy when planning ceases to be a top secret device among supervisors. I know that in present-day practice it is supposed to be done cooperatively with teachers. I have yet to have an opportunity to help in making such plans, or even know what the plans are. I can't help wondering what a supervisor gets out of visiting my classes. He doesn't know what my plans are unless they happen to be evident in the work going on at the moment; and

I certainly don't know what he would like them to be. Why can't we stop just talking about doing cooperative planning and actually do some?

If we have both been going in the same direction heretofore, it has been coincidental. The supervisor has been the person who knows and the teacher has been the learner—only much of the time she doesn't know what she is supposed to be learning. Maybe she is to learn to like having the supervisor come in and write in a notebook for an hour and then leave without making any comment!

#### Interest Fosters Unique Contributions

Creativeness is another rare quality frequently missing in teachers simply because it has been so deeply buried under autocratic rule that it is almost smothered. How much creativeness can be found in teachers who are required to use methods, techniques, and devices prescribed by the supervisor?

For two years I have worked in a democratic school. Under a system which does recognize creativeness as a desirable quality in teachers, I am beginning to regain some of the interest and enthusiasm I had when I first began to teach. The process of believing again that any unusual or unique ideas or plans that I have are really of some value has been a long and slow one. After teaching under an autocratic system for a number of years one becomes rather skeptical and cynical. There is a scar tissue built up that can't be removed immediately. It takes real sincerity and effort on the part of the supervisor to convince the teacher that her ideas may make a valuable contribution to the educational program.

## Emphasize Peer Relationships

Perhaps I am taking some liberties with the principle of considerateness and making it even more inclusive than it should be, but the problem of teacher morale, so far as the supervisor enters the picture, is based on the lack of attention given to this principle. It is generally accepted that no teacher can operate at maximum efficiency if her morale is poor.

It is my belief that a supervisor going to visit a teacher whom he does not know might well spend a minute or two looking up the data to see what her background of training and experience has been. There is a possibility that the supervisor may be impressed, and may even discard his "holier than thou" attitude. He may recognize that some teachers are his equal. Any teacher, regardless of her experience, resents the patronizing and condescending air affected by some supervisors. I wonder how often that air is a front to hide the supervisor's feeling of inadequacy in the situation.

Why can't more supervisors realize that they will be much more successful as supervisors if they will meet the teachers as colleagues? Certainly much more could be accomplished with mutual respect of the other's abilities and responsibilities. Suggestions and criticisms are much more readily accepted under such conditions.

## Speaking of Criticism

No teacher worthy of the name resents criticism if it is given in a constructive manner and if it comes from some respected person. We're all in a hurry to get things done, but a new

supervisor would be justified in making haste slowly and spending some time in becoming acquainted with teachers and conditions under which they work before he barges in and begins house-cleaning.

He *can* start in the first day criticizing and changing things since he is the authority—but the teacher doesn't have to like it! Teachers feel that their work is complex enough that no one can see it only once and immediately know all the right answers as to how it should be done.

## A Little Commendation Helps

Why are some supervisors hesitant to tell a teacher the good points they have observed in her work? I'd hate to think that the few commendatory remarks I've received were the only justified ones in my teaching. If they were, then I'm a misfit in the teaching profession; I've received only three or four really discriminating compliments. I don't mean that a supervisor should flatter a teacher's work with fulsome compliments—compliments given indiscriminately lose their effectiveness. And, too, doubt as to the supervisor's sincerity is soon developed.

I have a vivid recollection of a compliment received from a supervisor. He had spent some time in my class. The first time he saw me out of class he described the incident he thought had been very capably handled. He also took the time to comment on it to my principal. That one incident brightened a whole semester for me—and teaching isn't an entirely thankless job. Teachers are human in their reactions, and a few well-deserved compliments can mean a great deal.

## Can't We Talk About It?

Some supervisors seem to think a teacher is an automaton—pull the right levers and everything will be properly regulated—forgetting that a teacher is a personality. If the United States ever needs a Gestapo, I could recommend a few supervisors I've known. They peep around doors, they get their information via the grapevine. But the ones who irritate me most are those who creep into your room, sit in the back and write for an hour, then sneak out furtively. You don't know why he was there or what he was writing. If you consider it worthwhile, you might be able to find out something about it at the end of the year on your rating card at the central office. If *that* is supervision, you can have it.

Carrying this idea further, I dislike having anyone just sit in my class and write unless I know the purpose of the observation. It cramps my style; I can't proceed normally. If I know the purpose of the writing, it doesn't bother me. I believe most teachers feel this way.

Why can't rating be two-way? Why can't teachers rate supervisors? It might have a salutary effect on the quality of supervision we receive. It might awaken some to a realization that even a supervisor can be improved.

## Put These High on the List

Have I sounded embittered and intolerant? I truly respect and admire many supervisors I have known. I would like to describe more constructively the qualities I'd like in a supervisor—realizing that no one person will have all of these qualities. I do believe that selection of supervisors should be

very carefully made and that recognition should be given to the fact that good training in supervision alone does not guarantee that a person will make a good supervisor.

Most discussions concerning what a teacher wants from a supervisor list methods of teaching. I am assuming that any supervisor worthy of the name can give that if you ask for it. The things I want are less tangible but even more vital to me—and to the other teachers with whom I discussed this topic in an effort to get a sample of ideas.

Most of all, I want a supervisor who has faith in teachers and makes every effort to know them as persons. I want him to believe that most teachers are sincere of purpose, that they desire professional improvement, and that they can meet and share responsibility in planning. I want him to be willing to give teachers a chance to express themselves in conferences and meetings. I want him to give due consideration to the merit of their ideas.

I want him to recognize the attainments of teachers. I want him to minimize their weaknesses and magnify their strengths, realizing that by such procedures he can develop even stronger and more capable teachers.

I expect tactfulness and consideration from him. I would like the assurance that he is a real friend and as such has a sympathetic understanding of my work as a teacher. I would like a new supervisor to be on call until complete rapport is established. I want him to be patient insofar as a teacher doesn't try his patience to the breaking point. And I want him to be frank and sincere. I want to be able to feel that he is abso-

lutely dependable. I would like him to be enthusiastic. I want him to have the courage to uphold his own convictions, and yet be tolerant of other people's ideas and views. I want him to be adaptable to new ideas.

#### **Am I Asking Too Much?**

An additional quality I would appreciate in a supervisor is a sense of humor—but perhaps that is too much to ask. I feel that he must also possess a great deal of self-control.

There isn't a principle of supervision covering this point in so many words, but it has merit. At least to me it is important, i.e., enough ethics that you feel you can talk to him confidentially if

need be. I have had one or two experiences along this line which make me wonder if you can ever talk to any supervisor without hearing about it later from someone else. I'd rather publicize my problems myself.

I believe that a supervisor must recognize the potentialities of his teachers, stimulate them to do independent thinking, give them credit for worthwhile ideas, and consider them as colleagues.

Of course, the supervisor has every right to expect just as much from teachers as teachers can expect from supervisors. In a democratic organization there is freedom only insofar as we all recognize and fulfill our mutual responsibilities.

## *Tribulations of a Supervisor* \_\_\_\_\_

DOROTHY REED PECKHAM

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WHAT'S SAUCE FOR THE GOOSE is sauce for the gander. I am, therefore, taking advantage of the fact that we Americans relish a good argument and pride ourselves on our ability to see both sides of a question. When I read Miss Gough's article, "Complaints of a Much-Supervised Teacher," I was in accord—for I have been a teacher and have experienced some of the types of supervision she mentions. But there is another side to it. While we usually

think of supervision from the teacher's point of view, we must remember that the supervisor's life isn't easy.

After twelve years in supervision I think I have met all the varieties of teachers—from those who make supervision a joy to those who make us want to give up in discouragement. While most teachers are cooperative, interested, and really desirous of improving, we have others who are not so easy to work with. Let me classify these.

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