



“Supervisors I Have Known”

By a SUMMER SCHOOL CLASS

How do teachers *really* feel about supervisors? This article is an attempt to give a composite picture of the feelings of members of a large summer-school class toward “supervisors I have known.” The article was prepared by graduate students attending the 1952 Summer Session at Teachers College, Columbia University, New York City. Under the leadership of Professor Alice Miel, members of this class (teachers and supervisors) undertook the writing of this article, giving emphasis to personal and teaching relationships with supervisors, and to ways in which supervisors have given positive assistance. Ideas submitted were then considered by a steering committee of twelve class members who organized themselves into an investigating and research committee. The completed manuscript was edited in rough draft by the steering committee and in final draft by Professor Miel. The quoted material comes from teachers’ experiences and it is hoped that this article will be helpful to supervisors trying to improve educational supervision.¹

IN ALL the discussions with teachers as this article was being prepared—in the reading of all their comments—one idea continually appeared: the importance of a *genuine liking for people*. No set of principles, no amount of verbalized niceties can ever, by themselves, improve the level of educational supervision. Our profession is dedicated to the improvement of human relationships. Every thought, every word, every action has its effect upon these relationships. The teachers who helped on this

project think the key to effective supervision is this *genuine liking for people*. Teachers say:

These Things We Liked:

The Climate Is Important

“— it was all right to be different.”

“— your children were late for the bus because you were engrossed in your work. I’ll help you to get them home.”

¹Class members who served on the steering committee or who submitted ideas and personal experiences for consideration are the

"—I wanted to try a new method of teaching spelling to my children. My supervisor and I examined, clarified and evaluated the idea together. She encouraged me to go ahead."

"—teachers were not afraid to approach him with problems, and often did so in an informal way."

"—at no time was rank pulled."

"—she knew my reluctance to face a group of adults. She encouraged me to become the leader of a curriculum revision group. That was a turning point for me."

"—he seemed to 'radar' our strong points and used these to help us feel more adequate. In this way, he helped us fledge *over the hump*."

"—he created an atmosphere in which we *belonged*. That was a good, comfortable feeling *'to belong'*."

"—I never felt alone. I knew I could always get help."

"—the feeling of warmth that developed through our discussions made us want to work with our supervisor."

"—she gave me credit for what I did."

"—Miss V. was my friend first. She made me feel good. She encouraged



me to share my successful experiences with others."

"—when my child was ill, my supervisor called daily to ask about her. She wrote a personal note to me at Christmas time telling me how much she had enjoyed working with me."

"—she never criticized me harshly, but directed my thinking by pertinent questions."

"—she put herself in my place."

"—she had a deep sense of humility."

It Happened This Way:

"—Helen Jones and Margaret Fields were in the teachers' room catching a short rest before the afternoon session began. They were both young teachers full of energy and enthusiasm, but their discussion would have burned the ears of the supervisor.

"'Has Mr. Brown been in yet to visit your class?' asked Helen.

"'Not yet,' replied Margaret, 'but I'm scared to death that he will. What should I expect?'

"'Well,' said Helen, 'he came into my room last week armed with a pencil and a pad. This made me feel ill at ease—as if doomsday had arrived. He stood very conspicuously in front of the room for a while. Then he moved im-

following (starred names are those on the steering committee):

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The writing committee for this article consisted of: James M. Wheeler (chairman), Richard M. Bartelme, Anna Marie Connolly, Eugene Nelson and Harry W. Robinson.

pressively to the rear and started taking notes. On the way he adjusted the shades. Every few moments he would interrupt me to take over and show me how *he* would do it. I don't think that he knows much about children and their needs. He examined everybody and everything. When the children didn't give him the answers he expected, he became irritable. He seemed quite disgusted. He said he wanted the room to be so quiet the clock's tick would be noise. He certainly wasn't interested in what I was trying to accomplish. I really wanted to talk some things over with him, but I thought it would be better to keep still. You never know what he might be putting in his notebook. Believe me, if what he does in a classroom is supervision, I can do without it. The next time he comes in I'm having a review lesson."

An Interested Listener

"—slowly, informally, and with a pleasant look on his face the principal came into my classroom during my first week of teaching. 'You act as though you'd been teaching for years,' he remarked warmly. The class and I were immediately at ease. He was an interested listener for the next twenty minutes. He told me later that he was glad to see the children so free. He thought their laughter and spontaneity were indications that they would be able to express their feelings about the way things were going. He gave me

some suggestions that I thought were good. He did point out a few errors, but he said they were mistakes he had made when he started teaching.

"'We're experimenting,' he said. 'It may take time to get things running the way you want them, but don't get discouraged. You're doing a good job.' He suggested that I drop into the office for a coke or a chat whenever I felt like it. I'm going to take him up on it.

"I really appreciated the criticisms as much as the compliments. I think his visit was worth while. I felt that he was there to help me."

They Helped This Way:

"—she acted as leader, but there was a pleasant, informal atmosphere."

"—despite a very busy schedule and program, frequent opportunities were found to allow the teachers and the supervisor to sit down and discuss progress. Freedom of expression was encouraged."

"—the classroom occupants no longer shuddered when the principal appeared nearby. Visits were no longer geared to criticism of teaching but rather as progress reports on an experiment. I came to welcome the short visits when we were able to analyze the class at work together. The visits became informal and educational. The supervisor sat with the pupils, talked with them, discussed problems with them and always created a feeling that we were involved in a big undertaking and that no one was on trial."

Partners at Work

"—Soon after I came to this community, money was voted for a new build-

ing to replace our old temporary quarters.

"Our principal had had no previous experience with building construction but she had one conviction: that most school buildings don't meet the needs of their inhabitants. They're usually planned by people who know little about education needs. Fearful that much would be left out of our building because our appropriation had been cut in half, she called a faculty meeting. 'I know nothing about planning a school building,' she said, 'but we'll get more of the things we need if we know what we want and have definite plans. We have a year to work on these plans. Let's pool our ideas, learn about modern school buildings and draw plans that will be so good they'll influence the 'builders.' The entire group rose to the challenge. The spirit of cooperative planning, sharing and oneness of purpose penetrated every phase of school life.

"We drew our ideal classroom; put in everything we always wanted. We wrote to friends all over the country for ideas, pictures and plans. We visited schools everywhere we went. From parents, friends, contractors and engineers—the best and most practical ideas were pooled and finally put into drawings. At every stage, ideas were discussed by the faculty, and revamped as we found better ones. Our only limitations were the availability of the item and the needs of the school. By the time the officials were ready to start building, our plans were ready. They were accepted and used, with very few changes. The principal who directed this work so well and most of her teachers have moved on but the pride of the

teachers, parents and children in their school still carries on twelve years later."

Help in Improving Methods

"—when we were relaxed from the day's ordeal—and some days it was that—she would, in the kindest way, help me see where improvements could be made and give help and suggestions. After one of her early visits, she said, 'Ethel, you worked hard with the class in reading. What you did was good, but I'm not so sure it was good for all of them.' She helped me with materials and ways of doing something about it."

Rounding up Materials

"—she showed me the many possibilities to be found in paper-making—the making of books, the use of different types of materials used in paper. She gathered materials, books and bits of information for our use and then mentioned that she would stop by in a couple of weeks to pick them up—if we were through with them."

"—at every step in our work, there was the question of materials: tables, bulletin boards, books, radios, etc. These were ordered and put into use promptly. Anything which hampered the program was looked into and a remedy found if possible."

Ideas Shared for Everyone's Benefit

"—she works with one teacher in a building or with several in one section of the city. There have been workshops (attendance voluntary) with professional credit arranged if desired. Miss P. meets with parent groups that want her help and with other teacher groups over the state."

"—she invites teachers who have found

success working in the area to meet with others and to share their experiences." "—when our class was making marionettes and putting on small group plays, she asked us to let some other classes see our work. Then the fourth grades experimented with good and poor diets for two white mice and we were invited to observe. She encouraged us to write an article for the local newspaper."

The Alchemy of Human Relations

"—as I walked down the halls of Washington School there was no friendly, 'Hello, Mrs. Leonard,' no turning to see a childish smile revealed behind a spontaneous, 'Hi,' no friendly nod from those passing in the quiet halls as they hurried on their assigned errands. Except for the creaking of the floors as the weight of the students moved over them—silence. The silence was impressive; disturbing. Suddenly a bell shattered the chilled atmosphere. Recess time! Tight, rigid lines formed to proceed in silence to the playground. Washington School is a desert engulfed by four walls. It is silent—disturbing.

"Returned today to Washington School. 'Hey, John, it's Mrs. Leonard. I'll race you for her bag.' Bill had a head start so he beamingly carried my briefcase to the music room. As I passed by the first grade a cheerful voice said, 'We're having a party today. Can you come down later?' Alfrieda was waiting for me at the door to the music room. Her eyes were shining as she asked, 'Will you help me? I mean with the poem. I've written one, you know, and I'd like to make it into a song.' What had been a desert had blossomed into a riot of color and life. Teachers, cooks and custodians alike seemed to be

infected with a new, cheerful and outgoing attitude of friendliness. The most unusual transformation of all was in the boys and girls—shining faces and bodies awake to life all about them. The entire school buzzed with purposeful activity like a giant beehive.

"I talked to Mrs. Bates today about the plans for the Spring Music Fest. It is hard to realize that she came to Washington only last fall as the new supervising-principal. There was the same faculty, the same physical building, and the same type of youngsters and yet some formula has changed this school from mediocrity into an oasis of good will and happiness. Certainly Mrs. Bates has been behind it all. Right from the start the teachers, the custodians, yes and even the shyest little first-grade girl started off with a feeling of adequacy and worth. She even got the milk man, whose hobby is singing, to sing to the first graders. It was Mrs. Bates who helped establish this atmosphere of relaxed accomplishment. It's the way she handles human relations. Yes, that's it. She has mixed her potion well—the alchemy of human relations."

Same Name, New Person

"—my first contact with Miss J. came when she entered my room and said, 'I am here to observe the teaching of a music lesson.' She was the music supervisor—and I was a beginning sixth-grade teacher. The very thought of being observed by an expert struck terror in my heart. The experience turned out to be a sad and frustrating one for both of us.

"As the years passed subsequent visits by Miss J. were met with fortitude and tolerance, a sort of 'grin and bear it'

attitude—but no effort was made on either of our parts to find some common understandings, or to attempt to establish a satisfying working relationship.

“When I returned to the school after an absence of several years and had occasion to see Miss J., such a remarkable change had occurred that I could hardly believe she was the same person. Her approach to the job of supervision had changed. She no longer visited a classroom without an invitation to give special assistance where it was needed. Something even more important had happened to her as an individual. Whenever she was at the school she would drop in just to say hello, and she now seemed to have a genuine interest in all the experiences in which the children were engaged. The children and I began to look forward to her impromptu visits. Whenever we needed a song, a record or anything to do with music we found ourselves thinking of Miss J. first. She would help us locate our material.

“Miss J. now had a changed concept toward the teaching of music. The emphasis was now on a variety of activities, including singing for pleasure, learning to appreciate the works of composers, experimenting with instruments, creating original rhythms. Opportunity was provided for belonging to glee clubs, performing on programs, and participation in statewide events. A library of music reference books was established, and each room was provided with a radio, victrola and melody bells.

“You may be wondering what brought about such a marked change in a whole program. My idea is that the change

in Miss J. herself had probably been the greatest single factor in bringing about so many improvements. How or why Miss J. changed herself—that is a little harder to answer. I do know she attended a well-known university and took many courses in modern educational practices, which probably contributed to her professional growth. I do know that the curriculum director, in charge of supervision and instruction, made some changes. She provided that so-called ‘specialist’ people could be on call for help in any area, and could be resource persons in helping teachers to deal with any problem in which they needed assistance. This very probably helped her to see the other person’s side of the situation and enabled her to establish much better relationships.

“It is stimulating and inspiring to work with Miss J. since she has changed.”

To Sum Up:

“—what do I, in the light of my experience and thinking, expect of supervisors and supervision?”

“I want a partner in the improvement of instruction, someone who will know me. I want a supervisor who will realize that I am a person with problems, both in and out of school. I expect to be treated as an adult. I want honest criticism, not a ‘Pollyanna technique.’ I expect praise for what is good and help for what is weak. I expect the supervisor to suggest new ideas and materials.

“In short, I expect a supervisor who will help me to make my work in the classroom more effective and more enjoyable.”

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