So Begins—So Ends
the Supervisor’s Day

ETHEL THOMPSON

Working daily with children, teachers, administrators, parents and
other citizens, the supervisor assists in solution of varied instruc-
tional problems. His sensitive understanding, keen insight and flex-
ible approach help others clarify their problems and set up mean-
ingful objectives.

HOW DOES a supervisor supervise? Where would you find one on a
workday? Is supervision a satisfying ex-
perience? Is a school board justified in
spending tax money for personnel en-
gaged in supervision of instruction? As
a supervisor, I am eager to tell you
about my job and to answer some of
these questions.

There is something uniquely chal-
lenging and thrilling about supervi-
sion’s diversified activities. No two
days are like—indeed each minute ticks
off a different story. Sure, supervision
is frustrating at times—when things
“blow up” in your face; but this sort
of challenge keeps up the tempo and
gives you the problem to attack. A
typical day can’t be painted. The
broad objectives and scope of respon-
sibility can be sketched, but timing, per-
sonalities, circumstances alter the han-
dling of situations.

Working with People

The supervisor works with people;
the contacts are varied. There are al-
ways, of course, the children in the class-
room. One day they have problems;
you work with them as individuals or
as a group. The next day they want
to share with you a panel discussion,
explain an electric map, or surprise
you with their research and send you
off to explore an area in which you dis-
cover the children have outstripped
you. A week later they may want to
ask advice on next steps in a project
or may slip an art contribution in your
hand in the hope that you may want
this to “hang in your office.” Aye—
these are the thrills, the high lights!
The supervisor works with children.

The teachers in the classroom are the
supervisor’s co-workers. Together they
attack the job of guiding children to
discover, to solve problems, to read, to
question, to learn. Together they worry
when plans go awry, rejoice over the
successes, discuss the problems, evalu-
ate and plan new approaches. They
share with each other current research
and literature. The teacher can look
to the supervisor to bring inspiration
from state and national meetings and
to keep her informed of educational
trends. The supervisor is dependent
on the teacher for learning the practi-
cality and value of old and new prac-
tices, for illustrations, for suggestions
of needed research. The supervisors
and the teachers are a team—the teacher
furnishes much of the challenge, makes.

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EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP
the supervisor alert, keeps the supervisor’s feet on the ground while his head must be in the clouds.

Contacts with Central Staff and Parents

Many contacts are outside the classroom with central staff members, other supervisors, and administrators. This is another team of which the supervisor is a member. His role is to represent the children, to present the classroom situation, to bring into administrative planning a sensitivity to child needs acquired only by those who have contacts in the classroom and who are engaged in the everyday business of working with children. The administrative and supervisory staffs look to each other for the recommendations, interpretations, information, support and leadership which each is peculiarly well prepared to give the other. From these sessions of planning a wider vision is gained and a keener understanding results. The supervisor or administrator extends his appreciation of the total job as he carries on in his own smaller bivouac.

Education is not the exclusive business of school personnel. The supervisors, administrators, teachers, children, parents and other citizens work together—the supervisors and administrators acting as liaison between those whose full-time job is working with one particular group of children in an organized school program and those who have human investment at stake. Does anyone work with more highly explosive or valuable material?

This work with the investors must not be ignored as we chat about the supervisor’s job. Their concern—and rightly so—is in the returns. Returns for themselves? Indirectly, yes! Parents relate themselves to the schools through their children. Dividends and interest accrue when the parent investor sees his child enthralled by school, so involved in its activity that truancy is unthinkable. Why, school couldn’t function without him! School stock rises when the child carries home reports of successes, of learning. Then par value is high but the investor seeks opportunity to increase his investment through support of bond issues, higher millage, better school facilities. Is this implying the supervisor may have some responsibility in such a mundane matter as the financial program? Our school program is only as good as the children, the parents, the citizens rate it and are willing to support it financially. The supervisory staff provides leadership in the improvement of instruction and in curriculum building, and hence, determines in no small measure the public’s assessment of the schools.

A good share of the supervisor’s time is devoted to adult education and participation in educational planning by lay groups. You may want to remind me that I omitted in this statement the task of interpreting the school program to citizen groups. I assure you the maneuver was intentional. Not until professional and lay groups work and plan together can the school personnel move from a defensive position. And nothing so saps creativity as the need for a continual building of logical justification for an experimental attack, which may be born of inspiration. Co-workers acquire respect for each other’s opinions, and understanding of each other’s beliefs and ways of working,
and a deep-grounded faith in the plan evolved for joint sponsorship. Each contributes as his knowledge and experience equip him; each recognizes his limitations; each builds on the strengths of the other. Parents provide spice, flavor and leaven to the daily loaf of supervision.

**Concern with School Programs**

The supervisor is vitally concerned in the instructional program of many schools and in coordinating the curriculum of all schools. The program of the individual school is the responsibility of the principal, the supervisor supplementing the work of the principal as a visionary, a consultant or a demonstrator. The principal complements the supervisor by familiarizing him with the local school situation, by creating openings for him to work with teachers, children and parents, by serving as liaison between the teaching staff and the central office representatives. No person is more vital to effective functioning of the supervisor than is the principal.

Do you sense the limitless opportunity for creative work in human relations when your job is that of supervision? Do you feel the tingle of adventure and human contact that comes from the varied activity of a supervisor's day? Have you gained vicariously the deep satisfaction which comes from working out a knotty problem? These are some of the rewards that chain the supervisor to his job, help to secure him from a life of monotony.

**Helping Teachers Solve Problems**

In the first part of this article I hope you have gained an insight into the current philosophy on supervision. It is that of helping teachers solve problems in the teaching-learning situations. It is the sharing of work and responsibility with the staff members in improving the program. Ability to work with human material, ingenuity, a sense of humor, and interest in people are mandatory in this work. There is no one way of meeting each situation. No rule-of-thumb or twenty-easy-lessons can supply answers. But possibly there are some ideas worth passing along for further trial. Each of these will be introduced with a question.

Must the supervisor always work only with problems? No. The supervisor is not a repairman. Indeed if he is limited to working only with those who are experiencing difficulty he could not be, as was recommended earlier, the co-worker with the teacher. For the teachers contribute to the supervisor's skill by sharing, in addition to his problems, his plans, his successes, his data; thus furnishing illustrations, practical suggestions and leads for research. The high lights in the school point the way for future planning, figure in the overall stock-taking of central staff meetings—and keep the supervisor from being a discouraged trouble-shooter. Being invited by children and teachers to enjoy with them their successes in the classroom serves the purposes of supervision to an even greater extent by acquainting the supervisor with the competencies of his co-workers. As the supervisor locates principals and teachers who can contribute, through their ingenuity and skill, to the improvement of teaching and learning outside their own walls, he has extended himself manifold. He has also found a way to help these individuals grow. When human
have established themselves in one area they can then admit weaknesses in other areas and seek help.

Must the supervisor always wait for an invitation? No. The supervisor works on a service basis. Help is given when it can be used and it is generally accepted that the individual who has the need determines the timing. Aid of the highest quality, presented through the use of foolproof techniques (if we had any) would fail if the receiver did not want help. An invitation is evidence that suggestions are welcomed. But to become co-workers it is essential to establish contacts, to share philosophy, to manifest interest in the personal and professional life of the other. And so the teacher, the principal, the parent, the children should feel free to drop into the office of the supervisor to chat. The supervisor utilizes every occasion to stop in the classroom, the school office, the staff meeting and the PTA meeting to greet his co-workers. Through these contacts, one with another, barriers are broken down and groundwork is laid for future planning together. These casual visits frequently bring about invitations for specific service.

A Flexible Schedule Pays

Must the supervisor follow a schedule? No. Planning and organization contribute to effective and efficient production in any line of work; and availability is vital in personnel work. This suggests a compromise. A flexible schedule can insure both availability and accomplishment. Time must be distributed so the supervisor can plan, prepare materials, provide for routine office practice, maintain frequent and regular contacts with all persons with whom he is a co-worker (teachers, children, parents, administrators, other supervisors, and the citizens) and answer emergency service calls. A scheme which has been used successfully blocks out time by the week and month. Part of each week has regularly scheduled, designated activity, i.e., work in the individual schools and work in the office. Over a period of weeks visits to all schools are arranged. The other part of each week is available to anyone who wants the services of the supervisor, and is usually arranged and planned through telephone conversations. Regularly scheduled visits to all schools make the supervisor easily accessible to the personnel for help on matters which might seem too trivial to the person involved to require a special visit from the supervisor. This arrangement also allows time for those casual contacts which can so easily be neglected in a busy workaday world.

What Are the Supervisor's Activities?

A sample list of activities which are generally found on a supervisor's calendar illustrates what has been presented in this article.

Staff conferences—These may be on the placement or assignment of a child for the following year, on recommendations to the parents in working with their child, or on the review and evaluation of a case study for planning future work with the child.

Observations in a classroom—These may be at a teacher's request for help in some phase of teaching, for help with a child, for suggestions as to future planning, or just for satisfaction. They include invitations to programs, lunch-
eons, or other projects for learning planned by the children.

Working with parents—They may be preparing a guide for parents on some phase of the school program or planning a study group or PTA meeting.

Working with a group of principals—on the preparation of a principal's handbook, thinking through common problems, or determining policies.

Desk work—This covers filling out questionnaires, writing letters, speeches and professional articles, preparation of a digest of recent periodical articles on a given topic, budget planning and policy making.

Committee work—local, regional, state, national. This might include training a group leadership team, planning a workshop, preparing a guide for teaching a particular subject area, or developing an orientation program for new teachers.

Conferences—These are held with teachers, principals, parents, administrators, children, etc.

Recruitment—This would include visiting teachers colleges, interviewing candidates for positions, arranging observations for prospective teachers.

Professional meetings—These may be of local, regional, state or national professional organizations held at home or at a distance. They may be regularly scheduled meetings at the local level for the planning and implementation of the instructional program and involve work with a complete staff, parent, and/or teachers from various schools.

Demonstration teaching—This is in any area in which techniques can be demonstrated profitably and may be done for one teacher or a group, with children or with adults.

Acting as a resource person or speaker—in workshops, at school staff meetings, at state and national education conferences, at PTA meetings.

So go the days for supervisors. Have I answered your questions? Do you know how "Supervision Does?" I hope I've sold you on the job. To me, it's challenging and extremely satisfying.

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