

Resolving Conflicts in SUPERVISION

This author analyzes the objectives and some of the problems of supervision, and suggests that the building principal has a major responsibility in furnishing a continuing leadership in this area.

THE TERM "supervision" has been used to cover a multitude of conceptions. They tend to range all the way from the narrow notion that it is a technique by which individuals observe classroom practices and make judgments about them (snoopervision), to broad interpretations of "the improvement of instruction." Before one can resolve conflicts it is necessary to be clear as to where the conflicts lie.

For purposes of this article, supervision is conceived as constituting four major areas of activity:

1. The observation of classroom practices for the purpose of giving the teacher observed some helpful guidance in improving his instruction. (Classroom supervision)

2. The guidance of a group of teachers in designing and constructing total sequences of learning experiences for children. (Curriculum planning)

3. The development of techniques and procedures for determining the success of individual teachers and of the total program. (Evaluation)

4. The improvement of ability to work harmoniously together for the good of the program and the welfare of the individual teacher. (Human relations)

The above merely identify the areas in which supervisors work. They do not necessarily reveal the conflicts which are likely to occur in one's effort to contribute to the improvement of instruction. In order to be explicit about these conflict areas, the following are deliberately isolated. There are probably many others than those listed, but in the experience of the writer these tend to be the most critical.

1. Who shall plan the basic sequence of learning? Answers to this question range from the teacher, the principal, the supervisor, the curriculum specialist to committees of teachers or all the teachers collectively. The conflict needs to be resolved by determining the location of authority in which the responsibility for the curriculum rests.

2. Who makes the judgments concerning the quality of teaching results? Typically, administrators and supervisors have assumed this responsibility, but there are many who question the validity of this assumption. They claim that evaluation is an integral part of

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the whole planning process and must be exercised by those who do the planning. Conflicts 1 and 2 must be resolved together.

3. Who shall engage in the activities of supervision? Traditionally, supervision has been the sole responsibility of a person designated by the title "supervisor," whether "special" or "general." Recently, there has been some inclination to think of the building principal as involved in the process. More advanced theory has suggested that supervision is a group function, to be engaged in by all who are affected.

Unless the efforts to find adequate resolution of these problem areas are to degenerate into a pitched battle for supremacy of the fittest, it is necessary to establish some agreeable frame of reference that will provide a total context into which the answers will congruently fit. For the purpose of stimulating discussion, the following analysis is proposed.

The Principal's Role in Supervision

There is no question about the initial and ultimate responsibility for educational programs. It rests legally with the state. In many states this responsibility is delegated to the local community, with certain powers reserved by the state. The local board of education, through its superintendent, establishes the basic authority for education in the community it serves. Up to this point there is no problem, since the "line of authority" is clearly delineated. But, within the local school district itself there is no legal mandate that decrees that educational authority shall remain with the superintendent.

He may, upon approval of the board of education, further delegate his responsibility for the educational program. In practice, he has usually done so through the employment of central office supervisors who attempt to coordinate the entire program under his direction. The question is seldom raised as to whether or not the superintendent has the authority to delegate some of his responsibilities, but there is reason to question the effectiveness of that delegation.

Since the administrative affairs of the school system are generally delegated directly to the building principal, it is suggested that the *entire* responsibility for the educational program become the province of the building administrator. Thus, the principal, in fact, becomes the direct subordinate of the superintendent in all educational matters, including the improvement of instruction.

The principal, in turn, has the choice of arrogating to himself all decisions which govern the school program, or further delegating those that deal directly with the curriculum and its improvement to the teaching staff as a whole. In the latter case, the authority for the school's program then becomes the responsibility of the entire staff, with the principal acting as executive and educational leader. All basic policies which govern the program of the individual school will be made cooperatively by the teachers, including such matters as the conflict areas listed above.

Essentially, the proposal frankly suggests that the basic policy-making body for educational programs be the individual school, and not the school system. Each school would construct

its plans in terms of the uniqueness of its educational context. Schools within the same system might conceivably have similar programs, or vary widely in terms of what was demanded by the conditions. Unification would be sought at the system-wide level of planning of principals under the guidance of the superintendent.

This proposal obviously places a heavy load of educational responsibilities on the competence of the individual principal. He must be able to conceive his role as that of educational leader rather than that of manager of administrative detail. His purely administrative chores would need to be delegated to a clerk or secretary so that he might be free to provide the staff with a maximum of inspired professional leadership.

A Continuing Leadership

If this proposal is to prove its validity, it must be tested in its ability to resolve the conflicts which now beset the problem of improving instruction. The following is an attempt to make such a test.

1. Who shall plan the basic sequence of learning? This question is now answered by the delegation of responsibility to the entire staff. The program of learning which will be followed by all members of the staff is determined cooperatively. It will be necessary for the teachers to plan broadly in terms of at least four major areas:

The basic patterns of development of children, including their learning patterns

The social and cultural trends of American civilization

The unique needs of the community the school attempts to serve

The unique needs of the children that are revealed by a study of the community.

From these rich resources of information and understanding, the teachers will then construct a basic design for the learning experiences of the boys and girls in a known community. This will become the authority from which the individual teacher draws for the development of his classroom program.

2. Who makes the judgments concerning the quality of teaching results? Since evaluation has at least two aspects, individual judgments and group appraisal, it is apparent that it must be exercised by many different people. The entire staff can construct devices and instruments for the collection of information about the success of the program, but individuals will need to make value judgments about the efficacy of any one teacher. It is suggested that the principal, the supervisor and the individual teacher concerned, work cooperatively within the framework of the decisions of the group so that the *teacher* is aided in making increasingly more valid judgments of his own work. In the last analysis, effective evaluation that leads to improvement is the product of the individual's ability to see his work in the light of group standards he has helped to construct.

3. Who shall engage in the activities of supervision? This question is obviously answered by saying that all those concerned should participate. The principal has the direct responsibility of working closely with the indi-

vidual teacher in helping to interpret group plans more effectively. The principal will need to have an intimate understanding of the teacher's work, which can be gained in a great variety of ways other than classroom observation, so that he is capable of providing leadership in the specific interpretation of the total program as it applies to the individual teacher. The general or special supervisor has an equally direct responsibility, provided the supervisor has been a member of the educational team which originally formulated the plans which guide the work of the teacher. Other teachers have a considerable investment in the success achieved by all teachers. The total program will stand or fall on the ability of each teacher to implement group plans adequately. Since all members of the planning group have a deep concern for the work of all, everyone on the team constitutes himself as a supervisor, thus eliminating the conflict.

There are many who will seriously question the present professional adequacy of building principals to measure up to the high standards which are implied in the above suggestions. The proposal is not made without a clear recognition of the obstacles involved. But the alternative is equally objectionable. Schools have been operating too long on the principle of expediency. Since present principals are incapable, so this theory goes, we must supply teachers with expertly trained special-

ists who will practically fill the gap. The net result has been the introduction of conflicting forces which strike at the heart of the cooperative process, and lead inexorably to the organization of schools on the principle of autocratic domination from above.

Democratic leadership of a school program depends on the creation of a primary group which can plan cooperatively and accept the responsibility for its own acts. This group must have direct and continuous leadership which will help it to make plans skilfully, help it execute its plans in individual classroom programs, and assist it in engaging in valid evaluations of its successes and failures. It is difficult to conceive of this leadership as less than an intimate, colleague relationship.

There are many problems incident to the application of this theory to the improvement of classroom instruction which are necessarily ignored. The writer can only be excused on the grounds of space limitations. If the reader is interested in an expansion and in more detailed application of the theory to practical school situations, let him consult the following:

Wilbur A. Yauch, *Improving Human Relations in School Administration*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949.

Harold G. Shane and Wilbur A. Yauch, *Creative School Administration*. New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1954.



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