

Problems of Giving and Receiving Help

Teachers and supervisors study how instructional aid can be given and received in mutually beneficial ways.

MUCH of the information in this paper was contributed by teachers, principals and supervisors on the job in their respective schools and school systems. The examples of giving and receiving help which changed perception without threat are actual occurrences. These examples exemplify principles of good supervision as they are being practiced in everyday situations by principals and supervisors. Acknowledgment and appreciation are given to the many people who contributed in any way to the completion of this article.

A questionnaire was sent to selected teachers, principals and supervisors in various sections of the country in an effort to determine some answers to two questions: (a) Who is best qualified to give what help? (b) What are the problems involved in giving and receiving help as seen by teachers and/or principals and supervisors? Of the 125 questionnaires sent, 90 were returned. Listed on the questionnaires were 10 helps which teachers and/or supervisors believe teachers want from supervision. For the purpose of clarification, sub-headings were included for each of the 10 helps. These have been omitted here to conserve space.

Each person responding to the questionnaire no doubt reacted emotionally in terms of his own experience in giving and/or receiving help. A teacher working with a well trained principal, who provides considerable leadership in analyzing and solving instructional problems, would likely score the questionnaire in favor of the principal. However, teachers who receive more help and guidance from an effective supervisor would tend to score the items listed in favor of the supervisor. Those teachers who are fortunate enough to have a principal and a supervisor who work with them cooperatively in the areas of instruction and learning would feel that the principal and supervisor are both well qualified to give assistance in many areas. Principals probably checked the questionnaire in the light of the effectiveness of the supervisors with whom they work. Undoubtedly, the unique position of the principal for giving immediate help in improving curriculum and instruction was a factor which influenced some of the responses of teachers, principals and supervisors.

Although the survey is by no means a comprehensive one, the data gathered from the sampling serves to give some

insight into the ways teachers, principals and supervisors relate to one another.

The conclusions drawn were these:

1. According to the responses of both teachers and "principals and supervisors," the principal is better qualified to give help in three areas: (a) discipline—understanding child growth and development, (b) reports and records, (c) reporting to parents.

2. In the area of planning, 60 percent of the teachers feel that principal and supervisor are equally qualified to give help, while 40 percent of the "principals and supervisors" believe the principal is better qualified to help with planning.

3. In the area of evaluation, 43 percent of the teachers believe that the principal is better qualified to give help, while only 33 percent of the "principals and supervisors" agreed. Forty-four percent of the "principals and supervisors" indicated that the principal and supervisor are equally qualified to help with evaluation.

4. In all other areas the principal and supervisor are equally qualified. This would seem to indicate that teachers, principals and supervisors prefer a team approach in giving and receiving supervisory help.

This data will be of considerable interest to all personnel working toward improvement of instruction who are dedicated to the belief that the only sane approach to the solution of the majority of instructional problems is through cooperative action.

Teachers, principals and supervisors were asked to list problems which they experience in giving and receiving help.

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The problems have been organized under eight categories and ranked in order of importance according to the number of times each was mentioned on the questionnaire:

1. The element of time
2. Behavioral roles of all personnel not clearly defined
3. Feelings of insecurity
4. Failure to understand the importance of democratic procedures
5. Human relationships and mutual understandings
6. Involving principals, both individually and in groups
7. Use of research and objective data
8. Lack of money.

Many of the problems involved in giving and receiving help could be relieved, if not completely resolved, if the role of the teacher, the principal and the supervisor were mutually defined and if each of them would strive to live up to his role expectancy. While each one plays a different position on the instructional team, he cannot hope to compete in the final "play off" of instructional competency unless he works cooperatively with his colleagues toward the same goals.

Changing Perception Without Threat

Many worthwhile descriptions of changing teacher perception without threat were recorded on the questionnaires. Space does not permit the inclusion of all the descriptions. However, some interesting examples which exemplify various supervisory techniques are included below.

As Described by Supervisors

A state-wide survey of the educational programs of West Virginia public schools disclosed that in all subject

matter fields tested in grades three, six and nine, pupils were achieving below national norms and below expectancy.¹ The evaluation of the results of the tests administered revealed that in reading, spelling and language, the scores of pupils did not measure up to their potential. This would explain why their achievement results were below expectancy in other areas tested. While students in Kanawha County, West Virginia, scored somewhat higher than West Virginia pupils as a whole, they were also achieving below national norms in the areas of reading, spelling and language.

Kanawha County accepted the challenge of the Feaster report² and instituted a plan to improve the instructional program. For the purpose of determining pupils' learning difficulties, supervisors and directors talked with teachers in their respective buildings. The pupils' difficulties, listed in the order of their importance, were: (a) inability to read; (b) lack of spelling power; and (c) weakness in written expression. To improve the quality of instruction, a two-day county-wide preschool conference was held for all teachers and principals, with emphasis on the problems which had been cooperatively determined.

After initial planning by the superintendent and his staff, a steering committee was appointed, headed by the assistant superintendent in charge of instructional services. Included on this committee were elementary and secondary school principals, classroom teachers, a director of instruction, and two



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**Teachers, principals, supervisors
list problems.**

assistant superintendents. School principals were appointed as coordinators for the primary, intermediate and secondary divisions. Elementary teachers were assigned to discussion groups according to grade level taught, while secondary teachers were assigned to discussion groups according to subject matter fields, with approximately 30 teachers in each group. Classroom teachers and principals were selected as leaders of the 64 discussion groups. The theme, "Improvement of Instruction in the Content Fields Through Application of Communicative Skills," was chosen for the conference.

Immediately following the close of school the steering committee, group leaders, and division coordinators met for a full day to plan the conference. All group leaders observed a directed reading lesson in a content subject or a basic reader. During the summer months many hours were devoted to planning demonstration lessons, collecting helpful educational media for display, and securing speakers and consultants who were recognized authorities in the curriculum areas to be stressed.

At the opening session of the conference, over 2,000 teachers assembled to

¹ E. K. Feaster, *A Survey of the Educational Programs of the West Virginia Public Schools, 1957*. This study was authorized by the Legislative Interim Committee of West Virginia and was made by E. K. Feaster, dean, College of Education, West Virginia University, and a survey staff.

² *Ibid.*

hear a language arts specialist speak on, "The Role of Every Teacher in Developing Critical Reading." Following the general session, teachers in 64 concurrent groups devoted their efforts to ways of improving the language arts program. Above the third-grade level, each group leader taught a directed reading lesson in a content field with classroom teachers as pupils. Following each demonstration, an analysis was made of the lesson. Time was allotted for the discussion of other pertinent problems.

In grade levels one through three, a similar procedure was followed, except that attention was given to the introduction of new materials in reading, spelling, arithmetic and handwriting.

On the opening session of the second day, teachers of the fourth-grade level and above observed a demonstration lesson in word analysis, geared to specialized vocabulary in a particular content field. Included in this group were teachers in the fields of home economics, physical education, industrial arts, mathematics, music and art, as well as teachers of English, science and social studies. Teachers of the primary grades continued with their introductions of new materials. Reports from all discussion groups were summarized and a comprehensive summary and evaluation of the whole conference was presented to all teachers during the last hour of the day.

The central staff, principals and teachers have had the job of keeping alive the interest which the conference created. School faculties and individual teachers are working to continue the fine instruction received, and much improvement has been observed by the supervisors and directors in teaching techniques and in the appearance of classrooms. One junior high student was overheard to say, "We have spelling in

every class this year, even shop." Parents, too, have observed that in every content field emphasis is being placed on reading comprehension, vocabulary development, spelling, and oral and written expression.

Immediate reactions to the conference revealed that teachers in general found the meeting challenging and practical. Leaders indicated that they experienced tremendous growth and gained wider insight into their responsibilities in the area of communication skills. The results of a questionnaire sent to selected groups of teachers showed that teachers want another preschool conference with continued emphasis on the language arts skills.

The West Virginia Board of Education adopts an official state multiple list of elementary textbooks from which counties must select textbooks for adoption. In Kanawha County, West Virginia, the responsibility for making this selection is delegated to a textbook committee.

Upon the recommendation of the assistant superintendent in charge of instructional services, four elementary principals were appointed to the committee by the superintendent of schools. Each of the four principals was selected because of his special training in one of the following fields: reading, arithmetic, science and spelling. Four subcommittees were formed with each of the principals acting as chairman of a committee. The other members of the committee were classroom teachers chosen because of their particular interest in one of the subject matter areas and experience in developing county curriculum guides. One member of the supervisory staff also serves on each subcommittee. All committees work under the leadership of the assistant superin-

tendent in charge of instructional services. The four principals and the assistant superintendent make up a continuing committee while the various subcommittees are formed each year to study the programs which are up for adoption.

Notification of the appointment of the committee, along with the names of committee members, is sent to all textbook publishers with the request that they submit for consideration copies of any textbooks in the particular subject areas being studied. The subcommittees evaluate the textbooks by means of a set of cooperatively developed criteria. The members study the materials individually and frequent meetings of the committee are held to share findings and to listen to hearings presented by representatives of the companies which have submitted books.

After many hours of intensive study and numerous meetings of the entire committee, each subcommittee recommends one textbook to the superintendent who in turn recommends its approval by the Board of Education. Books are adopted for a four-year period in successive years in order that all elementary textbooks will not be readopted in one year.

After several observations in a junior high school, a supervisor was asked to conduct a faculty meeting on the topic, "The Good Versus the Poor Instructional Program." Emphasis was placed on the "good" instructional program. With the help of the staff, a check list was developed to evaluate (a) the total instructional program, (b) the individual teacher's program. Both strengths and weaknesses observed in the school were included in the check list plus other general principles of good teaching. The faculty then conducted a follow-up



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Teachers study changes which will affect them.

meeting, a buzz session, on "How Can We Improve Instruction in Our Schools?" This discussion centered around the check list which had been developed at the previous meeting. Teachers are now evaluating their own effectiveness and the effectiveness of their instructional programs, using the check list as evaluative criteria.

As Described by Teachers

When a new reading program was adopted, the change in the philosophy and in the teaching procedures was quite drastic. The supervisor, therefore, planned a series of meetings to acquaint first grade teachers with the new materials. These meetings were of different types, consisting of instructional meetings (county-wide, regional, individual schools) with consultants from the publishing company; demonstration classes with children using the new readers; sharing sessions for procedures, policies and seatwork; display of teaching aids which accompanied the program and correlation of the word analysis program with creative writing, art, and other subjects; and bulletins and letters sent directly to teachers.

Throughout the year the supervisor continued to share with teachers techniques, procedures, and samples of seat-work which had proven successful in other schools. Early in the spring, follow-up county-wide meetings were held to clarify any problems which had developed with the new material and to introduce the first reader in the series.

An alert child who was good in mathematics but unable to read was referred to the county reading supervisor. The supervisor suggested that he be given individual intelligence and other tests by the school psychologist in order to get some insight into the basis of his trouble. The psychologist found the student to be slightly above average in intelligence and strongly suggested that he was a "reverser." Upon her recommendation the parents sought the help of an ophthalmologist in the city. The student was definitely diagnosed as a "reverser." The parents are following through with the techniques recommended by the ophthalmologist and the boy is beginning to show some improvement.

"During my first year of teaching," writes a beginning teacher, "I sensed that my planning did not provide for the exceptional child. Failure to provide activities for such children was creating a discipline problem. My principal offered her assistance and together we began an objective study of the problem. Books were carefully searched for information on how to identify the exceptional child and how to plan daily activities to include these children. From this material I secured helpful suggestions about creating a classroom environment to meet the needs of exceptional children. With the help of my principal I was able to formulate more effective plans which brought about more active class partici-

pation and the problem of discipline gradually disappeared. My principal also assisted me in making a constructive evaluation of the study in terms of the original objectives.

"The interest demonstrated by my principal in helping me find a solution to a real instructional problem certainly gave me a new insight into supervision."

One classroom teacher suggested that much help could be gained by having "grade round-tables" about three times a year with the supervisor acting as leader. The purpose of the meeting would be to discuss instructional problems, their treatment and the results of the treatment.

A teacher was having difficulty in taking care of individual differences in arithmetic. He had tried the conventional methods of grouping, using two or three levels of materials. He had also tried using the same material for all students, with each group progressing at different rates. The principal encouraged him to try his own method of teaching by "concept" with materials graduating from easy to difficult. This provided for more flexibility in grouping.

Teachers generally welcome help from supervisors. To provide teachers the help they want, more supervisory time must be made available to them. Many of the duties which supervisors now perform should be assigned to specialists in areas such as guidance, testing, special education, and child growth and development, thus leaving the supervisor free to work with instruction and learning. The teacher-supervisor load should be reduced to enable the supervisor to study individual teachers, their backgrounds, their training and their attitudes toward teaching and life in general. Just as a teacher cannot teach a child whom he does not understand,

so a supervisor cannot work successfully with a teacher unless he understands and accepts him. The supervisor must also be thoroughly familiar with the situation in each classroom: backgrounds, capacities, interests, needs and socioeconomic status of pupils must be understood. This takes time.

More and more the principal must be

involved in improving teacher efficiency and pupil learning. As the team approach to the solution of problems slowly emerges, the role of the supervisor becomes clearer. He is now the third member of a team with the full and positive support of both teacher and principal. Improving teaching and learning demands cooperative action!

The Scheme of Things

Ah, Love, could you and I with Him conspire
to change this sorry scheme of things entire. . . .

Amid the cackle of meetings, the clink of coffee cups, the clank of
xeroxgraph machines our charismatic supervisor and cheery curriculum maker,
dedicated to the great god Change, may, with the vibrations generated by
the tumult, demagnetize the master compass of his purpose.

Change, which Heraclitus enthroned in the nature of things, is inevitable
enough and should be accorded the respect due an Element. A scheme of
things, whether it be that universe which bends its immensities around the
frail Einsteinian thread or that universe which Jersild calls the "self,"
is, in most respects, God's business. Yet, as Martin Buber states in
"The Silent Question," ". . . man must indeed accept creation from God's
hands, not in order to possess it, but lovingly to take part in the still
uncompleted work of creation." On this view supervision and curriculum
making is possible.

Whether we wheedle our change or threaten it, therapize, group-dynamicize,
manipulate, or righteously democateer it, we are obliged to respect the
scheme slated for change. We must beware of the urge to do something to
anything whatsoever that in the contraction of muscle our smallness feel
the push of power.

The cheerful chum can be an ace at brainwashing, the glad hand at politely
hounding a proud teacher set in her valuable though the old-hat ways. Before
we dare change this person, we must consider with Martin Buber whether
we are aware of her as "It" or as "Thou," the difference being considerable.
Buber's "Between Man and Man" tells how genuine responsibility responds
to a new moment: "A dog has looked at you, you answer for its glance, a
child has clutched your hand, you answer for its touch, a host of men
moves about you, you answer for their need."

If we approximate this spirit in supervision and curriculum making, the
scheme of things need not be shattered into bits to mould it nearer to
the heart's desire.

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