Expectations for Leadership

What are teachers’ expectations of supervision? A questionnaire study sometimes can bring significant responses.

EVERY supervisor expects to have his leadership values “show up” as a style of working and even hopes teachers will agree with those values. But he cannot be certain of this. At least this supervisor, after working with a group of teachers for three years, had some haunting doubts. Did the teachers and I really see eye-to-eye about the kind of leadership to be expected from supervision?

Planning an Evaluation

For sheer peace of mind, I needed some evidence, some way to look at the question honestly. Direct queries like, “Do you like the way I work with you?” sounded too naive to reveal anything but teacher reluctance to hurt the supervisor’s feelings. Open-ended questions on, “How would you like me to work?” might go too far afield. The purpose of evaluation was not to explore new vistas for supervision, but to look sharply at a personal style of operation.

For this purpose, the technique of forced-choice responses seemed to have most promise. Such a rating instrument, to be properly developed, required that the testmaker be close to the actual work situation. Teachers would have to make critical judgments in relation to statements most or least descriptive of a desirable supervisor. They would have several possible responses for each statement, but not know the effect of the responses, or which responses were weighted and in which direction.

Working with these points in mind, I developed the “test” instrument: a questionnaire with 35 statements. Each statement forced a value-choice among four responses, as in the following examples:

Which characteristic in this list do you consider to be most desirable in a supervisor?
- supporting
- enthusiastic
- directing
- skillful

Which of these supervisory jobs do you consider least appropriate for a supervisor?
- gather materials for the teacher
- tell the teacher what to do to improve
- ask the teacher to share ideas with others
- support the teacher in his work

How, in your opinion, can a supervisor work best with individual teachers?
- find out what the teacher is interested in and encourage him along those lines
- let the teacher know when he is doing something very well

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May 1959
take over the class to show the teacher how to work
write down suggestions for the teacher to use.

Since the values were hidden, or sup-
posedly so, enough questions were
needed to reveal a full, consistent rating
of teacher expectations for supervision
in relation to the supervisor's practices
and beliefs. None of the supervisory
practices suggested in the responses
were intentionally "good" or "bad"; some
simply had been deliberately emphasized
in the actual work situation and others
deliberately minimized.

Teacher Responses

The questionnaire, to be unsigned,
got to all 49 teachers in four small
districts. A few teachers found it "im-
possible" to do and several remarked
about the difficulty they had in marking.
Nevertheless, 39 teachers returned their
replies, knowing only that their super-
visor was interested in how they looked
at supervision, not that the answers
would be used to determine agreement
or disagreement with some leadership
values which the supervisor had tried to
practice.

Among the values to be compared were
two that are especially important: (a)
faith in the teacher's intelligence to work
and think as a responsible, professional-
minded person and not assuming the
teacher had to be told what to do; (b)
belief in a partner relationship of cur-
riculum development wherein both the
teacher and supervisor contribute their
thinking and each learns from the other;
not relying upon a dependence relation-
ship which assumed that the "strong"
supervisor had to assist the "weak"
teacher.

Would these values show up in the
teachers' responses?

Faith in the Teacher's
Intelligence

The teachers as a whole saw the
supervisor's job as an inspirational,
thought-provoking role in which the su-
pervisor takes responsibility to stimulate
a broad look at curriculum. They did not
recognize the role as a telling, criticizing,
directing one in which the supervisor
took responsibility for focusing on spe-
cifics. Wherever the teachers found items
like "expect," "take over" or "talk," they
rejected these as choices for the way a
supervisor should work.

Apparently there is a generally ac-
cepted notion that teachers crave the
quick technique. These teachers, how-
ever, with the exception of four, rejected
specificity as the most needed problem
area for a supervisor to work in. Much
more important than "increasing a teach-
er's know-how" were:

Broadening a teacher's vision and under-
standing
Practicing effective human relationships
Developing clearly defined and coordi-
nated scope and sequence.

With a single exception among them
the teachers rejected the idea that a su-
pervisor's main job is to make suggestions
for changes in teaching. Instead the ma-
majority chose the idea of the supervisor's
helping them think more deeply about
what they were doing. This was more
important to teachers even than giving
them new ideas to use, helping them feel
important or arranging teacher meetings.

Overwhelmingly the teachers pre-
ferred a supervisor to help them become
more creative in their work or provide
the help asked for rather than to give

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them a clear direction for working or let them be on their own. The clear majority felt that a supervisor can best work in helping to plan the total program, not evaluate teaching, help with class organization or even pupil guidance.

Their responses signaled clearly that the efforts made to broaden the horizon of supervision from a narrow expectation of techniques to a broad view of curriculum development were not being lost. Apparently the teachers and I were seeing eye-to-eye in this. But not completely.

Their concern for scope and sequence did not seem to go along with my efforts to encourage emerging curriculum. The majority of teachers felt it was more important for the supervisor to concentrate on coordination of scope and sequence of the program than to help with understanding children or with general methods and goals of teaching. They felt that developing clear scope and sequence was as important, if not slightly more so, than practicing human relations or broadening understanding.

Before deciding what this meant to my way of working, however, more thinking and re-evaluation would be necessary. Possibly the concept of scope and sequence needed clarification and sharper definition. Certainly I resisted the term as generally understood. Here was a point for further questioning.

Belief in a Partner Relationship

By and large the teachers wanted to be actively involved in mutual planning, not passively receiving suggestions and direction. But they wanted the supervisor to be actively involved too, not seesawing either to the receiving or giving end of the relationship. Choice after choice, the teachers showed their preference for working together with the supervisor toward shared goals. When asked, for example, "When can you feel most comfortable in working with a supervisor?" they chose:

- When you both plan together to work on some aspect of curriculum (27)
- When the supervisor gives direct answers (7)
- When the supervisor makes suggestions about your teaching (2)
- When conversation is social rather than professional (2).

Almost everyone selected, as the time when the teacher most wanted to work with a supervisor, "When I want help in planning or evaluating something" or "When I have a question or problem." Almost no one wanted to work with the supervisor when the supervisor took the initiative in suggesting that the teacher needed help or when the teacher had a new idea to share.

The majority wanted the supervisor after a visit to chat with the teacher, asking about the situation and drawing out their thinking before adding suggestions to the point. Comparatively few wished the supervisor to volunteer suggestions or simply ask if the teacher needed help. Almost none felt the supervisor should find out the teacher's interest and simply listen to what the teacher had to say.

In essence the teachers seemed to reject a relationship of one-sided direction or apathy. Apparently they wanted neither a Milquetoast nor a Napoleon for supervisor. To me, they were saying that they did see value in working with a supervisor; but with, not for, not under, not away from. My efforts to work with teachers on a cooperative basis seemed strongly to agree with the teachers' expectations for supervision.

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representatives of the educational profession are so conspicuous by their absence!

As a member of the profession, the reviewer is under the impression that educators, both collectively and individually, are vitally concerned with personnel research. Yet of the 185 individuals interviewed by the director of the study, only two are listed as “educators.” It is quite possible, of course, that many of the 62 psychologists interviewed were educational psychologists. Yet the listing of personnel research facilities that cooperated in the survey includes only one educational psychology department, and the only school or college of education listed is Teachers College, Columbia University. The American Council on Education and the National Education Association are the only professional education organizations listed, whereas one might expect to find listed such organizations as the American Personnel and Guidance Association and the National Society for the Study of Education. One can only conclude that the amount of personnel research being conducted by educators and educational organizations is rather insignificant; that such research was covered by this survey but is not clearly identified with education; or that the survey was not adequate. The reader is invited to look at the report and decide for himself which conclusion is indicated.

The report includes a chapter on each of the following topics: personnel research in a scientific age; facilities for personnel research; current personnel research efforts; scanty attention to the personnel problems of government; and personnel research needs of the future. It also includes a rather comprehensive and well-annotated, selected bibliography.

It is to be hoped that the report of this investigation will be studied by educators. If, as implied, the educational profession is not adequately represented in the nation’s personnel research efforts, it is also to be hoped that the appropriate people within the profession will do something to correct the deficiency.

—Reviewed by Henry L. Isaksen, associate professor of education, Boston University, Massachusetts.

Expectations

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In relation to this, the teachers also strongly reacted to the question:

If a choice had to be made, should the supervisor work most with:

Weak teachers to help them improve
Strong teachers to advance education
Any teacher interested in working with the supervisor
Every teacher regardless of interest or not in working with the supervisor.

Twenty-nine chose “any teacher interested in working with the supervisor.” I felt reassured by the responses.

Even if one concludes that here is a rare group of teachers who coincidentally shared their supervisor’s values without being influenced by the supervisor’s style of operating, it was comforting to learn how much we seemingly agreed about the kind of leadership to be expected from supervision. Regardless of who influences whom, the evaluation gave me not conclusions so much as peace of mind and fresh energy for the work ahead—meeting mutual expectations for dynamic leadership through supervisory services.
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