Who Does What in Instructional Supervision?

An in-service education and leadership plan helps a large county school system provide for professional stimulation and curriculum improvement.

Several authors, in writing on the subject of instructional supervision have tended to narrow its definition, whereas others have formulated more complicated and all-inclusive definitions. For example, Kimball Wiles conceives supervision to be essentially "a service activity that exists to help teachers do a better job," while John A. Bartky confines supervision to the task of improving instruction through in-service education. It would be unfortunate to provide a too-narrow definition of a service as all-encompassing as instructional supervision as it is practiced in our public schools. We believe, however, that in-service education is and should be a major and high priority function of supervision, and that an in-service education program, intelligently planned and wisely executed, is one of the best and most powerful ways to improve instruction, which is after all the end purpose of supervision at all levels. Accordingly, this article will attempt to develop at least one or two facets of this major emphasis in supervision. It will report recent practice in the Montgomery County, Maryland, Public Schools, a large school system in the suburbs of Washington, D. C.

It is recognized, of course, that the face-to-face work and relationship of the individual supervisor with the individual teacher or principal is perhaps the most pertinent of all supervisory responsibilities. Of equal importance is the role of the supervisor in action as a direct liaison person between the superintendent's office and the local school. However, in keeping with the scope and modest limits of this article, these basic points will be considered only incidentally and as they relate to communication and coordination. Furthermore, no attempt will be made herein to describe the over-all work of supervision or to formulate any kind of job description for supervisors.

Leadership Plan

Effective communication and coordination, essential to all organization, are crucial to the successful administration of a democratic instructional supervisory program in public education. The larger and more complex a school system, the more difficult communication and coordination become. At the same time both size and rapid growth in a school system compound the need for providing and
keeping open communication channels related to all phases of instructional improvement and supervision, and for increasing understanding of over-all goals and policies. The necessity for articulation and coordination of educational effort and purpose seems to increase more rapidly than the growing school system itself. Thus, if progress is to be made at all, the fight for effective two-way communication and coordination of effort within a school system can never be simply won and forgotten. It demands eternal vigilance and unceasing effort by the total leadership of the organization.

It follows logically that effective coordination and communication are essential to maintaining and improving instructional and supervisory leadership. In the Montgomery County school system, there are more than 70,000 pupils in all categories, and total coordination of instructional effort and purpose is given primary attention. All departments and divisions of the Board of Education, and all sections and subsections that contribute to instructional analysis or improvement through direct work with pupils, teachers, principals or parents, are considered as vital elements in the instructional and supervisory improvement process. To a certain extent, all professional instructional personnel involved in the process are supervisors in a very real sense.

In the Montgomery County public school system, this list of instructional supervisory personnel includes certain assistant superintendents and directors of departments and divisions, administrative supervisors, principals, assistant principals, guidance counselors, instructional supervisors, assistant supervisors, helping teachers, reading specialists, traveling teachers, critical textbook readers, pupil personnel workers, homebound coordinators, school psychologists, librarians, special education teachers, administrative and supervisory interns, and student teachers. Within these categories are general elementary supervisors, general secondary supervisors, secondary subject supervisors, K-12 special supervisors, a supervisor of handwriting, and various helping and traveling teachers who supplement directly the work of supervisors and regular teachers.

Less direct, but important, is the supplementary and supporting supervisory work of university and state department personnel and a variety of other consultants and outside specialists who contribute in many ways to the improvement of instruction and the upgrading of the total instructional staff. Naturally, all this supervisory staff and organization and all our efforts are directed toward supporting, helping and improving the work and effectiveness of the regular classroom teacher, who constitutes the primary support of any school instructional organization or pattern.

The Montgomery County in-service education and leadership plan includes a wide variety of professional stimulation and curriculum improvement activities and programs. Included are the support and promotion of action research, administrative internships, preservice professional programs for liberal arts (non-certified) college graduate teacher candidates, non-credit in-service courses (directed by supervisors and other local

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school leaders), curriculum improvement conferences, outside consultant service, state and national conference participation, course of study production, curriculum committees, in-service leadership courses (cooperatively planned and staffed by our own and local university leaders), in-service workshops, interclass and interschool teacher visitation, lay-professional study and cooperation, new leaders’ orientation, beginning teacher orientation, teachers’ professional leadership training and screening program, sabbatical leave, student teaching, summer workshops, and supervisory internships.

The in-service educational leadership program, as described, was conceived and planned as a cooperative venture involving all supervisors and allied instructional leaders. It is under the coordination of a full-time supervisor of in-service and leadership education. This program, which got under way a year ago, is growing fast and this year will involve approximately 1000 of our teachers, principals, and other local instructional and supervisory leaders. Eighty to ninety percent of the supervisory and administrative promotions in the system will involve personnel who have qualified for and successfully completed the leadership program.

Two other points should be mentioned. First, a few examples illustrating ways in which communication and coordination are encouraged and practiced as the various departments, divisions and sections of the school system attempt to improve instructional and supervisory leadership will be factually presented. Second, some questions will be raised for all supervisors of instruction to ask themselves as part of a self-evaluation program aimed at the improvement of communication, coordination and morale. These questions seek answers to the query of “Who does what?” in instructional supervision within a school and a large school system.

In-Service Program

Although the director of instruction is charged with the over-all supervision and coordination of the entire curriculum and instructional program, the directors of elementary and secondary education are directly responsible for the ever-increasing duties entailed in administering, supervising and upgrading instruction, and in meeting all the essential needs of the learner in grades K-12. They, together with the director of educational services, make recommendations to the director of instruction and the superintendent, and translate Board of Education policy applicable to elementary and secondary schools and program into action.

All those who supervise instruction and work for its improvement in a given school system must have some common understanding of both educational philosophy and policy. This is not to say that all the individuals concerned should think alike or always agree. However, each member of the instructional staff must believe generally in both the established goals and the team approach. Each should be familiar with the others’ plans and procedures, and, on occasion, each should play a contributing or integral part in the plans of the others. Having explored and accepted this point of view, the difficult and eternal problem of keeping each other informed, and the total program coordinated and in balance, come into somewhat clearer focus.

Here are a few examples of the ways in which we work in Montgomery County in our efforts to keep each other and the public informed and to achieve
cross-fertilization of ideas and cooperative effort:

1. A one- to two-hour report, with analysis and open discussion, is made once each month in open session to the School Board and press on some phase of the instructional program. Such a presentation usually involves supervisors, principals, teachers, and staff members from other departments or individual schools. Such topics as counseling and guidance, the elementary science-social studies curriculum study, psychological services, the summer science program, the K-12 Language Arts program, and the remedial reading program have been so considered in recent months.

2. Certain instructional or curriculum reports to the Board of Education that are of special or general interest are occasionally made at night in a school auditorium to which a large number of parents, other laymen, and interested non-public school and neighboring educators are invited. Some of these more timely evening reports of interest are repeated during half or whole-day sessions to which principals, supervisors, and additional laymen are invited. A preliminary evaluation and progress report of an important research project in special education, the joint work and planning of the Montgomery County public schools, the U.S. Office of Education, and Syracuse University, was presented recently in this manner to several hundred interested educators, laymen, and social scientists.

3. General supervisors of instruction regularly utilize local special supervisors of reading, testing, special education, psychological services, audio-visual instruction, and pupil personnel services in their general area principal and teacher meetings. These specialists provide in-service group instruction and help in the solution of problems under study by the teacher group. The talents and resources of the specialists are brought to bear on the instructional problems faced in teaching the average child as well as the atypical. This teacher education in-service phase of the specialists' work is of great importance to their particular programs and in helping all teachers and principals to better solve their own school problems.

4. The superintendent's Representative School Council meets with the superintendent of schools once every six weeks. On this council there is one elected representative from each school faculty and this representative is usually a classroom teacher. Because there are more than 100 schools in our system, and because a relatively small group is desirable, the council meets in two sections on consecutive afternoons, one-half of its members at each meeting. This also cuts down on the travel time for council members and facilitates informal discussion. The superintendent informs the council and council members question him and make suggestions and comments that express the thinking and feelings of the respective faculties that each represents.

5. A Mental Health Faculty Meeting is held in many schools yearly under the three-way sponsorship of the departments of Psychological Services and Pupil Personnel, and the school concerned. During the year any school may request the study of one child for this purpose. The principal and staff wishing such a study invite its pupil personnel worker to one of their general faculty meetings. The pupil personnel worker explains the nature of the study and the types of problems discussed. The faculty proposes various children, and together they select a child who clearly needs psychiatric and psychological consideration, who has the concern of many of his teachers, and whose needs, which are particularly difficult to meet, represent those of many children in the school. The child selected is then referred to Psychological Services where he is seen and studied. After the report is made to the school, the parent-school conference is held as in the case of any such referral. The Mental Health Faculty Meeting is then scheduled on one of the school's regular faculty meeting dates, and notices are sent out to the participants with summaries of the psychologist's findings and suggested questions for discussion. Anyone who has a pro-
fessional interest in the child's problems is urged to attend. All aspects of the child's needs are carefully considered, and each person is encouraged to contribute information and recommendations to the discussion. The school's faculty and supervisor, school psychologists, and the director of Pupil Personnel Services and members of his staff assigned to the school's area are always present. A psychiatrist is also invited. In addition, the school nurse, other members of the Montgomery County Health Department, the director of the County's Reading Clinic and one of his staff, and representatives of any interested social agencies participate in an effort to understand, assist and plan for the child.

6. For some time work and study have been in progress on the problem of cross-fertilization among the so-called "special" secondary fields and the traditional academic areas. Believing that all areas of learning and all teachers can contribute materially to instruction, and recognizing the traditional isolation of the secondary subject teacher, a program to consider "teaching techniques in the Special Subject Fields," was tried out this year for the first time. Under the plan, all secondary supervisors (general and special) observed regular classes in the special subject fields in the forenoon, followed by lunch at the school and a discussion conference period at the central office in the afternoon. The supervisors were divided into three teams and each team observed two out of six special subject areas being taught. These areas were: art, home arts, industrial arts, business education, music, and physical education. There were both general and special supervisors on each team. Each team went into the classroom, observed and conferred informally with both teacher and pupils. At the general discussion period in the afternoon all three teams met together and a short report and evaluation was made on the activities of each class visited. A moderator guided the discussion.

Among many other examples of how we attempt to evaluate and improve instruction through effective communication and cooperative planning and effort in Montgomery County, these may be worthy of mention: released days for instructional improvement for all principals and teachers during the school year; curriculum study days and half-days for principals and supervisors during the school year; a regular curriculum and instructional improvement program involving teachers and action-research types of studies in school centers; extensive and varied in-service improvement programs involving 11 and 12 months' professional employment for large numbers of instructional and supervisory personnel.

The above list of in-service activities might be considerably extended. Instead, this discussion will be concluded with reference to a "self-test for supervisors," which is now in the hands of some 40 Montgomery County instructional supervisors, and which is an outgrowth of this writing assignment. These "questions for supervisors to ask themselves" will be answered in due time and returned to the superintendent for analysis and action. The questionnaire follows:

Some Questions For Supervisors To Ask Themselves
In Relation to the Query of "Who Does What?"
In Instructional Supervision Within a School or School System

1. What general and specific instructional help does my job require that I be able to bring—to principals? to teachers? to other supervisors and central office staff concerned with the total instructional program? to parents and lay citizens?

2. In what ways, if any, do the persistent demands of my job differ in regard to the individual instructional leadership role or roles that I am best equipped to play and to

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Attractive in cover design and general format, this guide is outstanding in its presentation of materials and the understandings evidenced of the interests of children in national, state and local historical materials. In the introductory section of the guide general statements are presented relative to the social, economic and political setting in which the citizen of today finds himself. Discussion of the “Nature and Needs of the Learner” is presented in terms of the 12, 13 and 14 year olds; the 15, 16, 17 and 18 year olds. (No price quoted.)

A Psychologist
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nize that requests for help may come from desires related to personal maturity and professional growth, but that unfortunately these same requests can be related to some other real personality problems of his staff. Finally, the supervisor should be extremely careful about his own motives in giving help so that he does not penalize, as a consequence of his own distortions, the effective and independently oriented professional teacher.

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the supervisory tasks that I am most able to perform?

3. Who (do not name individuals) within my jurisdiction most needs instructional or supervisory help and what kind?

4. In what ways and to what extent do I attempt to change the perception of individuals with whom I work in supervision?

5. To what extent in my supervisory work do I succeed or fail in my attempts to change individual perception and what are the reasons therefor?

6. In my view, what is the Superintendent’s primary role or roles in instructional supervision and the improvement of instruction?

7. Likewise, what are the role or roles of the Director of Instruction and the Director of Elementary Education (or Secondary Education) in this context?

8. What of importance, if anything, is now being done in or by the central office to help me in my approach to my work and problems, and to make the performance of my instructional tasks more effective?

9. What could and should be done that is not being done by those in authority at the central office to make my work in instructional supervision more effective and more personally satisfying?

Secondary School Supervisor
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school supervisor so that his role may be more effectively fulfilled, the following recommendations are made:

1. General supervisors should decide which duties are important to supervision and concentrate on their accomplishment; delegate other duties—permanently.

2. Research as a vital supervisory activity should be stressed by colleges and universities offering courses in supervision.

3. The problem of an adequate ratio of general supervisors to teachers should be investigated.

4. Finally, school districts should prepare written material delineating as specifically as possible the role they expect of their general supervisors.