

The Importance of People

Column Editor: Prudence Bostwick

The Hazards of Supervision

WHEN I speak of the hazards of supervision, I am speaking not of the hazards of being a supervising principal, a college consultant or a classroom teacher, but rather the hazards of being a professional supervisor. Such a person has usually completed his Master's Degree, earned a supervisory credential, and is on his way to his doctorate. Generally he has been chosen from the ranks of classroom teachers to serve the needs of other teachers for ideas, resources, stimulation and emotional support, although this latter is not written into the contract.

Feelings of Isolation

In a way a supervisor is an isolate, whether he is a member of a county or district staff, or a staff that serves a city school system. If you see him on a line and staff diagram, he is connected with the superintendent by a tenuous and trembling line. In many ways he is outside the forces that work in the communal life of classroom and administration: he is not a member of a faculty; he is not an administrator. He knows that on a series of sociometric choices he might be selected as a member of a group to build a literature guide; but he probably will not be named to attend a

faculty picnic or go fishing with the superintendent. In addition he has the problem of identification with those who share his philosophy and his concerns. If he is lucky, he will belong to a staff of supervisors working out of a central office. But even here the commonness of shared interests is often lacking. Work is usually carried on in the field; and, except for occasional staff conferences, the supervisor tends to be separated in space and time from his fellows.

Loss of Direct Contact with Children

A supervisor may become reconciled to being set apart from school faculties. He finds it more difficult, however, to become reconciled to his separation from the face-to-face contact with boys and girls whose development has been his prime interest and still continues to be his central concern.

Many a supervisor has been chosen because of the quality of his classroom teaching. In his new role he finds himself deprived of the association with children or youth which was the inspiration of his professional life and the source of the questions which fed his imagination. Now, except for rare instances, he

must relate to school children indirectly through another human being.

Change of Focus

What has happened, of course, is that the focus of his life work has changed. The supervisor is now in the field of adult education, a role which he must fulfill with delicacy and tact, with discernment and courage. If through his efforts children receive a good education, they receive it not from him but from others whom he has influenced. In seeing himself as an educator of adults, the supervisor realizes that the general principles of learning which have guided his work with children will not be too different from those he will use in creating an environment for adult learning: work that is self-actuated, responsibility with freedom for variation and experiment, and recognition of the fact that the individual is of paramount importance.

Building New Self-Concepts

This redirection of responsibility and focus makes continuous demands upon the rebuilding of self-concepts. How does the supervisor see himself? How is he seen by others? It is sometimes a shock to a supervisor to realize that he is usually regarded in one of two ways: either there is too much of him or there is not enough of him. If there is too much of him, he may have fallen into the habit of teaching by telling or he may even have become a petty tyrant so that teachers at first glimpse of his familiar figure on the landscape send word to their fellow workers to be on guard. If there is too little of him in the eyes of those whom he seeks to serve, a supervisor may think of himself as something of a success unless the too little is the result of his own

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failing to measure up. If his help is sought, if he gives gladly of his own creative spirit and shares ideas which he has tested and found good, if he is wanted, then he will find himself in a veritable whirlwind of activity.

Variety in Role Expectation

A number of years ago, a friend of mine, a supervisor in a relatively large public school system, made a study of the roles which supervisors in that city were expected to fulfill.¹ As she went from school to school, she kept records of the questions asked of her by teachers. She interviewed principals and other supervisors. Out of her study she identified ten different roles, all having to do with either "The need for service or the need for leadership."² The three roles most often identified and wanted were resource-expert (what to teach, how to teach, and with what materials), interpreter (of policies, guides, and other resources), and coordinator (what is happening at other grade levels and in other schools). On the other hand, the roles most seldom mentioned but which the supervisor herself most wanted to play were those of initiator and the releaser of potentialities.

Such a study reveals the wide divergence in the ways in which supervisors may function. Upgrading of teaching and learning will continue to be their chief concern. Whether by telling, by showing, by demonstrating, by evaluating, by testing—the work will go on. As new

¹ "Studying Supervisory Roles." *Human Relations in Action: Pupils, Parents and Teachers Work Together*. Denver, Colorado: Denver Public Schools, 1952. p. 48-50. This is a publication which grew out of the work of the Denver Public Schools in the Study for Intergroup Education in Cooperating Schools. (Director: Hilda Taba; Consultant: John Robinson.)

² *Ibid.*, p. 48.

techniques are developed, they will become the concern of supervisors, as well as teachers in the classroom. For example, supervisors are studying teaching machines and learning how to program them; they are learning better ways of teaching reading and delving into new programs in mathematics so as to be able to interpret them. In his own eyes, a supervisor may never rest on old securities; he tends to believe that he, more than anyone else in the system, is responsible for leadership in upgrading practice and resources and in evaluating the results.³

Search for New Roles

In the past few years, a new concept of the role of the supervisor is emerging. As a cooperating partner in the development of curriculum and the improvement of method, the supervisor is a vital resource in the study of problems. As a member of a working team he is finding himself less an isolate from classroom practice, less an outcast from the administrative process. In Taba and Noel's *Action Research: A Case Study*, we see college consultant, county supervisor, and classroom teachers involved in studies in which each played significant and indispensable roles.⁴ Each grew in those skills and understandings most im-

³ In a recent study of "Who Is Responsible for Instructional Services?" (*California Journal for Instructional Improvement*, May 1961, p. 7-11), doubt was expressed as to the validity of this assertion, which is made out of the bias of the writer as a former supervisor. Quote from the study: "Principals reported that they were carrying more responsibility than supervisors attributed to them, while supervisors perceived themselves as carrying more responsibility than principals reported for them" (p. 10).

⁴ Hilda Taba and Elizabeth Noel. *Action Research: A Case Study*. Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, NEA, 1957. 58 p.

portant to him. Each brought essential knowledge to the situation. In this way, the team became the source of the expertness, interpretation and coordination which were essential for the process of problem solving and the application of the findings to the situation.

In working with teachers, the supervisor may continue to be the resource-expert, the interpreter and the coordinator. However, as the field opens more widely to include cooperative study of problems with teams of teachers, supervisors and administrators, the supervisor may come closer to the ideal which he may hold of himself as initiator and releaser of potentialities. In the world of cooperative study and research, the supervisor may find that the potentialities which he releases may be his own.

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Improving the Skills

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Many supervisors prepare bulletins to announce and lay the groundwork for group meetings, to summarize the discussion by a group, and to foster an exchange of ideas. They also use the bulletin to suggest references and resources for projects.

One of the most effective uses, however, is that of one supervisor who planned a series of professional bulletins on each of the following themes: "Using Manipulative Materials in Arithmetic"; "Developing Committee Skills in the Social Studies"; "Strengthening Handwriting Skills in the Intermediate Grades."

Each bulletin was only two pages long and was illustrated. Concrete examples of ideas which teachers might use in their classrooms were given, and a note-

book was provided for filing the bulletins for future reference.

The Quality of Planning

At the beginning of this article four factors were enumerated which combine to make good supervision. The last of these must be dealt with briefly.

A strong supervisory program uses the over-all educational objectives of the school system to give direction and assurance to everything the supervisors do for teachers. A program that feels its way day by day, determining from one teacher to another what changes in instruction are needed, is a weak one.

A supervisor must decide each year what he believes he can accomplish and then determine how the job is to be done. His plan should be put into writing for constant reference and an evaluation at the end of the year. It should be formulated with the administrative heads of the school system.

Supervision Strengthens the Teacher

In summary, supervision strengthens the teacher. It has no other reason for existing. Whatever is done to improve supervisory services ought also to improve instruction for boys and girls.

It becomes imperative, therefore, that the choice of supervisory personnel must be carefully made. Supervisors should be professional persons with characteristics and skills that will enable them to weld teachers into working groups for solving problems. The school staff itself must understand and accept the significant role of the supervisors in the constant struggle to attain the educational objectives of the school system.

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