

Coordinating a Supervisory Program

WHEN we speak of organizing a complete supervisory program we must ask ourselves first, "What are we organizing for?" Then we must ask, "What is a complete supervisory program?"

It is asserted that the chief function of supervision is to make it possible to help teachers help themselves become more skilled in the processes of fostering children's learning. To achieve this goal, teachers need to look at children with new and fresh vision, to become like the poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning defines in her lines:

The poet has the child's sight in his breast
And sees all new.

What oftenest he has viewed,
He views with the first glory.

To the extent that this goal is achieved, a school or school system may determine the "completeness" of its supervisory program.

In helping teachers help themselves, supervisors seek ways and means to make it possible for teachers to discover for themselves what "works" for them, ways that successfully interpret their knowledge of children and the learning process in creating a climate in school which encourages children's self-discovery, experimentation, interpretation of experience, and realization that learning in school can be dynamic and

exciting because it has use value in living.

When we begin to plan to coordinate the work of the staff toward the achievement of a complete supervisory program, we are reaching toward certain goals. Our objective is to try to help each staff member to discover the challenge of continuously seeking ways of improving the quality of learning, and of finding and using the opportunities available for stimulating children's motivation to learn. All staff members who have a responsibility for teaching and learning have equally significant roles to play. Teachers, administrators, supervisors and other service personnel are peers in the fulfillment of the learning process. A breakdown in the functioning of any member of the team presents blocks and frustrations which inhibit the full fruition of the exciting adventure of teaching and learning.

Today, more than ever, the schools are challenged by children's out-of-school learning. A single illustration may serve to emphasize this challenge. During a recent airflight, the writer had a four-hour stopover at a large modern

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airport in the South. The comfortable waiting room was filled with travelers waiting out a sudden storm. Most were deeply buried in newspapers or paperbacks.

Signs of the Times

In a far corner of the waiting room three boys, approximately twelve, ten and "going on seven," were quietly seated. On the wall, over their heads, was a "home-made" sign:

SHOE	SHIN
STAND	
.15¢	.15¢

After a brief huddle the youngest boy was sent around the room to recruit customers. All he approached refused the service, many with warm smiles but a few "growlingly."

Here was a prime learning situation. What were the boys learning?

1. They apparently had learned appropriate behavior—for a waiting room situation—orderliness, respect for the comfort of others, no "horseplay."

2. They were learning the psychology of "selling." No potential customers would be hardy enough to take a pair of newly shined shoes on an airfield that had turned into a stormy lake.

3. They were learning what makes people tick and how they responded differently on a face to face basis. All potential customers refused the service. The boys were learning variety in rejection, however. Most rejections were of the idea, not of the boys. But some rejections were of both. Human relations are learned and these boys were learning.

What of the schools these boys attend,

the schools that can only share in the education of boys who already feel at home in the dynamic environment of a modern airport?

1. Were these boys of whom teachers sometimes say, "They are not interested in anything"; "My boys have no motivation to learn"?

2. Were these boys who all too often must accept the conforming, restrictive quiet of too many classrooms in place of the exciting world of reality?

3. Did these boys attend schools in which teachers are told by administrators and supervisors that they *must* use prescribed texts; they *must* cover a certain amount of content in each subject; they *must* use common methods of teaching?

4. Did these boys have teachers who refused to accept the freedom to teach in unique ways, to draw upon many resources for learning, to create curricula with children which are appropriate for them, because the plodding of well-established, known paths is less demanding?

Today, more than ever, the conception of supervision as a service function demands administrators who fulfill their role of leadership by working with the staff, not for the staff. It demands supervisors and other service personnel who render service of leadership, provide spurs to teachers' self-direction, and share in the solution of problems in learning. It demands teachers whose conception of themselves is that of professional peers who find the fruition of their capabilities through working cooperatively with other staff members in the most exciting adventure of learning.

Where this conception of supervision, and of the functions of various staff members in implementing it, prevails, administration as the coordinating

medium becomes a potent force. Some examples of administration at work in its function of coordinating supervision may be helpful.

An Administrator Reports

Two problems face central administrators whose pressure of duties often blocks close contacts with the staff. One of these problems centers in communication and the other in establishing between the staff and the central administration a base for professional relationships. Such a base must foster recognition of professional peer status among members of a staff carrying different primary responsibilities, teaching, administration, supervision or other functions of education.

In one school system in a city of some 100,000 population, the director of elementary education was concerned with these problems. Previous experiences had convinced the director that teachers want to be informed, that they need to know factors underlying administrative decisions, that they want to have a part in decision making and that cooperative decision making demands knowledge of pertinent facts.

One year the director initiated a series of monthly "Reports to the Staff," a two or three page mimeographed bulletin, a copy of which was distributed to each staff member. There was no attempt to "pattern" these reports either in content or form. The primary focus was on establishing an informal style in reporting events or giving information similar to that found in correspondence between professional friends.

The first of these reports contained interesting information related to the opening of school, why some classes were so large and what was being done about

it. It commented on current pressures on kindergarten teachers for formalizing kindergarten education and suggested several current magazine articles to fortify kindergarten teachers and principals in resisting unwise demands. It reprinted a choice "story" provided by a local kindergarten teacher in winning the support of a questioning parent. And, finally, it informed the staff of the recognition won by some of the curriculum bulletins produced by the staff.

Subsequent reports dealt with similar current interests of the staff. Often they carried items of encouragement, particularly during times of the school year when the going was rough. The first tangible bit of evidence that the reports were being read and were of value came one cold February day when the director and a beginning teacher happened to meet. The teacher's first impulsive words were, "How did you know that *I* was so discouraged? It helped a lot to know *I* was not alone."

But one, or even a dozen, positive reactions do not make a base for a generalization. And so the director solicited anonymous evaluations of the "Reports to the Staff." Forty-five percent of the staff replied and the responses were enthusiastic. This group made 52 suggestions for the content of future reports, with priorities being given to items of "current news in education, specific information about local schools, help for evaluating children's growth and development, for self-evaluation by teachers, and community developments having implications for the schools."

Other Coordinating Activities

The thumbnail sketches that follow may reveal myriad opportunities for administrators and supervisors who are

committed to a supervisory program rooted in cooperative action:

1. When teachers expressed concern about the availability of needed books for use in a project on human relations education, the director, the supervisor of libraries and the general supervisors joined forces to produce monthly bulletins on "Growing Up With Books." These bulletins provided annotated references related to human relations concepts which were obtainable from the schools' well stocked children's libraries. One issue was contributed by the elementary librarians and another by one elementary librarian who had become interested enough to explore his school's library more comprehensively than had been done in the initial bulletins.

2. Each spring, the teachers of one school system elect faculty representatives from each school to meet with the director and supervisors as a planning committee for a Fall Workshop. Representatives discuss possible themes, activities, consultants and participants with individual faculties. They then come to the first committee meeting fully prepared to present the needs and recommendations of the faculties. This is an important matter to faculties, for each year the central, city-wide Fall Workshop establishes the base for further exploration by individual school workshops under the leadership of principals during the week prior to the official opening of schools. After all recommendations are considered by the planning committee, possible action is agreed upon and the representatives report to their faculties, seeking consensus and additional suggestions and assistance in developing the workshop. By the close of school or shortly thereafter, principals inform their staffs of the final program

developed for the city-wide workshop and plan with faculty committees for the building workshops which follow. There are no surprises and no guesswork. Faculties are ready to roll from the moment a new school year starts.

3. The director of elementary education in one city school system believes there is no more justification for central administration to hide behind the demands of business management than there is for a principal to retire to the office with busy work which keeps him from fulfilling his job as professional leader in creating educational programs of merit.

When circumstances reveal a demand for professional help which the director is capable of giving, he frequently provides this through bulletins distributed to the staff. Among the bulletins was a series on problems in the teaching of reading. The staff rated this series the single most valuable supervisory service rendered during the year. This reaction was obtained through an anonymous survey of teachers' opinions regarding problems in the teaching of reading and recommended ways of meeting the problems.

In planning for a complete supervisory program, there is no more critical issue than the role of the central administrator. In an entirely different context, Benjamin Spock has expressed a hazard that administrators may take to heart, when he says that creeping behind a technique or professional attitude may lead to the danger of trying to keep people away from us in order to manage them in a more arms-length kind of way.

Blocks and dodges in relationships among administrators, supervisors and teachers have no place in good supervision. Only a team, working together, can develop a supervisory program.

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