

*Report of an Indiana ASCD study*

## How Is Supervision Perceived?

WHAT should be the function of supervision? What duties performed by supervisors are being noted? Of these, which are the most important and which are the least important? How can the effectiveness of supervision be improved?

These questions, among others, have been and are of great interest to supervisors themselves. They are likewise of concern to college and university faculties responsible for educating future supervisors and, in some degree, to the persons who are affected by the process of supervision—namely, teachers, pupils, parents and other members of the community. Answers have been sought by various methods. These answers should prove helpful in clarifying the role of supervision and contributing to its improvement. A need for answers to these questions was one of the reasons why the Indiana ASCD undertook a three-year study of perceptions of supervision.

Psychological research and theory have indicated that an individual's be-

havior is determined largely by the individual's perception of himself and his role and that the expectations of others create, in part, this self-image which directs behavior. It seemed reasonable, therefore, that answers to these questions would lie, in part, in perceptions held by supervisors themselves and by others of the role of supervision.

The Research Committee of the Indiana Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, therefore, decided to derive whatever answers it could to the foregoing questions from replies received from six groups of persons. Members of these groups were considered influential in creating the expectancy level for school supervision—school administrators, principals, university faculty members in schools of education, parents, supervisors, and teachers.

### A Perception Study

The idea of a perception study of supervision was approved by IASCD. Members were given a questionnaire asking them to suggest areas of knowledge or areas of function which might be determiners of how supervision was being perceived.

An opinionnaire was constructed on the basis of suggestions received from

<sup>1</sup> Carolyn Guss served as Chairman of the Indiana ASCD Research Committee which conducted the study reported in this article. Members of the committee included Daisy Jones, Director of Elementary Education, Richmond Public Schools; Joseph C. Payne, Supervisor of Educational Research, Indianapolis Public Schools; and Doris Young, Associate Professor of Elementary Education, Purdue University.

the IASCD membership. Also considered were the findings of six doctoral researchers,<sup>2</sup> a Ball State Teachers College committee, a previous IASCD research committee, and several school city committees that had investigated various facets of the subject within the preceding five years. The instrument was deliberately developed as an open-ended, very broadly conceived, short and succinct device in order not to prestructure the replies. It was tried out experimentally. On the basis of the report on the pilot study, the committee was instructed to proceed.

Copies of the opinionnaire were sent to a random-stratified sample of 50 persons in each of six groups in Indiana—administrators, principals, faculty members teaching elementary and secondary education courses, parents, supervisors, and teachers. Over 50 percent of the administrators and supervisors returned completed opinionnaires. Only 16 percent of the parents responded with replies that were sufficiently complete to be included. Twice as many replied but did not attempt to answer the questions, indicating that they did not feel qualified to do so. Replies from the other three groups—principals, faculty members, and teachers—totalled 28, 21, and 14 respectively. Thus 139 completed replies were received in response to the 300 requests.

Analyzing results was no small task. As indicated earlier, the instrument was unstructured. The committee members found themselves with a vast array of replies variously worded and ranging from very

broad, all-inclusive comments to very specific, narrowly structured responses. Decisions had to be made. Insofar as possible, grouping of replies was based upon careful judgments and not on arbitrary decisions. It must be admitted, however, that the lines of demarcation and shades of meaning were not always clear. Whether the differences were a matter of semantics or of meaning constantly plagued the committee.

## Findings

The following findings represent an effort at objectively and accurately analyzing and summarizing the thousands of individual replies in the raw data. Statements reported as being held by the group were made by more than 40 percent of the respondents. Those reported as representing a minority point of view were held by less than 10 percent of the respondents.

*Functions of Supervision.* The question of what *should* be the function of supervision was designed to elicit philosophical speculation from the six groups. Functions mentioned by a majority of respondents were:

- Develop curriculum to meet the needs of the community
- Help teachers achieve the most effective learning environment
- Improve instruction
- Inspire teachers
- Render expert advice concerning methods and materials
- Serve as consultant or coordinator.

*Duties Being Performed by Supervisors.* The second question was intended to find out what the six groups of respondents perceived as the duties that were being performed by supervisors. Whether or not supervisors in Indiana are actually doing these things is specu-

<sup>2</sup> These researchers were: Lucy Bachman, R. Burdett Burk, Agnes Dodds, Joe Lowe, James Mitchell, and Wayne Palmer.

lative. The study, however, shows that a representative sampling of professional and lay persons concerned with supervision believe they are performing these duties:

- Compiling library and audio-visual materials
- Giving professional advice and assistance to teachers
- Improving the curriculum
- Taking care of paper work
- Testing and evaluating.

*Most Important Contributions of the Supervisor.* Here again a wide range of value judgments was expressed. The contributions of supervisors considered most important were:

- Help teachers, especially new ones, improve classroom instruction
- Hold individual conferences with teachers
- Provide teacher guidance and improve morale
- Serve as leader in curriculum development.

*Least Important Contributions of the Supervisor.* It should be noted that 40 percent of the parents replying to the questionnaire did not answer this question. Several wrote, in effect, that they considered everything supervisors do as important. The following contributions were considered least important:

- Creating an unnatural situation in the classroom
- Doing the teacher's work
- Evaluating teachers (checking up, inspecting)
- Performing clerical jobs (ordering, counting, delivering)
- Writing reports and keeping records.

*Recommended Improvement in Supervision.* This question received more individual replies than any other. Perhaps it is human nature to seize an opportunity to tell others how to do their jobs more

effectively. It may be, however, that improvement is needed. Suggestions for improvement included:

- Create a better understanding between teachers and supervisors
- Define goals of supervision more clearly
- Increase clerical assistance to supervisors
- Increase number of supervisors; i.e., decrease number of teachers and classrooms per supervisor
- Describe more specifically the role of supervisor
- Raise training and salary standards.

*Supervision Defined.* Some may believe that the sixth question should have been the first. The committee held that respondents should give their definitions of supervision last. On the basis of having answered the first five questions, respondents had done some critical thinking about supervision before giving their definitions of supervision as a process of:

- Observing, evaluating and implementing the educational process
- Improving instruction by working with teachers
- Directing the curriculum
- Cooperating in providing a wholesome learning environment for children
- Critically evaluating and directing education
- Overseeing, checking, comparing and helping.

A single study, of course, can answer only a few of the questions asked. We believe, though, that this study has served to give supervisors an insight into how their work is perceived by a number of groups which affect or are affected by the work of the supervisor. Wherever this perception agrees with the picture supervisors hold as their ideal, supervisors may feel safe in continuing the same principles of supervision. Wherever these perceptions vary from the ideas expressed, supervisors may wish to consider how to function so that their work will be per-

ceived more nearly in terms of their objectives. Following are brief summaries of the replies by the six groups of respondents:

*Administrators:* The function of supervision is that of improvement of instruction. The most important contribution is curriculum development. Goals of supervision should be more clearly defined so that supervisory effectiveness can be improved.

*Principals:* The function of supervision is that of helping the teacher achieve the most effective learning situation. The least important contribution is that of doing the teacher's work, and the effectiveness of supervision would improve if there were a better understanding between teachers and supervisors.

*University Faculty:* The function of supervision is to facilitate the work of teachers and help improve the learning situation; emphasis should be placed on curriculum development, mechanical routine activities must be de-emphasized or completely dropped. Supervisors should be mightily concerned with the human relations role they play and the human powers they wield. They should be trained and inclined to help teachers reach their highest potentials.

*Parents:* In replies from parents, four functions of the supervisor received equal emphasis—passing on new materials and methods to teachers, visiting classrooms, supervising teachers, and developing a curriculum to meet the needs of the community. Teacher guidance and assistance is their most important contribution. Generally there were no suggestions for improvement and the more common definition of supervision was to oversee, check, compare and help.

*Supervisors:* The function of supervision is helping teachers to improve

instruction. The individual conference with the teacher is very valuable, while clerical jobs are least important. Suggestions for improvement include more clerical help, more supervisors, and closer relationship between supervisors and principals.

*Teachers:* They tended to want to avoid being the object of supervision. Some of them considered supervision as an attack on them personally. Others thought of supervision as a program dealing with materials, ideas and schedules rather than with the teaching-learning situation as it affects personal relationships.

To inspire teachers and to improve morale were given as functions and contributions of supervision. This aspect of supervision, however, was not recognized by respondents as being performed. In the opinion of the committee, herein lies one of the most significant implications for possible behavioral changes on the part of supervisors.

Just as the role of the classroom teacher is changing, because of such factors as modern technology being applied in the classroom, various sized groups and types of grouping being used throughout the school day, an increasing amount of information to be conveyed to an increasing number of students, so the role of the supervisor is changing. Recurring references to improvement of the curriculum, community needs, evaluation, creating a better understanding, and raising standards suggest a very important implication of the study—supervisors cannot perpetuate the *status quo*, they must be sensitive to changes, and must be prepared to help teachers adjust to change. They must instill in teachers a desire and a zeal to dig deeper, to extend their horizons, and to advance the frontiers of knowledge.

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