

*Supervision helps in*

## Improving the Skills of Teaching

TEACHING can be improved by an efficient program of supervision. Because they are increasingly aware of this, boards of education and superintendents are appointing directors, special subject supervisors, and consultants to new positions in their school systems. Principals are being encouraged more and more to make improvement of instruction their first responsibility.

The position of this article is that effective supervision is the result of a wise combination of four factors. These factors are:

1. The kind of person who serves as the supervisor
2. The school environment relating to supervision
3. The technical know-how of the supervisor
4. The quality of planning carried on for effective supervision.

### The Kind of Person

The most important of these factors is the first. There are at least four characteristics which a good supervisor possesses, and there may be others. Unless the supervisor has a *warmth of personality* that wins teachers, he will find it difficult to establish the rapport that breaks down status barriers and

enables the teacher and supervisor to attack instructional problems cooperatively. The good supervisor possesses *ability to communicate* professionally with individual teachers and groups of teachers. He has an *interest in research* and engages in "action type" research activities within his school system and in cooperation with other systems. Finally, the supervisor who leads teachers in the task of improving their own skills must have the *know-how* that includes principles of curriculum development, familiarity with supervisory techniques, devices and instruments, and a knowledge of what constitutes good teaching.

### The School Environment

The responsibility for creating a positive environment for supervision lies mainly with the administrative leaders of the school system. They set the stage where the play takes place. They must be in accord with the play itself and indicate to the staff their support of it.

Many supervisors accept new positions wondering how strong and sincere the

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administrative support of the supervisory program will be. It does not take long to find this out. However, if administrators and supervisors work together to develop purposes and plans, there should be no misunderstanding of the role that each group must play to implement them.

The supervisor soon discovers what the teaching staff thinks of supervision. The good supervisor hopes that teachers have been encouraged to accept the attack upon instructional problems as a joint enterprise by the whole educational family. If this attitude exists, supervision becomes something done *with* teachers and *not to* them.

Teachers and supervisors do not always agree that certain services are the most valuable for improving instruction. A recent survey among hundreds of teachers and supervisors by the Illinois ASCD indicates that this is so. There were marked differences of opinion, too, between teachers of different grade levels. This suggests that there is a need for teachers and supervisors to discuss frankly what services are needed and how these can be provided.

The school environment ought to favor the problem solving approach to the study of instructional problems by groups and individual teachers. Are groups allowed to do research which leads to decisions about instructional changes? Are individual teachers encouraged to experiment with different techniques of teaching to test the advantage of one over another?

The professional climate that exists in a school or school system determines how well a good supervisor can serve teachers. The interplay of teachers, supervisors and administrators is a key condition of a good supervisory program.

The time comes when the supervisor

must work with teachers and choose wisely those devices which he believes will help teachers to improve instruction. The supervisor must use his knowledge about each teacher and his understanding of teachers as professional people if he is to be effective. What are some of the means for helping teachers?

### Classroom Visits

Classroom visits by the supervisor are not universally popular with teachers. They are necessary, however, as a supervisory technique, and no supervisor can avoid them.

When he visits a classroom, the supervisor observes learning as it happens. He sees the teacher as an active participant in the learning process. By careful analysis of what is happening, he gathers ideas for working with the teacher to improve instruction.

The supervisor should be free to visit a teacher at any time when school is in session. The argument that supervisors should be either on a "call" basis or a scheduled program should not be allowed. If the proper rapport exists, no strain is felt by the teacher or the supervisor whenever a visit is made.

Teachers, however, should never be in doubt as to the purpose of a visit. A conference before the visit can pave the way for the observation. A follow-up conference gives the opportunity to discuss what happened, to analyze reasons for pupil reactions and behavior, and to plan for changes in the techniques of instruction.

Frequent classroom visits to teachers new to the school system or new to the profession help the teachers get off to a good start, which is a real boost toward success. Knowing that the supervisor is willing and ready to help eases the new

teacher's natural concern about failure. A teacher wants to know what is expected of him, and he has a right to know how well others think he is doing. Being aware that others care about his service may make the difference between a good teacher and a mediocre one.

### Teaching Demonstration

The teaching demonstration is another device that lacks the universal support of teachers. Good teachers often resist giving demonstrations because they fear the criticism of their co-workers. They resent the accusation that they are showing off.

Yet, the teaching demonstration is an excellent device to illustrate specific teaching skills. It can focus attention upon only one skill by excluding other extraneous features of the classroom program.

Suppose the supervisor observes that poetry is not well taught in the literature program of the upper grades. An excellent teacher can demonstrate several valuable ideas and techniques for other teachers. These take-home suggestions soon become the practice in many classrooms.

Teaching demonstrations are more meaningful if they are preceded by briefing sessions with the observers. The purposes of the presentation should be clear. When the demonstration is over, the observers should exchange views with the teacher and the supervisor. Again, the cooperative approach toward seeking improved teaching skills becomes invaluable.

The planned observation of a teacher in action by another is an effective device for helping a person with a specific teaching problem. It is a type of demonstration that is tailored for one teacher.

Suppose the intermediate grade teacher has difficulty with the management of committees in a social studies project. After a discussion with the teacher about the make-up, organization, and purpose of committee work, the supervisor may arrange a visit with another teacher in the school system.

The demonstrating teacher must know what he is to illustrate, and the visiting teacher must know what to look for.

After the lesson has been taught, there should be a careful follow-up. The follow-up may be a discussion between the two teachers, a discussion between the supervisor and the teacher, and a try-out of the techniques with the visiting teacher's own class. The latter should be done under the watchful eye of the supervisor.

The advantage of this technique is that each skill can be more or less pin-pointed for a teacher. The demonstration in a classroom during a regular session proves to him that the techniques or skills in question do work.

The intervisit requires the release of the teacher from his classroom during the time of the observation. Many schools consider the cost of a substitute a wise investment in good instruction. In some cases other teachers in a building care for a class while the teacher is away.

### Conference

Conferences are often held in conjunction with other supervisory services. They enable the supervisor to discuss classroom visits, to evaluate a teaching project, to plan a unit, to explain school routine, and to suggest resources for teaching.

Since the conference usually involves only the supervisor and the teacher, this is the best time to discuss matters

that are confidential. There should be a mutual understanding that neither will discuss the conferences with another person. Both the supervisor and the teacher must feel free to talk frankly with each other.

Because personal views are exchanged in the conferences, the teacher can be made to feel that his own integrity as a professional worker is not in jeopardy. He may be reassured of his own personal worth to the school system. The conference is a means of inspiring the teacher to continue his professional growth and to reach for continued improvement of teaching skills.

### Group Meetings

Although group meetings are not always popular with teachers, they are essential to the democratic process of administration and supervision. Through group meetings teachers are involved in decision making preceded by discussion, investigation and research. Teachers should have a share of the responsibility for building philosophy, outlining curriculum objectives, and setting up instructional programs. Actually, the group meeting is a potential morale builder.

In general, group meetings are more meaningful when they are preceded by a bulletin. This bulletin should give an agenda and define the limits of the discussion.

The meeting itself should allow freedom for expression of ideas. The discussion must not stray from the agenda. If new problems are raised, they should be referred to another meeting. No meeting should close without nailing down the decisions or agreements reached by the group.

The workshop technique enables the supervisor to focus attention on problems of interest and concern to teachers. It may be a combination of group meetings and sessions which feature speakers.

Usually, the participants in a workshop meet together for making improvements in the instructional program. Teachers share ideas, examine teaching materials, set goals, and plan units of instruction. A group in one school system developed a unit for teaching about the United Nations. Another explored ways of developing international understandings.

Related to the workshop is a study program often called a "seminar." The theme of the seminar is usually one of the accepted problems or interests of the faculty.

A seminar held in one community dealt with the study of programs for fast-learning children. Time was used for reading, discussion of readings, listening to reports of participants, and listening to outside speakers. The seminar group prepared a short publication which was presented to all teachers and was used as the basis for discussions of the same topic at faculty meetings, workshops, and group meetings.

Participants in the seminar were given credit toward meeting the requirements of an in-service training credit program.

### Bulletins

Bulletins serve many purposes. Since they often become substitutes for other supervisory devices in an attempt to save time, they are frequently misused. Like all other supervisory devices, when bulletins are overused they lose their effectiveness.

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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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