

## Instructional Improvement: Considerations for Supervision

IN the past few years many of the current forces affecting schooling have been described or defined in numerous publications (2, 4, 12, 15). Those persons accountable for instructional improvement are actively aware of the new and powerful ideas and forces requiring their attention. Increasingly, it is evident that the kind and quality of instructional improvement will depend in large measure upon the extent to which these new ideas are grasped and put to use, hypotheses tested, and results evaluated in schools throughout the country (1:5-24; 7:17).

Presently the focus appears to be on: (a) examination of the nature and structure of knowledge in the disciplines (3, 5, 9, 16, 17, 18); (b) better operational definitions of the objectives of learning and teaching and proposals for more precise ways of evaluating outcomes—both stemming, in part, from research in programmed learning and automated teaching (6, 11, 14, 21); (c) a redefining of the essential tasks of schooling (3, 13, 15, 17); and (d) new strategies and tactics for effecting instructional change—proposals growing out of the studies of organizational behavior (10, 13, 20).

A brief analysis of the development of modern supervision may help to place present practices in perspective and pin-

point some requirements for supervisory action (13). Since the turn of the century various patterns of thought have characterized general supervisory practices in instructional improvement. These practices have not always been effective in achieving the objectives of the school. Shaftel (19) has noted the long-existent hiatus between the school's stated objectives and its practices, attributing the gap, in part, to the lack of a systematic theory of action.

In the first quarter of the century a classical view of man and institutions dominated school supervision. Generally teachers were closely directed and required to carry out practices determined by administrative personnel. Though "technical specialists" began to appear, as new subjects were added to the curriculum, supervisory responsibility for instructional improvement continued to be viewed as an arm of administration primarily concerned with holding teachers to certain standards of performance. Later, influenced in part by the scientific management movement, "scientific supervision" developed, and emphasis was placed on measurement, testing, and the setting of standards to be attained by pupils and teachers. The task of supervisors in this view was to discover "laws" of teaching and learning and require

teachers to apply these laws under direction.

Starting with the 1930's, attention was given to human relations or group process techniques as a way of influencing personnel toward instructional change. Manipulative techniques were more often emphasized than theoretical constructs in working with groups and individuals. Supervisors found themselves depending upon personalized approaches, using various techniques, prescriptions and maxims to persuade, influence or direct others toward the school's goals. While the use of human relations techniques in working with groups and individuals did take into account the feelings and motives of teachers and supervisors and was probably appropriate to some areas of action, not enough attention was given to individuals' properties as reasoning human beings and the application of rational thought to problems requiring intellectual attack (10:50; 13).

Further, because the supervisory process was not always well-defined, many supervisors engaged in tasks primarily the responsibility of other organizational agents. As Skinner (21:377) has noted, solutions to problems revolving around questions of better salaries, improved physical plant, updating textbooks and teaching materials, and ability grouping, may often be accomplished without much knowledge about teaching or learning. "In short there is a general neglect of educational method" (21:378). Supervisors served more as technicians ministering to the equilibrium of an organization than as leaders with vision and ability to predict and test the consequences of their proposals (13:x).

A current view would hold that the purpose of supervision is essentially that of the school itself—"furtherance of that

knowledge or truth by which human beings can comprehend if not control their world" (13:11-12). Supervisory action requires a more inclusive or supplementary approach, recognizing the importance of *both* mechanism and morale, yet taking into account the importance of cognition and the application of rational and practical intelligence in effecting improvement in schools (13). New analyses and interpretations of the structure of knowledge and contributions from learning theory (5, 16, 17, 18, 22) require that instructional efforts be directed toward new ends. Supervisors and teachers will need to develop the intellectual content of their tasks and to acquire the necessary theories with which to relate particular consequences to the conditions which produce these consequences (5, 13). Instructional improvement is a global endeavor requiring *all* persons responsible for change to make

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rational choices. Supervision can thus be considered a dimension of behavior in *many* positions and involves: (a) "forecasting the consequences of procedures and change, (b) balancing and assimilating relevant culture resources, (c) systematically ordering procedures for change, and (d) liberating human spirit in cooperatively developing new perspective" (13:46). Supervisory roles at any level require: "a clear perspective of the school's goals, awareness of its resources and qualities, and the ability to help others contribute to this vision and to perceive and act in accordance with it" (13:46).

Contemporary theories of organization indicate that individual members of organizations have limits placed on their knowledge and capacities to analyze and solve problems. since no one individual can envision *all* the consequences of any particular task. "To the extent that these limits are removed, the administrative organization approaches its goal of high efficiency. . . . administrative theory must be interested in the factors that will determine with what skills, values and knowledge the organization member undertakes his work" (20:39). It is incumbent upon those accountable for instructional improvement to develop "the ability to see the enterprise as a whole" (8:68) and provide the kind of direction which helps teachers toward behavior reflecting and implementing the mission of the school.

Supervisory techniques for making teacher behavior more rational, that is, *more consistent with the schools' goals*, have been proposed (13:15):

1. Divide essential work among teachers, thus focusing their efforts on immediate tasks.
2. Establish standardized practices which relieve the teacher of having to make minor

choices remote from or indirectly related to instructional goals.

3. Provide expert help from many sources, yet center the decision-making function in one person when conflicts must be resolved.

4. Utilize "influence systems" such as in-service education programs, seminars, or study groups for developing teachers' commitments to the objectives of the school. Place emphasis on dedication to the overall mission of the school rather than to a teacher's subject field or to a particular service. Communicate exactly how the instructional objectives of the school relate and contribute to each teacher's own professional goals.

5. Recognize that changes are more readily accepted when programs are altered gradually and systematically, thus enabling individuals to see more clearly their own roles in innovation.

6. Make school objectives so explicit, definite, and operational that exact assessments of their attainment are possible.

This last proposition deserves some amplification. More precise ways of specifying behavioral objectives for learning are growing out of the research on programmed learning (6, 14). Viable techniques for describing intended outcomes of learning, systematically ordering learning opportunities, programming the explicit and sequential behaviors required, and assessing the degree of terminal behavior are now available for application to instructional problems (6). Because research in programmed learning provides the theories and techniques to examine *what* is to be taught, *how* it will be taught, and to *assess* predicted effects, instruction should benefit.

The persistent questions regarding the value of one instructional practice or process over another may be answered better by testing hypotheses developed from systematic theories than by dependence upon blind faith in a particular practice. "No enterprise can improve it-

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self very effectively without examining its basic processes" (21:378). Widespread experimentation in the laboratory of the school to test theories, propositions and techniques should focus attention on, and provide better answers for, the generic problems of instruction. Skinner, in discussing the study of teaching machines, indicated the importance of applying the findings of basic science to instructional problems:

... more than half a century of the self-conscious examination of instructional processes had worked only moderate changes in educational practices. The laboratory study of learning provided the confidence, if not all the knowledge needed for a successful instrumental attack on the *status quo*. Traditional views may not have been actually wrong, but they were vague and were not entertained with sufficient commitment to work substantial technological changes (21:398).

The responsible roles for persons engaged in the improvement of instruction have been competently examined in the 1960 ASCD Yearbook. A quotation from this source may serve as a conclusion:

... if teachers, principals, supervisors, curriculum workers and other educational leaders are not, at least in some phases of their operations, out in front testing ideas, discovering new relationships and exploring the unknown, how can new practical or theoretical knowledge in education emerge?

... educational leadership is responsible for discovering ways to help people feel secure and accepted in their being different, in their individual searchings for ideas and ways of behaving, in their efforts to fulfill their potentialities (1:22).

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## Role of Leadership

(Continued from page 159)

from technique in the mechanistic sense toward increasing recognition and value of human worth. It recognizes man's individual right to self determination within the framework of a democratic society. From this point of view, leadership does not assist in a search for homeostasis but rather serves as a catalyst in the process of change from the present of what man is now toward the future of what he can become.

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