

The Art of Creative Supervision

CREATIVE supervision has the possibility of releasing the tremendous energy and productivity of other human beings. As a creative function, supervision might well use Gardner Murphy's hypothesis, "in every relationship between teacher and taught (there should exist) a full transactionalism, the teacher being taught, the student teaching, the two learning and teaching in reciprocity."¹

With such an approach to supervision this hypothesis can serve as a benchmark from which to make further explorations into the complex world of human relations which are so much part and parcel of the supervisory role.

For years the supervisor was thought of as being an administrative assistant to the school principal or at least as an independent judgmental observer who reinforced or checked the judgments of school administrators in regard to school personnel. We might place this original concept of the supervisor's role at one end of a school service spectrum. We seem just now to be moving toward the other end of this spectrum toward a func-

tion defined as "consultation" or "creative supervision." This end in some ways is identified with nonjudgmental assistance and with peer relationship interactions.

Enhancing Learning

Much of this change can be laid to the expanding, but far from complete, knowledge of human growth and development, of the teaching-learning act and of the factors which come into play in interpersonal relationships. In any discussion of action and reaction among people, we may find, because of the limitation of symbolic verbalization, that the process of interaction seems to follow a one, two, three order. In reality, however, the identified factors of group process, and other relationships start at any point and may also be modified somewhat according to the personalities involved.

What are some of the research and experience factors that can provide the atmosphere and art to enhance the possibilities for creative supervision?

¹Gardner Murphy, *Freeing Intelligence Through Teaching*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961. p. 60.

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1. By the very nature of our profession, we should take into consideration the theories relating to *how people learn*, especially the areas pertaining to the teacher-pupil relationship.

2. Interwoven with the way we learn is the technique of *problem solving*. Some organizational pattern of problem solving seems to be useful as long as the pattern itself does not become the end toward which we strive.

3. Because our educational system is based on education for all, we must seek *ways to work effectively within groups*. The creative supervisor must synthesize these three areas into effective action.

At this point we should remind ourselves of the reason for education—children. In the study of children and in the research which has given us clues for the releasing of potential growth in children, we can find a measure for fulfilling the role of the schools. This role is to provide a staff which develops in the child the inner strength to meet the challenge of a complex changing world. This objective calls for a teacher who recognizes the need and strives to create an atmosphere in which optimum growth can take place. Such an atmosphere is created by teachers who among other assets have or are developing a sense of self-security and a recognition of the changing reality we live in. So it follows that as the teacher has learned from interaction with children so must the supervisor learn from the teacher.

The following points are expressed, not as limitations, but as ideas as to what creates a greater possibility for learning.

Learning does not happen in a vacuum; rather, it involves both rational and irrational elements. With such a side scope of interrelated impulses any at-

tempt to isolate and take into consideration only part of the whole human being is to ignore reality. Yet, even with this kind of knowledge, we often fail to use such learnings in the formal part of any interchange among a school staff. In fact, by a variety of communications we put a premium on the act of being cold and dispassionate. As a consequence, after most meetings we find members of the group splintering off into twos or threes to give vent to their feelings. Thus, at the formal meeting we often have only the skeleton present.

Within the structure of any organization there is a tendency to resist change. For example, one of the most potent tools used by those who are proponents of the status quo is the employment of ridicule in its many forms. The supervisor who would help significant learning take place is the one who encourages freedom of expression without fear of being hurt. It is well to remember in this context that it is generally not what is said, but how it is said, or some nonverbal expression which may cut off any attempt by the teacher to explore new ground.

We learn in groups and are influenced in various ways by any group of which we happen to be a member. Nevertheless, it is the learner's individual involvement that makes for meaningful learning. This involvement helps the learner find the intrinsic satisfaction that is essential to effective learning.

Working with the Staff

Using these and other experiences in the teaching-learning act, what then is the function of a creative supervisor in the problem solving act with the teaching staff?

The supervisor comes to any group with experiences and values different

from other members of the group. This fact in itself gives us a clue as to the impracticality of trying to superimpose outside perceptions of what are the problems facing any particular staff or individual. Instead, the slow, but worthwhile acts of conferences, verbalization of perceptions, indication of feeling and development of communication skills between those who seek mutual help leads to the original identification of the problem by the teachers. This procedure does not mean a passive role for the supervisor. Rather, the approach is one of active questioning which assists in probing that particular educational field for problems that are recognized by staff as needing to be solved.

Many times in identifying a problem a staff or an individual will perceive a situation which in reality is a symptom and not the cause of the problem. A supervisor who helps a staff explore the different phases of a situation so as to get at the cause has developed within that group a greater sensitivity toward problem identification. Once the general outline of the problem has been agreed upon, it becomes the entire group's responsibility to develop a clear, usable statement of the problem. Unless this decision is arrived at cooperatively there is a distinct possibility that later on in other phases of the problem solving you will face a very real difficulty. You may find that the members who for any reason were not involved in the problem definition will, either physically or mentally, be missing from the group. It is apparent that the successful problem solving situation is one in which a clear problem definition is present.

Following a clear statement of the problem the supervisor may participate in the collection of data, provide information from his own experience or be a

contact person for other informational sources. Probably of greater value is the encouragement, by the supervisor, of the discovery of resources by groups within their own frame of reference. Most of the collections of facts which have been handed by a supervisor to a group, in neat little bundles of mimeographed materials, are still neat little bundles in some closet gathering dust.

As the data is being collected in sufficient quantity, the encouragement of a tentative hypothesis helps develop unique ideas from which a working hypothesis may then be structured. Again the focus by the supervisor should be on a wondering or questioning attitude, preferably of the nature which creates more questioning.

With the construction of a hypothesis and the development of a series of steps to solutions of the problem, the validity of the data gathered to support the hypothesis should be questioned. Here the supervisor again should search out with the teachers the methods which might be used. The great temptation is to give the "answers" to the group. This is a sure way to tell group members that they are an inferior breed. Given the opportunity and encouragement to communicate freely, the human mind has no limits. To twist a phrase, "there are nothing but new ideas," when the creative supervisor reaches out to help a staff or an individual solve an urgent problem.

An important strand needs to flow through all the steps in problem solving to insure the greatest chance of success. This element is the communication from the supervisor to other staff members of the idea that he does not perceive himself as a know-it-all who has come to lead the "lower level" of the profession on the right path. Instead, the supervisor, by his actions is saying that he sees him-

self as another member of the profession who has a high respect for his co-workers and is sincerely eager to work cooperatively with them in attempting to solve their mutual problems.

Throughout the research on the teaching-learning act and problem-solving methods there is reference to cooperation, to a permissive atmosphere, and to self-security. All of these are variables which are enhanced or diminished in the crucible of group processes. In fact it is almost impossible to separate these factors in real life. So often it is only our rejection or ignoring of these factors when making decisions for interaction with other human beings that brings about unnecessary problems.

Areas of Emphasis

With this in mind we may look at some areas of emphasis in relation to group processes which the creative supervisor might heed as he works in the field. Each school, each group no matter the size, creates within itself a culture of its own. This culture is not just a collection of individuals; rather it is the manner in which each individual relates to parts of the group or to the whole group that gives the group its character. The fallacy that might arise here is that of typing the person because of the group to which he belongs. Group character is not static, just as an individual's character is not static. Because of this uniqueness each group must be allowed to determine, within group processes, its own pattern of operation. The supervisor, through group processes, helps the group identify the methods by which it is working and indicates the possible roles humans play in groups and how each role affects the group. The group can then begin to perceive how it has been work-

ing and can make changes for a more effective way of working.

The creative supervisor recognizes that sufficient time must be provided so that group members feel that they can explore in depth, if necessary, the resources and information needed to solve the problems that are identified by the group or by individual members of the group. Along with the provision of time, the creative supervisor must work on the closing of the gap between the recommended procedures that come out of the faculty group process structure and the implementation of these recommendations by the staff. Teachers and other staff members quickly learn that the time and effort which they have put into the identification of and the tentative solutions to their problems can be easily negated at other decision-making levels.

This knowledge, in turn, frequently lays the groundwork for non-commitment by teachers and others in future group work.

A sensitivity to the readiness of a group and of the individuals who may make up subgroups is a prime requisite of the creative supervisor. This sensitivity reminds the supervisor of the need to consider the differences in growth and development of the individuals in a group. This quality also reminds him of his responsibility to help each individual develop a readiness for exploration and study of problems.

Sensitivity toward groups and individuals must extend to the recognition of those factors that make a human being feel secure, that make one aware of the infinite potentialities for developing mutual coordination and communication and for involving staff members in a variety of actions which increase the possibilities of success. Such sensitivity

(Continued on page 127)

maintain the leadership roles that are theirs. Title is not sufficient justification for real leadership. Skill, knowledge and latest information about teaching and learning must increasingly become the daily tools required of the curriculum worker. ASCD's Committee on the Professionalization of Supervisors and Curriculum Workers is continuing the important study started by the preceding Commission on the Preparation of Instructional Leaders.

Other educational groups have been for some time carrying on the same type of study of the responsibilities of their own members and the ways in which they may become increasingly skilled in their positions. The work of the joint Committee on the Professionalization of Administrators and Supervisors, made up of representatives from the college and public school levels from ASCD, AASA, DESP and NASSP, continues to give evidence of the value of shared study, shared responsibility and the strengthening of efforts toward professionalization through preservice and continuing inservice education.

Someone has said that if supervisors had spent as much time in the past year in keeping parents informed regarding instructional programs as they have in re-explaining education, both education and the status of supervisors would be greater. Hopefully, this is not typical; yet in the sharing of some ASCD activities and other curriculum information that come through your ASCD office, it occurs to me that you may find it a bit easier to keep informed about current studies in the area of your interests and responsibilities.

—MARGARET GILL, *Executive Secretary, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.*

can provide the open-ended leadership which develops and enhances the faculty group process skills and ways of working.

The creative supervisor in group process then seems to be primarily concerned about the creation of a free flowing working atmosphere. Such an atmosphere has as some of its components: (a) the group's satisfactory definition of its problems; (b) support within the group of freedom for exploration and work; (c) coordination and communication between and among members of the group; and (d) time to develop a satisfactory group relationship.

The success of group process seems to be greatly influenced by the development of a positive feeling of each individual toward the other individuals who make up the group. Thus, some characteristics included in creative supervision are: the personal development of the supervisor in his feelings of self security; his knowledge of and working ability in human relations; the understanding of the relationship between the specific area of inquiry and the teaching-learning act; the ability to develop a free-wheeling atmosphere in which problem solving becomes a personal commitment; and the knowledge and ability to use group process in an open-ended way to solve problems.

These characteristics of creative supervision are in reality interwoven and are present in different strength in each communication contact the supervisor makes with another human being. It is very doubtful whether there is a single psychology of creativeness. More likely there may be an infinite number of action possibilities which will enhance the development of creativity among teachers.

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