

*Toward democratic supervision . . .*

## The Change That Counts

BEFORE one can express what effects a democratic supervisor would have on the individual teacher, he must understand the true meanings and implications of democracy and supervision. Democracy, as we know it today, may not be exactly the same democracy that was envisioned by our forefathers. Likewise, democracy in the future will probably undergo other changes. Eduard C. Lindeman in his book, *The Democratic Man* states:

Democracy begins whenever two or more human beings interacting with each other begin to move away from the pattern of command and obedience; . . . Democracy furnished us with an ideal concept of human relations; . . . We need to learn how to turn differences and conflicts into creative channels; . . . This means that we must learn how to participate with each other in experiments even though complete agreement is lacking; . . . Difference is what makes living itself an exciting adventure (4).

Prior to becoming a democratic person one must have an unequivocal belief in the tenets of democracy and in democratic procedures. Democracy then becomes a powerful tool to preserve the ideals of the educational system. Democratic action emerges when groups of people with different opinions get together to solve their problems cooperatively toward an acceptable goal.

A belief in the basic tenets of democracy governs the democratic man's actions. These tenets center around four main concepts:

1. Belief in each individual as a person of worth and infinite value
2. Belief in equality of opportunity for the optimal development of each individual's potentialities
3. Belief in the effectiveness of cooperative action
4. Belief in the effectiveness of the use of reason and intelligence to solve problems.

Application of his convictions to practicing democracy necessitates one's use of special skills and techniques. These are helping and sharing skills which encourage a group to develop its own creative powers for leadership. These skills assist in releasing dormant individual capacities leading toward a more mature group.

Democracy in its true meaning always progresses toward an ideal form. It is important that the potential democratic supervisor understands supervision as well as democracy. Wiles, Brown, and Cassidy state, "the basic function of supervision is to improve the learning situation for boys and girls" (7). Supervision exists to help teachers do their jobs better. In summary, the supervisor facilitates the program. Democratic su-

pervision can be brought into true focus in the local educational system. When democratic procedures are employed, then definite changes toward the ideal will be forthcoming.

The impact of democratic supervision on the individual teacher is felt from the beginning. In fact, these effects have definite carry-through value that eventually will influence the students and the educational program. A major problem is bringing about change. Many cooperatively planned steps have to be carefully undertaken. The democratic minded group must prepare for change, bring about the change, evaluate and finally stabilize the change.

### Setting the Stage for Change

Change is a difficult process. Once patterns have been established, there is reluctance to change, even if this change may be beneficial. Reluctance is especially strong if the change is being forced. The democratic supervisor, realizing and understanding this idiosyncrasy of human behavior, will attempt to acclimate his staff to the democratic process. The staff must have a chance to adjust to the new situation and at the same time develop and grow in its ability to handle the freedom and responsibilities which are characteristic of the democratic process. Through various methods, the supervisor can *set the stage* for the establishment of the democratic process in the group.

The first meeting of staff and supervisor is the most important; it should be directed toward an informal and social theme, with the primary purpose to establish a comfortable atmosphere. By arranging for the meeting at a time which is convenient for all those concerned, the supervisor has taken his first

step in the democratic process, that of consideration of others.

The supervisor's primary responsibility is to promote a wholesome relationship with the group. In this respect he will be quick to recognize and give due consideration to individual differences. To accomplish this with a degree of thoroughness will involve a knowledge of each staff member's training, experience, aptitudes, interests, abilities, and personality traits. By recognizing and respecting individual differences, a permissive atmosphere will be developed. In this atmosphere fear is absent and a free exchange of ideas and suggestions can develop. Through this type of group action, each person will benefit from skill, knowledge, ideas, mistakes, and past experiences of others. The lines of communication among the group must be free and open, thus enabling a complete understanding. The democratic supervisor, by his very nature, must be able to develop an atmosphere in which people feel free to discuss problems and express their feelings.

The role of the supervisor should be one of a worker within and for the group, not as a boss from outside. In accordance with the definition of the Democratic Man, it is of utmost importance to have "power with" rather than "power over" the group (7).

Ideal conditions must be present for the most efficient and effective operation of the democratic process. To presume that an entire staff will be free from

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conflicting ideas would be a questionable assumption. Goethe wrote, ". . . difference is life giving, sameness is sterile" (4). The fact that individuals have conflicting opinions, but are able to express these ideas under a democratic supervisor, is an important aspect of the democratic concept. This is the ideal way to solve a problem, as the various possible solutions are worked down into the final decision that has been the result of contributions from each individual within the group. The supervisor must deal with the realities of the situation and act in a democratic manner within the limits of the existing conditions.

The staff, with the help of the supervisor, may have to define the limits of their rights and responsibilities as a group and as individuals acting within this group. A feeling of security will be engendered because something solid and definite is thereby established, upon which to rely in guiding the teachers' work. Once the democratic supervisor has *set the stage*, he is in a much better position to bring about the change toward greater democratic action.

### The Devices of Change

The supervisor's position in reference to actual methods of change is that of a guide. He should initiate situations in which changes might be made more easily and more effectively. Although he is striving to accomplish this in a democratic manner, he should remember that he is responsible for the program and that the staff must be interested in helping to fulfill this responsibility. The following devices are possible as methods of change and will be discussed separately: committees, workshops, bulletins, individual conferences, group conferences, demonstrations and staff meetings.

### Committees

Committees may often take the task of putting into action policies or recommendations approved by the faculty and administration. The committees that perform such functions should be composed largely of volunteers. Members of a committee will work more effectively if they choose to serve. Committees provide an opportunity for shared decision making as a means of overcoming difficulties. Shared decisions give each individual involved a sense of being a part of the whole program, and also provide excellent opportunities for useful member roles (6).

### Workshops

There are two types of workshops: (a) the in-service workshop which is conducted either before, during, or after the school year; and (b) workshops conducted in schools or at institutions of higher education during the summer.

The in-service workshop necessitates a great deal of planning and cooperation. As much as is possible the entire operation and staffing of the workshop should come from within the group. The workshop should be designed to solve *one* problem of the group. The participants in a workshop should be encouraged to expend the necessary time in solving their problem, and they should have access to an adequate supply of pamphlets, books and all other resource materials which might aid them (2).

### Bulletins

Bulletins can be a method of bringing about change. Bulletins should be issued at regular intervals, and deal with many things. The bulletin should include references to current literature, and espe-

cially that literature which deals with projects and problems in which the staff is currently interested. News items of procedures and practices of teachers in other schools are also appropriate material. Achievements, experiments or special projects by local teachers should be publicized in order to stimulate other staff members and to give recognition for such activities already undertaken.

All information from research, speeches, literature or observation which might be of value to individuals on the staff should be included in the bulletins (3). All contributions should be aimed toward the purpose of supervision—improvement of learning. The bulletin could well become the creative instrument of the teachers themselves, as they become a part of it, by writing, editing and publishing.

#### *Individual Conferences*

The individual conference should deal with the discussion of some professional problem which needs solution. The conference can be instigated by the teacher or the supervisor, although the former is preferred.

To instill confidence in teachers, a supervisor should always keep an open door. He should always be willing to listen and to help with teachers' problems. The conference gives clues as to the interests and problems of the teacher, thus enabling him to take an active interest in improvement. Supervisors can encourage experimentation in individual conferences and should accept opinions concerning need for change, or methods for change, giving such opinions active consideration (3). All procedures of an individual conference should be aimed at the personal growth of the teacher.

#### *Group Conferences*

A group conference can be an excellent means of bringing about change. For example, the supervisor might give the group an opportunity to express opinions about the duties and responsibilities of a supervisor. This would give him a good opportunity for determining a more favorable course of action. This is an excellent environment for the exchange of ideas concerning any problem of one member or the entire group. Also, the staff should be involved in assisting in the determination of the policies and program of the school. Group conferences provide many possibilities for practicing supervision through the democratic method.

#### *Demonstrations*

Demonstrations provide a different method of establishing change. Since it is not an ordinary practice, the demonstration is a refreshing change from the lecture method of expressing ideas. The supervisor may not be able to express clearly the necessary factors concerning an activity, but, through demonstrations, he can accomplish understanding among a greater percentage of his teachers. This is essentially the belief that "seeing is believing" (3).

Demonstrating by a group of teachers, or by individual teachers, is an excellent means of better understanding a specific idea or method that is being considered for adoption. Anything that is clearly understood is more easily accepted and more quickly incorporated into the daily routine of any teacher.

#### *Staff Meetings*

Staff meetings should be based upon problems and issues that affect the

teacher. It is very important that the staff feel free to express its opinions on any subject under discussion. The meeting should aim at building *esprit de corps* among the staff; to bring an understanding of what each department is doing; to inform teachers of new movements in education; to provide a medium for the exchange of ideas; to take action on matters of curriculum, rules, regulations or other issues which demand staff approval, and especially to encourage the staff's professional growth (3). Large meetings may be more creative in idea production if the group is divided into smaller subgroups for discussion. Each small group then brings its considered product to the larger group for study.

In each of the areas mentioned here, it must be remembered that the personal and professional growth of the teacher is the most important consideration of the democratic supervisor.

### Stabilizing Change

To reinforce change we must look at the results of both methods of supervision, the original or traditional method of supervision and the newer or more democratic method of supervision.

The traditional method must be scrutinized carefully to see just what was accomplished and how it was accomplished. Evaluation of the method should be as constructive as possible. The staff, by looking carefully at the accomplishments of the previous method, can determine the success of former techniques. The group should observe and evaluate any program change brought about by the traditional method of supervising, and request opinions from the original participants in this program.

After a survey of past procedures, the staff must look at the accomplishments

of the democratic method of supervision and then carefully compare the results. The democratic supervisor obviously feels that more can be accomplished through the democratic method. However, comparison of the two methods may show the group that the democratic method is more productive, thereby reinforcing the democratic method.

Whenever any new method is being introduced, regression may occur unless the desired responses are constantly reinforced. Interpretation of results should enable the group to see the change and, more important, to recognize the actual effect on the work situation. Several ways to reinforce democratic supervision are: continually attacking problems in a democratic way; helping teachers feel free to speak, without fear of reprisals; continuing to strive for an air of creativeness; giving individuals words of praise and giving credit to those deserving.

There will be those who at first will not believe in democratic supervision and also who feel it will not work or fit in some situations. The supervisor must lead the "fight" in bringing these problems before the group; arriving at a reasonable solution and in a democratic way. Sometimes problems cannot be solved democratically due to policies established by the administration. The supervisor should attempt to show why and how these decisions have been made. He should make every attempt to impress upon the group that these policies are for the moment out of the group's hands, but should assure the group members that their suggestions may bring the influence which motivates desired changes.

One of the best ways to keep the people informed of the changing methods in

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the school is by collecting attitudes and knowledge in anonymous form. The questionnaire method of gathering information may be used to inform the teachers, administrators and the general public. The questionnaire or opinionnaire is a feedback device which permits the community to contribute, in a democratic way, any ideas that might be of help in making the program better. The questionnaire or opinionnaire would serve a dual purpose; gaining response to the program and providing a reservoir for future reference.

When points of view are in opposition, the group must work for a solution or compromise that will be fair. When a change is needed, the supervisor must work closely within group discussions to assimilate the expression of ideas. The supervisor should make educational suggestions; providing opportunity for discussion and welcoming any further suggestion that may be contributed.

Once the democratic process is put into operation by the supervisor and the group, all problems should be treated in a democratic manner. Each time the democratic method is used and it is successful, a stronger foundation is formed. Reinforcement must be continuous.

### A Change Agent

When the Democratic Man becomes a supervisor, he automatically, due to the nature and purpose of supervision, assumes the role of a change agent. The system, with all that may affect pupil learning, becomes the client. Because the democratic supervisor behaves and reacts in ways reflecting his beliefs, his influence may spread as those who work with and around him discover the satis-

factions resulting from the democratic method. As has been pointed out, change meets with resistance and the amount of resistance is in direct proportion to the amount of fear provoked by efforts for change. Elimination of fear followed by reinforcement of desired outcomes may assist in overcoming resistance to change and stabilizing the change.

If the democratic supervisor, or for that matter the Democratic Man, appears to be an unobtainable ideal, perhaps he is just that. The purpose here is to identify some paths to follow, some "provisional tries," in approaching this ideal. These suggestions have been in the area of method. The long-used techniques are enriched by involvement of the individual teacher both in the formulation of the techniques and in their implementation. Through the process of involvement the staff becomes its own change agent. Honesty in a permissive climate tends to help the teacher identify and accept his own weaknesses. With the help of the group he finds reinforcement in change toward a richer environment for learning. He *wants* to become a better teacher.

Stabilizing change to avoid regression necessitates constant reinforcement for the changed situation. In terms of people and their feelings, this means that teachers must feel secure and maintain a belief that the supervisor is continually working for them. Such an approach pays off in the teacher's self-esteem since he views the supervisor as a colleague who gives help when needed but continually respects the teacher as a person of worth and dignity. Individuals cannot fail to see the advantages of the democratic method when this is revealed in concrete ways.

The client system, i.e., the school system, must maintain the characteristic of

flexibility so that change is always possible. The democratic way is the method of orderly change through the use of reason and intelligence. Courage is needed for change. The "status quo" is always a comfortable ditch to lie in and the effort to overcome inertia is too great at times. The democratic supervisor understands this, and he knows that unless there is a felt need for change none will occur. Teachers will follow orders because they must. Yet no change occurs inside unless the staff members *want* it and then discover that the new way is good, good for them and good for pupil learning.

The discovery of a way of working together is probably the most important contribution that a democratic supervisor can give to the teachers. Learning this way requires skills but most of all it requires faith in the process. The goal becomes a method and this method allows for flexibility which will meet the needs of the teachers and pupils.

The image of the Democratic Man becomes more of a reality in the supervisor, in the teachers, and finally in the pupils who are our real concern in building for a democratic way of life. As Lindeman phrases it, "The vast American educational system has set man free—free not only to serve, but also to lead. Education is the mother of leadership" (4). There is no better laboratory to preserve democracy than in our schools. There is no better way to preserve democracy than through democratic supervision in action.

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