

## **WHAT SHOULD BE THE CRUX OF SUPERVISION?**

**LOUISE M. BERMAN**

THE Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development is committed to the professional welfare and development of all persons who perform supervisory functions within the educational milieu. The Association has concerned itself with age-old questions, continuously begging for new and more persuasive answers.

Some of these questions have been: How can a supervisor simultaneously play a helping and an evaluative role? What are the tasks of the principal in the process of supervision? What types of cooperative arrangements should be developed between the supervisor and principal to insure adequate help to teachers?

Although these questions still need to be asked, the current nature of schooling is such that finding answers only to the old questions will not meet today's educational challenges. New priorities and emphases demand that the field of supervision rearrange its boundaries and reconsider its central foci.

Shifts on the horizon such as the following are necessitating a new look at the concept of supervision:

Preschool programs in which professionals and semiprofessionals are expected to collaborate to build sturdy programs for the young child

Cooperative teaching in which teams of teachers must adapt to new types of hierarchical and horizontal arrangements among themselves in order to provide more "meaty" programs for children and youth

New plans of school organization, such as the middle school and the extended secondary school, in which new kinds of administrative and supervisory arrangements provide the setting for exciting innovations in line-staff relationships

Cooperative arrangements among public schools and universities in which persons are needed who can mediate between the two institutions in order to utilize most fruitfully the unique and common features of each institution

Research emphases in the public schools necessitating additional staff or reeducating old staff in order to help make the educational undertakings more precise.

These trends are cited merely to indicate that principals, supervisors and curriculum coordinators are no longer the primary persons fulfilling supervisory functions within the school. New and revitalized studies need to be made concerning the tasks of directors of research, department chairmen, master teachers,

teacher leaders, coordinators, cooperating teachers and numerous other persons who have significant supervisory roles in today's schools.

The increasingly complex and proliferated nature of supervision demands the profession's rethinking the issues to which it will address itself. The questions need to be pervasive and penetrating. One good question can often be of such strength that a myriad of insignificant queries no longer need to be asked.

### **The Facilitating Process**

One question related to the function of supervision which appears to get at the crux of the problem is: *What is the nature of the facilitating process?* Inherent in the dictionary definition of facilitating is the notion of making easy or less difficult and of freeing from impediments. If supervising is considered as facilitating or making the work of others easier, those persons who are responsible for helping teachers see their tasks with less difficulty and more clarity need to reassess their modes of providing service and to ascertain how this work is perceived by others.

In considering the facilitating process we might consider it from the stance of the behaviors the facilitator exhibits or the perception of the facilitator's behavior by others. The latter stance seems the more profitable.

Among the qualities which the facilitator is seen as possessing is acuity and accuracy of perception. Visual and psychological perception is seen as being keen both in viewing the reality of persons and the abstractions of ideas. The facilitator is perceived as being aware of himself and others to the extent that he realizes the levels of awareness and the types of blind spots he and others bring to a situation. That persons are simultaneously strangers and intimates to themselves is evident in practice.

The facilitator is considered as being more interested in the internalized organizational schemes and plans of the teachers with whom he works than in external organizational patterns which are precise on paper but dissatisfying to those who must "fit in." He is seen as prizing the models, patterns and plans which the individual teacher develops to help explain his intent and relations to the magic models designed by "experts." The model of the expert serves only as a source of guidance for more personalized models. No rational plan of organization offers consolation when the person operating within it has been dichotomized so that his inner self is slave to an outer organizational plan.

The facilitator is seen by others as possessing reality-centered excitement. Such excitement demands discernment in reaction to ideas. When the ends of a project are even dimly discernible, he may appear to react with greater caution than when ends are clearly visible. He is perceived as doing more than giving support, although this commodity is generous when appropriate. At other times, however, he is perceived as asking the prickly, barbed questions which sharpen the issues of a dilemma. He is seen as knowing the difference between decisions that are made because of current fads or pressures, and those that are based upon the promise of long-term and far-reaching consequences.

The facilitator is perceived as respecting the integrity of others and caring for their well being. Because of his staunch enthusiasm for what persons are and can become, he is not seen primarily as an "authority" but rather as a person who is willing to throw his considered judgments into the arena of ideas. Others have the opportunity to react honestly without fear of recrimination. Teachers are aware that his proposals are subject to the same type of discussion, decision making, and evaluation as their own. At the same time he is seen as establishing the setting so that others have equal opportunity for a hearing. Insofar as possible, the group is utilized in making decisions but various responsibilities in the decision making process and who performs them are clearly visible.

Although the facilitator is genuinely interested in others, he is *not* perceived as having a continuous "open door policy." Even as teachers are expected to build into their days time for increasing their knowledge and for making considered judgments, so he practices his policy of allowing for intake as well as outgo of ideas. He formulates "maps," schemes and *Weltanschauungs* which enable him in the long run to be a better facilitator.

Because of his integrity, his relative freedom from game and role playing and his ability to place himself in the position of others, he is perceived to be a caring, human individual. In brief, he is a person capable of the total range of human behaviors. He earns the respect of his colleagues primarily through his total being as a person rather than through his title or status.

If the many new jobs demanding competency in facilitation are to be adequately filled, then the profession needs to give increased attention to this important process. The basis of initial and continuing preparation should be reexamined and additional insights should be sought from other fields and disciplines which focus upon the helping relationship—theology, psychology, psychiatry, social work, and the like. Attention should be given to including in the preparation of all persons who have responsibility for facilitating the work of others, intern-type opportunities for experience which focus directly upon the competencies needed to enhance the professional activity of another. Such preparation would enable instructors to understand better the motivations of persons seeking to become educational facilitators and to establish criteria for selection of those who should do this type of work.

If supervision is to enlarge its borders to take in those persons who will be facilitators as a result of newly created jobs and if supervision is to address itself to more powerful questions, then the nature of facilitation should be studied as the crux of supervision.

The field of supervision has some "mighty men." Oftentimes through random experiences these persons have become great facilitators. Our task now is to explicate more fully the task of educational facilitation so that more "mighty men" will emerge.

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