

# SUPERVISION: Loneliness and Rewards

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I would not exchange the sorrows of my heart for the joys of the multitude. And I would not have the tears that sadness makes to flow from my every part turn into laughter. I would that my life remain a tear and a smile.

KAHLIL GIBRAN (1)

THERE are elements within the framework of the role of the supervisor which bring a rich return and there are elements that seem to make it a lonely quest. On some occasions, it is difficult to distinguish "east from west" and to know where one set of elements begins and the other leaves off. Feelings become mixed. At other times, the reward or the loneliness appears distinct and the feelings are clear-cut. The supervisor's role is both "a tear and a smile."

Although the school personnel who share responsibilities for supervision have much in common, the material contained in this article relates specifically to the role of a curriculum supervisor or consultant working at a district level. The intent is not to be theoretical or abstract, but to share some personal thoughts about the nature of the super-

visor's role and how it relates to feelings of reward and moments of loneliness.

## Supervision: A Shared Function

Much sincere, direct and provocative writing has been done on the topic of modern supervision. Attention has been directed to its definition, purpose, scope, and unique values, as well as to its central problems and issues.

The use of well defined terms assists in counteracting the tendency to stereotype the general term, "supervision." Such an effort has been made in *Supervisory Behavior in Education*, by Ben M. Harris (2), with whom, some years back, the writer had many happy and rewarding experiences in the curriculum work of a local school district.

The terms and their distinctions are given as follows: "instructional supervision," conceptualizing supervision as a part of a larger entity; "supervisory behavior," describing the tasks, skills, and processes involved; "supervisory personnel," referring to all personnel sharing responsibility for leadership in supervisory activities regardless of position, title, status, or amount of responsi-

bility; and the term "supervisor," being reserved for those whose major responsibilities are for providing leadership in supervisory activities.

According to Harris, many new terms have been created to replace or substitute for the word "supervisor" in order to reflect more precisely the nature of the work and the newer concepts of supervision. Among the host of such terms are coordinator, instructional leader, and consultant.

Much of the professional literature reveals that supervision is a shared function, that it should be viewed as a part of the total operation of the educational system, and that its primary purpose is for the development and improvement of the total teaching-learning process.

Modern supervision is positive, dynamic, democratic action designed to improve classroom instruction through the continual growth of all concerned individuals—the child, the teacher, the supervisor, the administrator and the parent or other lay person (3).

### **Nature of the Supervisor's Role**

For the most part, the supervisor's feelings of reward or loneliness revolve around some unique features of the role. The purpose here is to discuss some of these features, not to define, describe, or defend the position.

There are certain factors which are basic to the effectiveness of the supervisor's task. Among the most crucial are: (a) the supervisor himself—his personality for the role, his feelings toward other people, his background of experience, and his convictions concerning what the role has to offer; (b) the belief in and the support given to

the position by the administration, the school board, and the community; and (c) the personal and working relationships established among the personnel of the school district, including a team approach involving teachers, principals, parents, children, and members of the supervisory personnel.

The work of the supervisor involves the lives and feelings of people—with different backgrounds, experiences and opinions. "Principles of individual differences, acceptance, and self-understanding—as well as the results of other contributions to the study of human beings—should be applied to instructional leadership" (4). The work is on a "feeling" level, and continuously calls for sensitivity to situations, for intuitive responses, for patience with time, and for wisdom to know when to lead and when to follow, when to speak and when best to remain silent. It is a matter of having an open mind, being an "open self" (5), seeing the worth of others and having a good image of self. In the ASCD 1962 Yearbook titled, *Perceiving, Behaving, Becoming: A New Focus for Education* (6), Earl C. Kelley says that the "fully functioning person" not only thinks well of others, but thinks well of himself—"the oneness of the self-other relationship." He goes on to say that "it is doubtful that there can be a self except in relation to others, and to accept one implies the acceptance of the other."

These qualities of being able to see through the eyes of the other person, to place oneself in another's shoes, to exemplify warmth and mutual trust, and to reflect a "we are in this together" feeling are often the factors in supervision which determine whether or not

another person is willing to take a second look or give something another try. This way of working, although not always easy to do, can provide the most satisfaction for others and can, at the same time, give the supervisor his greatest feeling of reward.

If he is indeed wise he does not bid you enter the house of his wisdom, but rather leads you to the threshold of your own mind (7).

Decisions are often made on a moment-to-moment basis. Certain occasions call for extemporaneous thoughts. Intuition and a good night's sleep may be the best preparation. Other contributions allow for more time and for planning, not over-structured, but thorough enough to present a relaxed feeling of oneness with the group.

Situations may vary; roles become blurred; changes are in order; one's sense of timing cannot always be accurate. The strength of the contribution may depend on another's strength of leadership. The scope of the work can be wide or narrow; the purposes can be alike or different; distinctions are often subtle. Some work can be held in the hand—a guide or a handbook. Other work can be held only in the heart—a suggestion made in a principal's office or a smile from a teacher as she hands you some children's stories.

In operation the supervisor's role often loses its identity. The how's, what's, and when's can be vague. The why's are usually relative to the situation. What one does is difficult to define. I was visiting a fifth grade classroom not too long ago. A vivacious youngster at the back of the room looked at me and asked, "What do you do for a living?" His attention was called to the

front of the room and I drew a deep breath. As I walked down the hall, I wondered what I would have said if time had allowed.

The results of the supervisor's work are often measured in someone else's success. Many times the best job a supervisor can do is the job that helps someone else to succeed. The better his work, the more accurately another's performance may be judged. The irony is that the very essence of the role can lead to misunderstanding and misconception, and perhaps negative evaluation, as related to "the need for" or "the help from" a curriculum supervisor. This feature is abstract and subtle and must be understood and accepted by the supervisor as an inherent and positive part of the role. Acceptance of this paradox can bring reward; lack of acceptance can cause frustration and long moments of loneliness.

### **A Personal Note**

It is a soul-searching experience to think back over the happenings in one's work which have given feelings of reward, and about those which have brought loneliness. Recently, as I have heard friends in the field of supervision speak about their experiences, and as I have recalled my own, I have been reminded that the greatest satisfaction for a supervisor comes from the type of work that brings him in contact with people.

Following are some kinds of opportunities and experiences which I feel bring feelings of gratification. Although this changing role has both joys and sorrows, loneliness would come to me if circumstances did not afford these types of satisfactions. The experiences

listed have been jotted down as I have thought "out loud" about my work as a curriculum supervisor in a school district.

1. Being a part of a school district where value is placed on the roles of the supervisory personnel, where the "team approach" of working is established as vital to the service, and where some balance is maintained between the direct work in the schools and the work on a district level

2. Working in a school where the principal plans and makes the best use of a supervisor's time

3. Assisting a teacher with methods, materials, techniques, etc., which may help to make her experiences and those of the children more rewarding

4. Talking and working with the children in a school

5. Helping with the planning and holding of in-service meetings around school or district needs

6. Taking part in the development and try-out of new approaches to the teaching-learning process

7. Having such opportunities as: making a visit to a classroom, reading and reviewing the new materials for teachers and children, reading a set of original stories, watching a group of children put on a puppet play, etc.

8. Helping with the planning and decision-making procedures as related to the curriculum program within the district

9. Having opportunities to take part in activities outside the school district

which provide means of gaining knowledge and which, in turn, can be of assistance to the district

10. Having a personal feeling from day to day of being of help to someone in some way.

In times of change, which can bring depersonalization, pressures, and fragmentation, there is need for ways of working which bring people close together.

This can be a part of a supervisor's contribution and at the same time can be the source of his greatest reward. Howard Thurman (8), educator and theologian, has expressed his feelings in these words: "In this atomic age, the only refuge a man has is another man's heart."

#### References

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