A CHALLENGE TO THE SUPERVISOR

WITHOUT realizing it, most teachers possess enough unused potential to make themselves two or three times more effective in their jobs. Self-motivation is the key that unlocks such potential. What can the supervisor do to spark a self-motivating attitude in teachers?

Need for Supervision

Many teachers believe that instructional materials are only the vehicles for teaching and learning. Nevertheless these same teachers place important emphasis on the first grader who was “first” to read in a “hard covered” book or on the symbol “five” on a math book needed to help a slow seventh grader. Similarly, few teachers will argue against the fact that greater learning evolves from student-oriented participation in social studies. Yet one finds many such teachers assuming the role of “purveyor of the facts,” while bored class members listen only for the bell.

Some English teachers frankly admit that hanging words on hooks or slanting them in brackets does nothing to improve the written communication skills. Yet these same teachers would not think of omitting that one-third of the text which deals laboriously with the minute details of “diagramming sentences.”

Almost all teachers will recognize that there are differences among their students, but these same teachers will literally slave to get all students to be alike. It would be very difficult to find even one instructor who would try to refute the fact that success is closely related to good mental health; yet every time he prepares report card data, the same students who failed last time fail again.

One could exhaust pages in enumerating the gaps that exist between what is known by teachers about the growth patterns and problems of the children and youth they teach and what is practiced by the same teachers in the process of instruction. Does the difference between the thinking and doing reflect a lack of understanding the skills necessary to accomplish the task? Does it indicate that to escape from an overburdened work load and pressures, one pursues an
“easier” path? Do the teachers see their administrative personnel lost in administrative detail with no time to help—hence a feeling, “no one cares what is done”?

Whatever this lost horizon means to the reader, it is an alarm giving rise to a need for the warmhearted, undivided attention of a person called a supervisor. Eye and Netzer in their recent book, *Supervision of Instruction: A Phase of Administration*, indicate that a “supervisory program is a program of persons, behaviors, and situations” and it could not be more succinctly described.

How does the supervisor proceed to bridge the gap between the thinking and the doing? By working in a person-to-person relationship and in small group in-service meetings.

...it is a widely accepted psychological fact that human beings tend to find time for and learn to do those things which they understand, believe in, and value as important. The task of the supervisor, then, is to assist teachers in the examination of their present beliefs and of the values they hold, and to assist them in modifying those beliefs and values in light of the changing needs of children and society and the findings of research in child growth, development, motivation, and learning.

**Techniques and Process**

It is refreshing to note in the recent literature on supervision an emphasis on the importance of classroom visitation. The writer is convinced that this is a vital technique and one which promises the most hope for instructional improvement. The technique is not easily described because there is no one, single procedure. The teacher visited, the purpose of the visit, the type of activity observed, determine the procedure one uses. Classroom observation is a complex professional

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skill. It implies that the observer must have a “basic familiarity with teaching, children, subject matter, and their relationships.”

Conferences must precede and/or follow a classroom visit. “If ideas are to have effect, it is usually through persons. Ideas are mediated by people.”

In the person-to-person relationship, the supervisor is better able to stimulate change because the teacher has confidence to experiment when he knows someone is being supportive. Not only are ideas of change communicated in the conference, but the behavior problems of children are analyzed, new materials are found, school policies are interpreted, and the burden of a personal problem has been shared.

For the beginning teacher, a conference prior to the opening of school can not only dispel the fears of the neophyte but it can give the supervisor an understanding of the creativeness and attitudes of the new staff member. In conducting the conference with the beginner as well as in other conferences, the writer makes it a practice to have the names and recent test data of the children assigned to the staff member. This list helps to focus the discussion on specific needs for the particular classroom.

The individual conference-classroom observation approach is a slow, time-consuming process. Nevertheless, until teachers feel supported in their venture of experimentation, are helped to understand the changing behavior of children and youth, are assisted in finding and evaluating materials, are encouraged and shown how to use a conceptual framework, they will continue to “fact find” and “cover material.”

Closely related to the person-to-person working relationship is the small group in-service conference which the writer believes is more effective for change than a total-faculty approach.

In the small group conference, the design for action research is established when the members concern themselves with a specific hypothesis; cooperatively study, experiment and solve that problem; and evaluate the results in terms of their needs. The literature of Corey, Shumsky, Taba, Franseth, and other proponents of Action Research reflects the value of this process.

The writer has found the Action Research method most effective in curriculum innovation. To develop a conceptual approach to the social studies in the intermediate grades, the teachers from one small district met to determine their problem, namely, what and how to teach social studies more effectively. A division of tasks, review of the research, defining a scope and sequence, planning a conceptual framework, and putting their ideas into writing required numerous meetings. Each time, the supervisor served as a supporting, reinforcing, and interpreting agent. This type of curriculum revision becomes meaningful to the individuals concerned. Teachers also develop respect for each other by working together; and their classrooms come to reflect more experimentation.

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After some experience with Action Research in working with teachers, the same idea may be transferred by teachers into the classroom, where teachers may obtain most interesting results in using this technique. Davison concludes:

If there is to be a revolution in educational research, it should come from the classroom teacher and the curriculum specialist. There are several reasons for this. The professional personnel have the basic tools for research: the children, the materials, and a large accumulation of experience with children in a school setting.5

The techniques already discussed are only two of the many which one can use. Yet they do represent some of the promising practices for change. Other supervisory practices which have merit at particular times include the sharing of bulletins or specific material with a teacher at a psychological time, conducting workshops of various kinds, or large group meetings such as a convention or conference, and using visual aids in demonstrations. Choice of the technique is determined by the time and need.

The supervisor’s function is to generate improvements in instruction, motivate teacher growth, and promote curriculum development in a changing world. All of these are time-consuming tasks and the teachers’ workdays offer little time for cooperative work with the supervisor. Perhaps more thought should be given to providing time for teachers to grow on the job. The colleges and universities are unable to prepare the graduates for all the work load they assume as they enter our schools to teach. Those entering the profession as well as those on the job need to be involved in continuing in-service education. This cannot all be done after so-called school hours. Perhaps those concerned with supervisory tasks should research the fruits of their labors so that findings could be presented to prove the need.  

*5 Hugh M. Davison. From address to Department of Supervision and Curriculum Development, Pennsylvania State Education Association November 1961.

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