

BEYOND THE STATUS QUO—

A Reappraisal of Instructional Supervision

DAVID TURNEY

*Director, University School
Kent State University
Kent, Ohio*

INSTRUCTIONAL supervision as presently employed in the United States is not a definable area of specialization. The kinds of duties performed by supervisors vary widely from one school system to the next and collections of job descriptions reflect this basic variability in the duties described by Neagley and Evans (1965). As a further complication, the functions that are most often performed by supervisors are distributed over a wide range of educational specialties which have been assigned other identifications.

Administrators supervise and so at times do classroom teachers. Lucio and McNeil (1962) note that, "We believe that supervision is a distributive function, a common dimension in the expected role behavior of those who hold various positions in the school system." What we actually find in practice is that there are a number of functions thus distributed; and as a consequence, we are likely to find teacher, curriculum coordinator, supervisor, or superintendent all, at one time or another, en-

gaged in supervisory activities, coordinating activities, developing leadership and the host of other functions that may be found listed in the professional literature.

Harris (1963) further reinforces the notion that supervision is a distributive function in his theoretical analysis of the relationship of supervision to the major functions of school operation. He describes a two dimensional model that includes the functions of teaching, supervision, management, special services and general administration. For Harris, these functional areas are not mutually exclusive but tend to overlap.

Such observations about the nature of supervision by these authors are most helpful in clarifying the role of the supervisor as it is presently defined by school systems. These observations, however, still do not provide us with a clearly defined direction for the further development of supervision as an educational specialty. As long as we continue to see supervision as a multi-functional task that may be accom-

plished by a wide variety of specialists we will continue to experience difficulty in developing effective programs of pre-service education and in-service development for this educational specialty.

Earlier writings on supervision are even less helpful in this respect. Moreover, we find on inspection an even greater lack of unanimity as to what supervisory functions really are.

Wiles (1955) lists five major functions having to do with skills in leadership, human relations, group process, personnel administration and evaluation. Swearingen (1962) discusses eight functions beginning with "coordination of efforts," and ending with "integrating of goals and energy building."

One could identify as many other diverse viewpoints as there are books on supervision.

One result of this multi-functioned conception of supervision and the accompanying diffusion of role has been the reduction of the supervisor's position to that of a sort of educational, utility infielder whose responsibilities are likely to shift from time to time depending on the nature of current emergencies or the need of superiors to unload some time-consuming and unrewarding task that has drifted their way.

A second result of this global definition of supervision has been an excessive duplication of teaching about these functions in most graduate professional courses. Since everyone from administrator to classroom teacher may on occasion supervise, instructors feel obliged to devote some portion of their classes in these areas of study to a consideration of supervisory functions. Instructors in supervision courses, because of

the scope of the field, feel obliged to include in their presentations work on administration, personnel, curriculum development, and a liberal sampling of the rest of the functions identified at one time or another as a part of supervision.

A Proposal for Delimitation

As a way out of this miasma of conflicting, overlapping and intertwining responsibilities, it is proposed that supervision be redefined as including those services that contribute directly to the improvement of classroom instruction. It is further proposed that curriculum development work and administration be specifically excluded from this definition.

Obviously current staffing practice will not change rapidly as a result of the acceptance of such a definition, but until we are able to specify reasonably discrete areas for supervisory specialization, the supervisor will remain a sort of educational chameleon. More immediate improvements could be realized if programs of graduate professional preparation were reorganized into the discrete and clearly defined areas of study, toward which this definition leads.

Since the supervision and curriculum development specialities are already partially separated in practice from administration by the "line and staff" form of organization, we may expect comparatively little objection to this formulation from administrators since no real change in this pattern is involved. Changes in the ways that curriculum specialists and supervisors are used within the pattern would be involved. Curriculum specialists, on the

other hand, may be expected to object to this proposal on the grounds that effective supervision is generally a consequence of curriculum development work and therefore may not be thus readily separated from its counterpart. Let us therefore examine this probable objection.

Improvement of Instruction

It has been assumed that involvement in curriculum development programs, action research projects, human relations workshops, and other educational problem solving endeavors will automatically result in improved teaching competence. To assume this is to base the program of instructional improvement on the fortuitous operation of concomitant learning. Without question such learning does take place and many teachers have profited from their involvement in these diverse activities. It is, however, highly doubtful if rapid and continuous professional growth can be adequately supported by learning processes whose outcomes are so generally unpredictable.

An assessment of what is presently known about teaching, as described in the many research studies so ably reviewed in *The Handbook of Research on Teaching* (Gage et al., 1962), leads one to the conclusion that teachers fail to work effectively with their classes for very specific reasons.

In order to improve their professional competence, teachers need to be engaged in carefully devised programs of serious study which are aimed at the development of substantive understandings, methodological skill, or knowledge about the availability and uses of learning resources.

For example, current experiences with National Science Foundation summer and full-year institutes clearly indicate that mastery of new content areas and the procedures needed for teaching them requires a kind of instruction, a degree of concentrated study, and large blocks of time that we have not heretofore dealt with in school in-service programs.

Substantive learning about the content of a discipline, the growth and development of children, and the theoretical principles of learning requires a disciplined approach by the learner and a quality of teaching rarely encountered in an in-service setting. In general, on campus, advanced degree programs seldom provide adequate backgrounds of this type for a variety of reasons, one of which is the heavy emphasis on training for administrative or other specialty positions in such programs. Undergraduate programs of instruction generally offer a brief overview of these areas, but usually fail to get past the superficial aspects.

It is difficult to see how any great advances in the improvement of teaching methodology can be achieved without recourse to laboratory experiences in which teachers can try out new ways of working and receive dependable feedback on the consequences of their efforts. The possible usefulness for such instruction of sound films, closed-circuit television coupled with video-taping, and simulation exercises is only beginning to be explored. Empirical studies by Bowers and Soar (1961) and Flanders (1962) are examples of the laboratory approach to the improvement of teaching methodology. Comments by Broady (1964) on the labora-

tory aspects of the preservice education of teachers also reinforce this point of view.

With regard to the problem of helping teachers learn the function and uses of the wide variety of materials and media available to them, it must be pointed out that present preservice and in-service preparation programs do not generally make a very great contribution to this part of the teacher's professional equipment.

For example, it is not very likely that a high school English teacher will be very effective in guiding the reading of pupils unless the teacher has an exhaustive knowledge of the literature that is most appropriate to the age group he is teaching. Furthermore, it is not enough to know the materials that exist, but one must also know which of these materials may be found in the local setting. Preservice preparation courses rarely deal with this problem, and in-service time devoted to a thorough exploration of the school library is indeed a rarity.

A basic prerequisite to the individualization of instruction is a teacher who will know what to try once the individual learning need has been identified.

Curriculum plans and the accessibility of learning materials may be viewed as limiting or facilitating factors in teaching effectiveness; rather, it is what the teacher is able to do with the plans and materials that must be the supervisor's central concern. Materials and plans are not necessarily useful because the teacher has constructed them himself; rather they will be helpful to the degree that they are appropriate to a given learning task or a specific learning problem of an indi-

vidual. While the teacher must be a skilled diagnostician of learning difficulties, he need not compound his own prescriptions for the remediation of learning deficits. What the teacher does need is an exhaustive knowledge of the media that may be employed to accomplish specific teaching goals. This is, in a sense, the pharmacology of the profession, and its dimensions are presently expanding at a staggering rate of speed.

Without deprecating the importance of curriculum problems, we believe that the most critical area for concentration of supervisory effort is on the professional development of the teacher and not on the instructional program to be employed. In the final analysis the teacher must make the specific curriculum decisions that make the difference for the individual pupils in his charge. In difficult cases, consultation may be desirable, but the critical decisions will always be a responsibility of the teacher.

The supervisor's major objective should be to help the teacher *master the substantive content he may not understand, attain competency in teaching techniques he may not know, and catalog, classify and test the countless resources that may be brought to bear on the specific learning problems he may encounter*. With such skills as these at his command, the teacher will be in a position to create that rare blend of professional competence and personal understanding which results in the fine and sensitive decisions vital to the development of superior programs of classroom instruction.

If the arguments presented in the preceding sections of this paper are valid, then some special areas of com-

petency for the supervisor are clearly implied.

Refining the Supervisory Speciality

First of all, the supervisor needs to be a person highly skilled in the analysis of the teaching act. He should be knowledgeable about and able to employ in his work a variety of the research techniques now available for the objective study of classroom teaching. In order to improve his work, the teacher should have available a continual feedback of reliable data on the characteristics of his own performance. The supervisor should be the specialist who is able to collect and present such information to the classroom teacher. The studies listed in the pamphlet recently published by AACTE entitled *A Proposal for the Revision of the Pre-Service Professional Component of a Program of Teacher Education* (1964) would constitute a nucleus of substantive content for instruction in this area.

Second, the supervisor should be able to employ effectively, techniques of individual and group counseling with members of the professional staff he proposes to help. If supervision is a teaching speciality, the need for such skills is paramount. If individualization of instruction is an important educational goal, then supervisory efforts should provide for the classroom teacher a model of such teaching methodology worth emulating. Real gains in teaching effectiveness are more likely to be produced in the context of the face to face interaction between teacher and supervisor and among the members of small groups that include the supervisor as an instructional leader than in the large

group, inspirational address approach usually employed in in-service work.

It also follows that the supervisor should be highly skilled in the use of instructional media. His own instructional work with teachers should exemplify the wise and deliberate selection of media of instruction and his knowledge of this field of study should be comprehensive enough so that he will be able to guide teachers in their own use of such instructional tools.

Since the structure of knowledge in the several disciplines appears to be so closely related to the teaching methodology essential to their adequate presentation, it will be necessary for the supervisor to have a considerable depth of understanding in at least one of the instructional areas common to the public school curriculum. In addition to his own special area of accomplishment, he will need a thorough understanding of and sensitivity to the critical differences among the different curricular areas and the implications of these differences for modification in teaching strategy and methodology.

These four areas of study—the *analysis of teaching, individual and group counseling techniques, instructional media, and the structure of knowledge in the content areas*—should constitute the major emphasis in the preparation program, both preservice and in-service, for the instructional supervisor.

Depending on native ability and background of previous training and experience, additional work will be necessary in differing degrees for specific individuals in communication skills, administrative and management techniques, and principles of curriculum construction. Beyond these special-

ized studies, it is assumed that the common elements of a good graduate program in education would supply the broad understandings of the nature of public education in the United States, and the philosophical, social and psychological bases upon which it rests.

It is believed that a major shift in emphasis toward the basic functions described herein would make possible the development of a supervisor who will be able to provide the educational guidance essential for the classroom teacher's continuous professional growth and achievement.

In summary, the notion that the supervisor is essentially a teacher of teachers is not a new one. This function, however, has not been viewed as the central role around which the preparation and work of the supervisor should be developed.

Supervisors do have a responsibility for curriculum development, but the curriculum that should concern them most is the program of learning for the teachers they supervise.

Supervisors also have a responsibility for administration, but their major concern in this area should be with the elements that are directly related to the instructional programs they develop for professional improvement of the teachers they supervise.

Supervision viewed as a logical extension of college and university professional instruction carried on within a school system will have a unique and crucial role to fulfill. The continuous educational growth of classroom teachers has been an ideal long recommended.

Effective supervision properly conceived and executed can move us rapidly toward the achievement of this goal.

References

American Educational Research Association. *Handbook of Research on Teaching*. N. L. Gage, editor. Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1963.

Norman D. Bowers and Robert S. Soar. V *Final Report: Evaluation of Laboratory Human Relations Training for Classroom Teachers*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina. U. S. Office of Education, Cooperative Research Project No. 8143, 1961. (Mimeo-graphed.)

Harry S. Broady. "Laboratory, Clinical and Internship Experience in the Professional Preparation of Teachers." *Ideas Educational*. Kent, Ohio: Kent State University School 2 (2): 5-14; Spring 1964.

Ned A. Flanders. *Teacher Influence, Pupil Attitudes and Achievement*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, U.S. Office of Education, Cooperative Research Project No. 397. 1960. (Mimeo-graphed.)

Ben M. Harris. *Supervisory Behavior in Education*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963. p. 7-11.

Herbert F. LaGrone. *A Proposal for the Revision of the Pre-Service Professional Component of A Program of Teacher Preparation*. Washington, D. C.: Teacher Education and Media Project, The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1964.

William H. Lucio and John D. McNeil. *Supervision: A Synthesis of Thought and Action*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1962. p. 46.

Ross L. Neagley and N. Dean Evans. *Handbook for Effective Supervision of Instruction*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964.

Kimball Wiles. *Supervision for Better Schools*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1955. p. 18-26. 65

Copyright © 1966 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.