

*"Suddenly the supervisor becomes an enthusiastic partner in a teaching-learning situation."*

## "Osmosis"—

### THE NEW SUPERVISION

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IF ONE reviews the college, graduate-level textbooks on organization, administration and supervision which have been published in the past 25 to 30 years, he will find that the major instrument of instructional change is a "committee." Almost without exception, author after author, the present writer included, points out that supervision, the improvement of instruction, is teacher oriented at the grass roots level and that the "participatory process" is the one insurance policy that guarantees progress.

Invariably we administrators are told to gather about us a group of "interested teachers," define and delimit a problem, set up a hypothesis, attack the problem, determine alternatives, choose a solution and arrive (!) at a conclusion—be it a new method, report card, a new course of study, a recommendation about noontime supervision or adoption of a textbook. The advocates of this type of supervisory operation contend that the end product is not the impor-

tant outcome but that the major contribution lies "in transit." The true goal, they say, is in the intragroup, interpersonal relationships that mold teacher opinion as the group progresses, and teachers, seeing the reasons and need for revision, actually accept, for themselves, change which is put into action upon their return to the classroom.

Such committees, fortified by gallons of coffee—and possibly doughnuts—are clothed with such presently pertinent phrases as "democratic practices, involvement, communication systems, participation, group dynamics, feeling of belonging and purposeful activity." When you strip all the verbiage away, the educational administrator, supervisor or principal is saying, "We want the teachers to do what we want them to do, but, they must think it is their own idea!" Imagine! Another famous administrator indicates that he "gets teachers to do what he wants but entirely without friction"—again imagine!

One of the reasons that the educative

process changes so slowly is that too many supervisors feel that teachers fall for this line of fluff. Teachers are not stupid! They are aware of the literature, they know that change is necessary; they patiently observe the rules of the game as played by some administrators and go stoically through the motions of meetings, and coffee and committee caravans as part of the price they must pay for membership in a fine and rewarding profession.

More deadly than the above questionable and limiting experience is the "group therapy" approach to supervision. Here we find the administrator-executive "curing" teachers by repealing the past. Little by little, step by step, he leads his staff out of the gloom of confusion into the bloom of professional profusion—as he sees it! This is the administrator who, in advance, knows what he wants, picks his own committee and tells it where he wants the group to go! And, what's more, gets there by leading his tethered teachers down the path of least resistance.

Again when one realizes that this process has been functioning for years under the cloak of democracy, one understands the lag of educational advancement. Teachers justifiably resent this type of nonsense as beneath their dignity. One will find thousands of courses of study, arrived at through such chicanery covered with dust, unnoticed by the teacher, in a stack on his desk or in his book cupboard. So much for "supervision" in its traditional form.

Let us now turn our attention to another chapter of progress. The words, *obligated boundary maintenance*, should have special meaning to the supervisor who truly is interested in

change. *Obligated boundary maintenance* indicates the reaction and resistance of a group to a suggestion of change. Even if the people (teachers) involved know that change is necessary, even though they know that new ideas, methods, materials or techniques are profitable, the group feels "obliged" to join hands and, with bowed heads, shout, "No!"

To change, you see, is tantamount to admitting that what one has been doing in the past is not "quite right"—and there are too few people in the world who are secure enough to admit that there might be a better way or that they are or have been wrong. We, all of us, therefore, deny progress by saying, "My kids are different; we did this before and it doesn't work; parents won't stand for it; my principal is against it; takes too much time" and on and on. There are hundreds of ways to scuttle a new idea.

### A New Method

How, then, does one who wants to innovate, lead, create or simply supervise, organize for progress? The writer would like to offer a new method which for want of a better term I call "osmosis," the gentle movement of liquid through a barrier.

To begin this "Osmosis" process, the supervisor-administrator searches through his own staff for teachers with adventurous souls. They are not hard to find. You take one teacher by the hand and say, "Come with me." With this one teacher, the supervisor works as a partner to develop a new teaching technique, explore a new method of organizing a classroom, experiment with a unique unit, build new methods of presentation

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of material or construct a continuing self-evaluation system for the students. One is limited here only by the ingenuity and creativity of the two educators involved.

While the "Osmosis" process is attractive and exciting, it should be obvious to any educational administrator that this operation can be "fraught." The process requires great delicacy; one must be extremely sensitive to the feelings of other teachers when a specific member of the staff may be given a surplus of notoriety and publicity. Professional jealousy is difficult to handle and administratively requires tact. We all know that the truly great teachers, the artists in the classroom, are usually dramatic classroom actors and the fact that someone else is a recipient of a great deal of applause and attention can breed dissatisfaction within the staff. It is obvious, then, that as the project goes on, the rest of the staff needs to feel secure. This is why the writer stresses continuously, "I like what you (the others) are doing, please don't change."

In essence the supervisor stops talking and starts doing. You quit telling teachers what and how they should be doing and start showing them. This is, then, the basic difference. Suddenly the supervisor becomes an enthusiastic partner in a teaching-learning situation. He becomes less a supervisor and more a co-worker in the vineyards of the profession. The management-labor aspect is completely eliminated as the leader leads because he earns it and deserves it through enthusiasm, drive and creative initiative, not because he is appointed. The difference of this "Osmosis" approach is, of course, quite obvious and

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from any standpoint pays premium dividends not only in improved instruction but what is more encouraging in improved staff morale.

There are only two criteria to be observed here: First, it must be fun for the teacher and the children, and second, it must be productive educationally.

When other teachers inquire about the new activity, you say, "We're not sure the process works as yet." Every teacher, then, is positive he can make it work better! However, we are seldom in a hurry! To all teachers the writer says and means it, "You are wonderful just the way you are; you don't need to change; I like what you are doing right now. I could care less whether you change or not." When teachers feel that no one is trying to force them to change, no one is trying to slip something over on them, no one is going to "chew them

out" for not changing, when they feel secure enough to try, *they will try!*

When the supervisor says, "Come with me, I will help you; I will show you," that one teacher will move forward confidently, secure in his or her guide. Moreover, when pressure and fear are removed and the pseudo-democratic drapery is eliminated, teachers move forward rapidly, happy at last to be treated as intelligent adults.

### **Change in Attitude**

The writer had the opportunity and advantage of experimenting with this type of activity only briefly in the mid-west, but has been able to bring the process to full fruition in San Rafael, California. Progress has been startling. On the wings of one or two exciting and excited teachers, ideas and techniques have spread through our small (225 teachers) school system with great rapidity.

However, and more important than the progress that has been made, is the change in attitude that one notices in teachers and administrators alike. Now that change is pleasant, it must be fun; and individual, no one is submerged in a group, ideas are springing from the staff with surprising and satisfying regularity. Not all of these ideas are productive but this is not important. What truly counts is the growing ability of some of our teachers, with such encouragement, to stand back from their activities and look at the total teaching-learning process with an objective professional eye, all the while saying, "Now, how can I do it better—or differently?"

As ideas pop up from the teachers and administrators we take them from school to school and teacher to teacher

saying, "Who wants to take a look at this one?" It does not take long now, after two years, to find teachers who are anxious to share ideas, experiment, innovate. Now that invention is fun, nearly everyone wants to get into the process. We are at the point now at which, when we say, "Who wants to try to . . ." we seldom are able to finish the sentence. Everyone volunteers; no one wants to be left out. Teachers are saying, "How come I didn't get to try that first?"

No one is naïve enough to think that every individual teacher is wild about every idea or technique. Some teachers are always fearful of progress for the reasons already mentioned. Some will forever retreat into the past and sigh longingly for the good old days and for the "committee" operation wherein they can be submerged unnoticed in the group. This is not to be critical but to recognize people as they are. The height of absolute zero is a report card committee which after three years brings forth a report card that only half the staff approves when it is finally adopted.

While there is still a place, quite small in the writer's estimation, for a group meeting in education, the modern, dynamic professional leader will today find the "Osmosis" method (if given the right treatment) far superior to the traditional "committee and coffee caravan" of the past. We urge educational leaders to take off in high gear in a new direction with a new method. As a technique may we suggest "show" instead of "tell," individual instead of group, personal commitment instead of professional detachment as we work with teachers to lift "our" level of instruction. The results will be amazing! ☞

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