

## "Supervisor" or "Curriculum Specialist"?

**BARBARA T. MASON**

**I**T SEEMS to me that the time has come for ASCD to eliminate the word "supervisor" from its vocabulary as it is used to describe the professional personnel who work with teachers in the area of curriculum. My reason for this conclusion is that many teachers still look upon supervisors as inspectors whose chief responsibility is to determine whether teaching performance is satisfactory.

True, supervisors have worked for years to dispel this idea and have redefined supervision as assistance rather than inspection, but our communication has been more with ourselves than with teachers. The result is that, even though supervisors have changed their objectives and techniques, all too many teachers still talk about their favorite supervisors in terms of their being helpful in spite of, rather than because of, their being supervisors. Curriculum workers, titled "supervisors," begin their jobs with a handicap.

Even though our image has improved gradually, we are now faced with new developments which I believe make it more imperative for us to communicate effectively with teachers if we are even to maintain our present status. One of these developments is the emerging practice of negotiating curriculum matters. Many decisions which formerly were made by administrators and supervisors in consultation with teachers are now being made in negotiation sessions between teachers and boards of education. Supervisors are being bypassed. It seems to me

that instead of standing by bemoaning that negotiation may not be the best vehicle for the improvement of curriculum, we should realize that teachers will not, and should not, give up their newly won power.

Supervisors are, in fact, in the middle between teachers and administrators. If our first concern is that the best possible learning situations be provided for children and youth, then we should make ourselves acceptable to teacher organizations to assist them in working out curriculum proposals before they go into negotiation; or if we try to head off the trend toward a negotiated curriculum, we should work to secure a framework for curriculum planning that will ensure teachers a central role. In either case, if we eliminate the word "supervisor" from our titles we are more likely to be welcomed by the rank and file teacher.

### **Demand for Accountability**

Another very pressing reason for teachers to understand the true function of supervision immediately is related to the demand for *accountability* which is echoing from community to community. Probably it is too early to predict what form these first efforts will take to hold individual teachers, schools, and school systems accountable for their results, but it does seem that they must involve developing instruments that can be used to evaluate students' progress in all the objec-

tives of the curriculum. I think this development is a very positive one.

For too long we have had a very limited evaluation of school experiences and have given the excuse that even though certain objectives are very important they are too difficult to evaluate. The result of this is that we have failed to do a good job of teaching that which is not evaluated. So it seems to me that the cry for accountability will force educators and laymen: (a) to agree upon the objectives of a school, (b) to state these objectives in behavioral terms so that (c) some kind of instrument, be it ever so crude, can be developed which will (d) be used to evaluate progress toward these objectives.

This process is, of course, not new. We claim it has been going on for years. However, in too many situations it has been more discussed than practiced. Emphasis upon accountability will result in teachers' looking first at their objectives and asking how best to achieve them. Too often in actual practice today teachers are held more accountable for the methods they use than the results they get. Thus too many teachers perceive supervisors as observing in classrooms to rate them on whether they are using the prescribed methods rather than to examine the progress of the students.

When teachers are held accountable for the results rather than for their methods, they

will welcome, even seek out those specialists who they think can help them secure the best results. I think they will call first for consultants, curriculum specialists, anyone with a title which does not convey the idea of inspection. So it seems to me that curriculum workers can perform a much needed service today and a much demanded service tomorrow in helping teachers and community to set up objectives in behavioral terms and to develop evaluation instruments. If we sit on the sidelines while teacher organizations and community groups struggle through this process without us, we will have only ourselves to blame. I think if we cease to use the title "supervisor" and emphasize "curriculum improvement" we will remove one barrier to acceptance.

If we do not improve our communication with teachers at a more rapid pace I can envision the day when teacher organizations begin to demand the elimination of supervisors. They may advocate that supervisors be replaced by *curriculum specialists* who will provide leadership and assistance to classroom teachers in providing more effective learning environments. The rank and file teacher may not realize that this has been the function of supervisors for the past 40 years!

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