



One-to-One Conferences:



TEACHER and SUPERVISOR

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IT IS accepted that supervisory tasks are becoming increasingly more complex. Regardless of the various tasks or their levels of complexity, the primary purpose of supervision is the improvement of instruction. The process to achieve this end is based to a considerable degree on individual subjectivity and is essential to the ultimate success of a supervisor.

The supervisor is seen as working in a number of different roles to accomplish specific tasks. Tasks in this context are either specifically described job functions or implied functions from a less specific job-role description. A significantly important role which the supervisor is expected to work within is the *one-to-one conference with the teacher*. Studies indicate this role is perceived and carried out in different ways.

One of the disciplines that supervisors should develop for working in this setting is an understanding of counseling. In general the findings from counseling literature reveal that the complexity of the human beings in the setting makes precise classification extremely difficult for what should and should not be done. These differing characteristics relate primarily to attitudes and skills of the supervisor on the one hand and to the perception of the relationship with the teacher on the other. Studies from the coun-

seling field do not give any final answer to what a helping relationship is nor how it is formed.¹

In the individual conference setting, it is important for supervisors to employ behaviors that are most effective. Interaction between supervisor and teacher is an important vehicle for planning, improving, and evaluating the instructional program. The effectiveness and behaviors demonstrated by the supervisor determine the ultimate success or failure of each individual conference. The crucial nature of the one-to-one conference suggests the need to determine the essential behaviors as seen by public school personnel working in supervisory positions.

Intensity

The impression that the supervisor makes on the teacher and the teacher on the supervisor is accentuated in such a setting.²

¹C. R. Rogers. "The Characteristics of a Helping Relationship." *Personnel and Guidance Journal* 37 (1): 6-16; September 1958.

²Robert Goldhammer. *Clinical Supervision*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1969.

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As a result of the closeness that exists, there is an intensity in the interchange. The rapport, or lack of it, the mutual respect and confidence that can be developed in such a meeting, are more difficult to achieve in a large group setting.

What is the one-to-one conference that is being referred to here? It can be either a formal or an informal meeting between the supervisor and the teacher. This denotes that the situation can run the gamut from the casual meeting in the faculty lounge to a highly structured conference planned for as the result of a predetermined understanding. Based on this judgment, to function at the most optimal level becomes increasingly more important.

The impression that the supervisor makes on the teacher plays a major part in how effectively he is able to carry out his overall tasks. It is in this close personal setting that both the supervisor and teacher should be able to relate freely. In the large group meetings, it is not as readily possible to have the direct personal interchange that the individual conference affords. The supervisor must address himself to the group as a whole, even if particular points being dealt with are directed at specific individuals. Where supervisor and teacher must communicate one to another in such a setting, the remaining members of the group will have, by their presence, a modifying effect on that interchange.

In supervisory preparation, theories of supervision and models for supervisory actions are integral parts of the training. How do these theories relate to the supervisor who works or plans to work in the individual one-to-one conference setting with teachers? The theoretical classroom phase of the supervisor's training combined with actual field experience is the foundation from which supervisors make their eventual value judgments. The ongoing factor of job experience is a modifying process which either negates or promotes certain theoretical aspects of supervision.

In moving from the theoretical to the applied, what is viewed by trained supervisory personnel as being the most effective

behavior to employ in working with teachers in the individual conference setting? Are we able to determine whether a pattern in behavior is discernible by supervisors when they function in such a setting?

Report of a Study

A study was conducted to determine the behaviors that supervisors deemed most effective in working with teachers in the one-to-one conference setting.³ Factors including sex of supervisor and teacher, certification and experience of the supervisor, and initiator of the conference were treated in separate hypotheses associated with (a) reasons for the conference being held, and (b) behaviors deemed most effective in the individual conference setting.

One hundred and twenty-two persons serving in supervisory positions in 11 school districts of western New York State school systems responded to a questionnaire that employed the Critical Incident Technique (CIT). The CIT procedure as outlined by Flanagan

... consists of a set of procedures for collecting direct observations of human behavior in such a way as to facilitate their potential usefulness in solving practical problems and developing broad psychological principles. The Critical Incident Technique outlines procedures for collecting observed incidents having special significance and meeting systematically defined criteria (p. 327).⁴

The supervisors were asked to describe briefly a particularly successful supervisory conference they had and extract from that conference the one thing they did that in their judgment made it (the conference) particularly effective. Subjective evaluation of these written responses was made and the supervisors' responses were placed into one of five predetermined categories. These behaviors were information gathering, listen-

³ Bruce Gordon. "Supervisors' Perceptions of Effective Behaviors in the Individual Supervisor-Teacher Conference." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Georgia, 1971.

⁴ J. C. Flanagan. "The Critical Incident Technique." *Psychological Bulletin* 51 (4): 327-58; July 1954.

ing, advising and informing, diagnosing, and supporting.

An analysis of these behaviors was made in relation to the aforementioned factors of sex of supervisor and teacher, conference initiator, years of supervisory experience, and the primary function of the respondent (administrative or supervisory). The category of advising and informing was clearly the single most reported behavior in the one-to-one conference setting, with 41 percent of the respondents recording this behavior. The next most reported behavior was that of supporting (28 percent), followed in order by listening (13 percent), diagnosing (11 percent), and information gathering (7 percent). It was further determined that experienced supervisors (seven or more years) used advising and informing more than did those in the less experienced category (44 percent to 38 percent).

In the area of supervisor certification and use of specific conference behaviors, there was a decrease in the advising and informing role by the fully certified supervisors. Fully certified supervisors (New York State certification) reported advising and informing as most effective 40 percent of the time as compared to 50 percent for those with less than full certification.

A breakdown of the data regarding the initiator of the conference revealed that 62 percent of the conferences were initiated by the supervisors, while the teachers were responsible for initiating 29 percent of them. Nine percent were held at the request of other persons (administrators, parents, other teachers).

Effective Behaviors

These findings contradict, to a degree, what recognized authorities in the field of supervision (Berman, Harnack, Wiles)⁵ have

⁵ Louise M. Berman. "What Should Be the Crux of Supervision?" *Educational Leadership* 23 (8): 616; May 1966; Robert Harnack. *The Teacher: Decision Maker and Curriculum Planner*. Scranton, Pennsylvania: International Textbook Company, 1968; Kimball Wiles. *Supervision for Better Schools*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967.

purported to be effective behaviors to employ in working with teachers. It does tend to support the findings of others (McInnes), who suggest that supervisors dominate in their relationship with teachers.⁶

It is the contention here that supervisors are employing methods of working with teachers in the one-to-one conference similar to those they use in other supervisory settings (for example, in-service programs, group meetings). It would appear that there are no perceived differences on the part of supervisors as to how they should or how they can function most effectively in different settings.

From the data supplied by the working supervisors in the study cited, supervision is seen as being most effective when it is directing teachers. This contradicts the contentions of such recognized authorities in the field of supervision as Wiles, Harris, and Goldhammer. These individuals have perceived supervisors as being most effective on a less authoritarian and a more cooperative, equal-sharing basis.

The question that we need to respond to as a result of these findings is: Are we in supervision doing what we set out to do in the manner we judge to be most effective? Are we operating from some type of set pattern, either deliberate in nature or one we randomly fall into as we meet with teachers?

It is not now possible nor should it ever become possible for us to prescribe the one "best" way in which to work in the one-to-one conference setting. If such were to be the case, that would mean that individuals were alike and the problems they had were all of a similar nature. Nothing could be further from the truth.

What the results of these findings may do is give evidence to critics of supervision who claim that supervisors perform in a telling-authority role. The category of advising and informing judged most effective by supervisors in the study cited contradicts the supervisory theory that there is a sharing

⁶ J. A. McInnes. "The Teaching Aspects of the Supervisory Conference." *Dissertation Abstracts* 29: 3530A; 1968.

of ideas between supervisor and teacher. If supervisors perceive advising and informing as the single most effective behavior, how must teachers perceive supervision? The lip service that is given to the cooperative, democratic sharing of ideas between supervisor and teacher is rapidly dissipated in such an environment. The accountability factor must be present in every aspect of the supervisor's job, whether it is in the development of a system-wide program or in an informal meeting with teachers.

It is simple to look back in retrospect at the actions others have taken. It is far more difficult to look at these actions from a critical perspective and ask these questions: Did I think out my approach to each meeting? Did I have concrete objectives in mind prior to engaging in the conference? Had I in conjunction with the teacher set up

workable guidelines within which both of us could function effectively? Was I flexible enough within the guidelines we had established? Did I make value judgments regarding the outcome of each conference on the basis of my preconference objectives? Is there a pattern developing in the individual conference setting that seems to be promoting mutual respect and understanding? Have I knowingly built into latter conferences what I have learned from former conferences?

If we as supervisors are able to look at our actions objectively in light of such questions, the likelihood of a more meaningful conference being held is significantly enhanced.

The successful conference does not just happen. It takes planning, implementation, and reevaluation. □



Edited by
J. Galen Saylor

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