

WHAT SHALL THE SUPERVISOR DO?

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Recent literature on supervision makes frequent reference to "principles of supervision," but there is a tendency for these principles to conflict. Differences in point of view are recognized by Knight when he says: "One type (of supervision) places the responsibility for leadership on the teacher. It is highly improbable that much good is derived from putting on a drive in spelling at one time, of testing and plunging in arithmetic at another, of stirring up enthusiasm and anxiety about art at another and of standing by to slowly watch these drives die like waves after a storm. Such procedure is certainly not constructive supervision. What we want is perpetual guidance. A supervisory technique which cannot be maintained as a permanent aspect of the life of the school warrants little confidence." "One theory would suggest that a school is analogous to a soviet of teachers. The other would suggest that a supervisor and his teachers are analogous to a master surgeon directing the work of well equipped internes and nurses."¹

Hudelson describes two kinds of supervision, the didactic and the experimental. Under the didactic, "the supervisor simply tells the teacher how to teach. What he tells he probably received from his supervisor who in turn hear it from his. If he has abundant experience, if he has common sense and if he is a shrewd observer, many of his opinions will probably be sound; but those that are wrong will be as wrong as sin. He not only tells one teacher how to teach, but he tells several teachers and he tells them all the same things! "Under the experimental type of supervision, the supervisor provides the teachers with techniques whereby they may attempt to solve their teaching problems experimentally."²

The statements just reviewed are illustrative of the disagreement concerning the basis for supervisory procedure. Shall initiative for improvement of teaching rest with the supervisor or

¹ F. B. Knight, *Scientific Supervision, Journal of Educational Research*, 16:1-15.

² Earl Hudelson, *Experimental Supervision, The First Yearbook of the Conference on Educational Method*, pages 208-215.

the teacher? For example, shall the supervisor visit the teacher, find out what she is doing, and work in detail on making improvement, or shall the supervisor create the conditions for self-improvement on the part of the teacher? Shall the supervisor aim to see that all teachers employ the same method, or is it better for the supervisor to give attention to the problem of developing initiative and originality? Must distinctions be made in principle between supervision of general subjects, such as reading and arithmetic, and supervision of special subjects, like art and music? What differences, if any, exist between elementary and secondary supervision?

PROCEDURE

There was no thought of attempting to answer these questions in this study. It was felt, however, that it would be helpful to compare the attitudes of the various groups of supervisors, together with those of specialists in school administration, toward certain principles which might be a basis for supervisory procedure.

From an interview study of the practices in the ten Minnesota school systems visited, a number of varying tendencies were found. These were embodied in statements which were augmented by others derived from various sources. There is no claim that the list of statements is comprehensive or that it includes the "right" principles. In case the statements on the form did not describe an individual's view, it was suggested that he fill the blank spaces on the form with the principles to which he did subscribe. Very few such additions were made. When made, they were in almost every case applications or restatements of the items on the form.

The results of the inquiry as here reported (Table I) are probably a measure of the extent to which individuals within the various groups agree to the statements on the form. These groups may approve many other principles not found in the list. If, however, the statements found in the form are not descriptive of the viewpoints of the various groups, this fact has not been indicated in the replies to any significant extent.

VIEWPOINTS OF SPECIAL SUPERVISORS

It will be noticed that the four groups of special supervisors are in substantial agreement that it is the supervisor's function to

visit the teacher and assist with the detail of teaching procedure. They also agree that in this work the supervisor should take the initiative and see that certain objectives are attained. Music and physical education supervisors are least enthusiastic about stimulation of teacher effort through study and experimentation. Likewise, music and physical education supervisors, in substantial numbers, believe that their function is to see to it that their subjects are taught in accordance with certain standards and methods. Approximately equal percentages believe that their function is to develop originality and initiative. In general, it may be said that the majority of those supervisors do not believe that much initiative for improvement of teaching rests either with teachers or heads of departments. They have little approval to offer for the policy of having the supervisor visit only "on call." They agree in refusing to assume teachers to be highly trained specialists who can direct their own work without detailed supervision. At the same time they fail to see in the variety of subjects any great obstacle. On an average, about 30 per cent of these special supervisors believe that conformity to a particular method is essential in the teaching of their subject. It is worthy of note in this connection, that only 3 per cent of the superintendents in these school systems attach similar importance to conformity to a particular method in these same subjects. Experts in administration and supervision likewise attach little importance to conformity to method.

GENERAL SUPERVISION

Principals seem to have less faith in conformity to certain methods than the special subject supervisors. They give higher rank to stimulation of study and experimentation. Superintendents seem to have less approval to give for study and experimentation than principals. Perhaps the word "experimentation" in this statement is responsible for the small number of superintendents who subscribe to it. Only physical education supervisors subscribe to this statement with less frequency than do superintendents. On the other hand, nearly half of the superintendents believe that originality and initiative on the part of teachers is more important than method. Conversely, few of them believe that conformity to method is essential. Development of individuality and initiative may be an ideal recognized by these superintendents but not achieved, either because of lack of ways and means or because of the fear of the consequences.

TABLE I—COMPARING THE PERCENTAGES OF VARIOUS GROUPS OF SUPERVISORY OFFICERS WHO SUBSCRIBE TO CERTAIN VIEWPOINTS IN REGARD TO SUPERVISION.

Statement	Per cent*						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
It is the supervisor's function to visit classes and confer with teachers concerning the detail of teaching method.....	47	56	54	70	52	53	44
The supervisor should take the initiative in the work of improving instruction.....	50	52	60	58	58	69	60
The responsibility of the supervisor is to see that certain definite objectives are attained in instruction.....	50	60	68	86	84	78	68
The chief supervisory function of the supervisor is not to show teachers how to teach their subjects but rather to stimulate effort on the part of teachers in improving their own teaching through study and experimentation.....	31	52	75	88	68	41	30
Initiative for improvement of instruction rests primarily with heads of departments.....	15	18	8	18	32	32	30
Initiative for improvement of instruction rests primarily with teachers.....	19	20	17	21	28	6	20
The supervisor should extend assistance chiefly "on call," that is, help those who ask for assistance.....	7	32	7	19	18	20	10
The supervisor should assume teachers to be highly trained specialists who are competent to direct their own work without detailed supervision.....	4	2	18	14			3
Detailed assistance to teachers impractical because of the variety of subjects offered....	3	4	23	12	14	5	6
Conformity to a particular method is essential	3	6			14	30	28
Originality and initiative on the part of teachers is more important than uniformity in method.....	44	68			66	39	40
Number included.....	120	56	80	150	55	75	54

* Key to classes:

- 1—Superintendents.
- 2—Specialists.
- 3—High school principals.
- 4—Elementary school principals.
- 5—Art supervisors.
- 6—Music supervisors.
- 7—Physical education supervisors.

† For more complete discussion and presentation of data, see "Organization and Administration of Supervision," Northwestern University Contributions to Education, No. 1, Public School Publishing Company, Bloomington, Illinois, 1929.

SECONDARY SCHOOL SUPERVISION

Very small differences are shown between the viewpoints of elementary and high school principals. It is true that only two-thirds as many high school as elementary school principals subscribe to the statement that it is the principal's function to visit classes and confer with teachers concerning the detail of teaching method. On the other hand, a slightly larger percentage of high school than elementary school principals believe the principal should take the initiative in improving instruction. High school principals seem less concerned than elementary school principals about the attainment of definite objectives. To an even less extent than elementary school principals the high school principals assume that initiative for improvement of instruction rests with teachers. A smaller number of them believe that the principal should visit "on call" only. A slightly larger percentage of high school principals see an obstacle in the variety of subjects. Likewise, in larger numbers they assume teachers to be highly trained specialists competent to direct their own work without detailed supervision. However, the differences are probably too slight to be significant. There may be great differences between elementary and high school supervision, but such differences are not reflected in the reactions of the principals who are now doing the supervisory work in these schools.

Superintendents were asked to check the statements separately for the special subjects and separately for elementary and high schools. In general, they checked all columns the same way, indicating in no way that differences existed in principle between supervision in different schools or subjects.

VIEWPOINTS OF SPECIALISTS

Judgments of specialists seem to differ very little from those of principals. Greatest differences exist between judgments of special supervisors and all other groups. One or two of the specialists returned the forms without checking them with the comment that they were unable to express their views on the form. One stated that he could not check the form "without restricting his views." This, of course, was expected. For this reason blank spaces were left, with the caption, "Others, name them." In view of the expressions to the effect that the statements on the form

did not describe all possible views, it was thought that perhaps a considerable number would add other items. In all, only 18 specialists added items to the list. In most cases these were comments concerning items already found in the list of statements. For illustrative purposes the nature of such comments is here discussed. One authority points out that all supervisory procedure should be tested experimentally. Several seem to believe in greater initiative for teachers but see a number of difficulties in the way of realization. "Originality is desirable provided it leads to desirable ends." "Many teachers should but can't take initiative in improving their teaching because of lack of training." "We dare not wait for calls from teachers." "In better cases initiative may rest with teacher." "In worst cases explicit directions must be given the teacher." One authority believes a general supervisor in high school to be impractical because of the variety of subjects. Another questions the feasibility of detailed supervision in high school. Some emphasize "co-operation," "joy in work," "research," "individual differences." Finally one specialist states that "all the generalizations are wrong, including this one."

INFLUENCE OF THE TEACHER'S TRAINING

In these various comments the feeling can be discerned that the principles subscribed to and procedures followed may be determined to a great extent by the qualifications of the teachers supervised. It is possible that (temporarily, at least) with untrained teachers it may be necessary to prescribe methods in detail and "show teachers how to teach." Highly trained teachers, however, may demand an entirely different supervisory procedure based upon a different concept of the supervisor's function.

SUMMARY

A majority of all types of supervisory officers subscribe to the principle that it is the supervisor's function to take the initiative in instructional improvement, to visit teachers, assist with the detail of classroom procedure, and see to it that certain objectives are achieved. Only a small minority believe in those principles which leave the initiative with teachers. They disagree widely over the desirability of experimentation and originality in method. Special subject supervisors tend to emphasize the importance of conformity to method while principals put a larger premium upon originality and attach a greater importance to experimentation.

The literature, the opinions of experts canvassed in the present study, as well as a study of the judgments of supervisory officers of various kinds, indicates a great difference of opinion concerning the role which the supervisory officer is to play in the improvement of instruction.

It is not, of course, proposed to determine the principles under which supervision should be organized. It is pointed out, however, that in these school systems teachers are being supervised by persons with widely different concepts of the function and purpose of supervision. It may be that a fifth grade teacher who is free to use any method she chooses in reading, is held rigidly to a prescribed method in music. The method used in reading may be diametrically opposite to the one employed in music. For all we know, they may be entirely opposite in educational outcomes. It is difficult to see how a co-ordinated educational program can be carried out under these conditions. It seems that one of the important problems of the superintendent in supervision is leadership in the definition of a set of principles outlining the functions of supervisors. Such principles might set forth also the policy of the supervisory staff with reference to latitude granted and responsibilities assigned to various members. Such principles, in light of the above facts, must be formulated with proper consideration of the instructional objectives selected and the outcomes desired for the several school subjects and activities. These principles and the procedures based upon them may be effected also by the training and ability of the teachers supervised.