

THE VALUE OF SCHOOL SUPERVISION

Demonstrated with the Zone Plan in Rural Schools

By

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INTRODUCTION

Among all of the forms and grades of schools under public administration, there are none as much in need of supervisory guidance and help as the district schools in the open country. Such schools represent the most difficult supervisory problems found in our school system. Country schools are distant from each other and from county seats. Country roads are often poor. To visit country schools is enormously expensive in time, money, and energy. It is difficult to bring teachers together frequently for group conferences. To develop any plan by which supervision of country schools may be made more efficient and at an expenditure of time and money which does not make it prohibitive is therefore to make a very genuine contribution to the progress of country school education.

There is involved here, however, a very fundamental question as to the values of school supervision itself. Under whatever plan proposed, is supervision worth its cost? Hitherto there has been no answer to this question supported by adequate evidence in concrete, scientific form. There has been no definite, measurable comparison of the progress of children and teachers who were supervised and of those who were unsupervised under conditions otherwise the same.

The two problems, that of the worth of supervision and that of a plan of supervision sufficiently definite to measure the results of its operation were inseparably connected. The worth of supervision could not be

determined without an adequate plan for supervision, and such a plan could not be tested as to its worth without means for measuring school progress, thereby ascertaining whether there were values assignable to the supervision. Fortunately, we have now reached a point in the development of measurements in some school achievements which makes comparisons in progress possible.

Professor Pittman has succeeded in devising a "Zone Plan" of supervision by which he has been enabled to supervise a group of representative country schools much more intensely than is usual, and to measure the result of such supervision. For comparison he has had an equally representative group of relatively unsupervised schools with conditions other than those of supervision approximately the same.

The results are highly gratifying. Positive values of supervision, sufficiently substantial to give them much weight have been demonstrated. The plan devised has been found practicable and not sufficiently expensive to make it prohibitive.

While the advances in school progress clearly assignable to supervision constitute the most definitely scientific evidence of the values of supervision, the evidences through the increased interest in school life by the children, the development of wider cooperation between home and school, the more intelligent and sympathetic interest of parents in education, and the enlarged professional spirit and growth of the teachers are all of significance in attesting the values of the work. These evidences are not yet measurable by reference to standards as are gains in the school subjects used

as bases of measurement. But that such evidences, when described, are clearly appreciable as quantitatively larger than the same types of interest and activity in unsupervised schools adds materially to the sense of value of supervision.

In the plan used, there are elements of supervision which are distinctly new and which commend themselves as highly worth while. The direct contact of the supervisor with both children and parents as well as with teachers is a feature of supervision in which Professor Pittman has made a pioneer contribution. He appealed to worthy incentives of both children and parents which elicited their cooperation and support in promoting the educational progress of the children and the community, both in school and out of school. The plan which he devised and employed makes this possible as no other general plan of county or district supervision has done. The experiment has therefore yielded two distinct though vitally related contributions to the field of country school supervision—scientific evidence that supervision has positive values in a degree worth while, and a plan that is both practicable and educationally commendable.

This plan of supervision requires the expenditure of more money than is usually devoted to rural supervision. But this is also true of any plan of successful supervision of rural schools. There are very few counties or districts in the United States in which there is an adequate number of supervisors to give proper help to the schools under any plan. By this Zone Plan, together with the methods of supervision employed by Professor Pittman, the cost would be as low as that

of any plan yet devised, and it has the virtue of tested efficiency which gives reasonable promise that the money spent will bring results well worth all that they cost.

District, county, and state superintendents should find this study of great value in working out their problems of rural supervision. The evidence which it contains should help them materially in convincing the authorities, whose financial support they must secure, of the values of supervision and of the practicability of a plan that has been found to work with demonstrated success. The experiment and its results inspire one with optimism and a renewed hope that the difficult and pressing problem of rural supervision has been brought very near to a satisfactory solution.

The country schools and the country school authorities are placed under great obligation to Professor Pittman for his plan and the demonstration of its efficiency. All interested in elementary school supervision are indebted to the study as furnishing positive evidence of the values of supervision in terms that are measurable and in degrees of worth sufficient to justify its reasonable cost.

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM, THE METHOD, AND THE RESULTS STATED

A. THE PROBLEM

Does the supervision of schools pay? If so, to what extent, in what ways and under what condition?

These are questions which the school administrators, the teachers and the taxpayers of America have been asking with increasing earnestness and frequency during recent years.

With a view to giving at least partial answers to these important educational questions, the investigation discussed in the following pages was undertaken. Since it was necessary to limit the scope of the investigation, it was restricted to the following question:

What is the effect of supervision upon the work of rural schools when the supervision is done according to the Zone Plan?

(The Zone Plan will be described later)

B. THE METHOD

The equivalent groups method was used in conducting the experiment upon which this discussion is based. The method is a familiar one to those acquainted with educational investigation. To others it is sufficient to say that two groups whose equivalence is determined, or whose difference is evaluated and allowed for, are compared in their ability to perform certain work. Ideally, the only element of difference between the

two groups is the one factor, the effect of which is being tested. In practice, this cannot always be absolutely the case but the differences can be determined in advance of the experiment and taken into account in evaluating the results.

In this experiment the standings of the children in thirteen school functions were determined in the early days of October 1919 for both groups, the experimental (the group under investigation) and the control (the group with which the experimental was compared). This was followed by seven months of supervision of the school work of the experimental group only. The standings of the two groups were again determined in May, 1920. The differences in the amounts of improvements made by the two groups in the functions under investigation during the intervening seven months were credited to the effect of supervision.

C. THE RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

1. *Results.* The results of supervision in the experiment hereafter described were positive in the particulars and to the extent stated below:

(a) Children in the supervised schools, when measured by equated differences and by percentages of progress of the experimental group measured in terms of progress of the control group, advanced approximately 194 per cent, as far during the seven months in the particular functions under investigation as did the children with whom they were compared.

(b) Upon this as a basis and assuming the social value of this type of educational material, the value of

the service of one supervisor, who would produce such a difference in the total results of the school work for forty-five schoolrooms similar to those supervised, would be \$45,102.15 per school year for that service alone.

(c) The teachers under supervision did, approximately, four times as much professional reading as they themselves had done during the previous year and four times as much as the group of teachers with whom they were compared during the year of the experiment.

(d) The average attendance, measured in terms of total enrollment, was 76 per cent for the year in the supervised schools as against 70.7 per cent. in the unsupervised schools.

(e) In the schools under supervision all of the children in the grades from three to eight, inclusive, made excellent progress with greater gains usually in the lower grades. In the schools not having supervision, the children in the grades below the seventh did not make the progress which might have been expected if the progress of the seventh and eighth grades were taken as a standard by which to compare them.

(f) Supervision served to keep in school children who were in the seventh and eighth grades. Of the children who entered those grades of the supervised schools, 92 per cent continued in school to the end of the year. In the unsupervised schools, only 69 per cent completed the school year.

(g) Supervision promoted the social life of the community.

2. *Supplementary Related Conclusions.*

(a) While supervision gave positive results in subjects supervised, it did not interfere with the progress of subjects not especially supervised.

(b) In order to get the best results from supervision, the attention of all concerned must be centered upon the particular phases which it is desired to improve.

CHAPTER II

DETERMINING CONDITIONS OF THE EXPERIMENT

A. THE CONDITIONS REQUIRED

Having decided to test the value of supervision of rural schools, to find a suitable place for conducting the experiment was the first problem which confronted the writer. Three conditions seemed necessary in order that the experiment might result in a successful performance, provide reliable data, and yield results of educational significance. These three conditions were:

1. The supervisor must have freedom to conduct the experiment according to conditions necessary for its scientific success. For this, two groups of schools having practical equivalence in all particulars, except the one factor of supervision, were required. What was done with the supervised schools should not be known or copied by the unsupervised schools.

2. The co-operative assistance of competent educators was necessary at the time of administering and scoring the tests.

3. A territory, genuinely rural in character, was desired. The schools should be small, far apart, and taught by teachers no more efficient than the average rural teachers of the nation. The weather conditions should be such as to test the determination of the supervisor. The travel conditions should be as difficult as that confronting the average supervisor of rural schools in any section of America.

B. THE REQUIRED CONDITIONS FOUND IN BROWN COUNTY, SOUTH DAKOTA

All of the conditions set forth above were happily met in Brown County, South Dakota.

1. Through the co-operation of Miss Lucile Trott, the county superintendent of schools, the writer was privileged to conduct the experiment according to conditions mentioned in "A" above. Because of the large number of schools in the county and the lack of field deputies, Miss Trott was unable to make more than one visit to each school during the year. This visit was made to the supervised and unsupervised schools alike. No other supervisory assistance was given by the superintendent to the schools of either group except that which was given through the regular institutes which were given to all teachers alike. Miss Trott very kindly gave permission to work with the teachers and children in any way which would improve the character of the work.

2. Through the co-operative assistance of President H. W. Foght and the faculty of the Northern Normal and Industrial School and of the county superintendent, sufficient competent assistance was provided for administering the tests and scoring the papers. This assistance was rendered at such times and in such quantities as to give the most reliable statistical data.

3. Brown County, outside of the town of Aberdeen, is genuinely rural territory. A very large percentage of the schools of the county are one-teacher schools. They are located, on an average, about four miles apart. The one-teacher schools have an enrollment of from six to twenty pupils with an average of about