

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SUPERVISION

BY

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PREFACE

Profession.—The elementary school principalship began as a disciplinary and clerical situation, developing later into a managerial position as the enrolment of the schools increased and the classification and management of the pupils became more of a problem. Now we find this position emerging from one of a purely managerial type to one of the highest educational responsibilities and influences, a profession in itself.

Development.—This growth of the elementary school principalship, which has been very rapid, is one of the most wholesome indications of progress in elementary education. It is only within the last few years, possibly within the last decade, that this position has carried with it the responsibility of assisting in the shaping of educational policies and programmes, and a somewhat full directing of these plans, that the highest type of efficiency possible may be realized. Because of this rapid and recent change in the conception of the principalship, little has been done definitely at job analysis; but few carefully planned courses are given by those competent to give such courses; the literature on the instructional phases of the principalship is meagre, and chiefly in magazine form, and most of the principals at the present time who have recognized this evolution have developed with this change.

Director.—Much of value has been written on methodology upon which classroom procedure is based. It is the point of view of the author that the educational

aspect of the work of the principal begins with a thorough, working knowledge of the principles of pedagogy, and the most modern conception of the psychology of each subject. It does not end here, however. With the fundamental information the principal proceeds as the director of education in the individual school, studying the capacities and limitations of the pupils, the experience, attitude, and ability of the teachers, that all efforts may be co-ordinated toward well-defined problems. As an elementary school principal the author has found it necessary to develop an effective technic of subject supervision, and as editor of the Yearbooks of the Department of Elementary School Principals of the National Education Association, he has found technics somewhat rare. He has, however, found an enthusiastic professional spirit among superintendents and principals who are seeking definite assistance in planning and in executing their most important function. They are so occupied with administrative duties that clear vision, careful planning, and a most energetic procedure are necessary to function as directors of instruction.

Purpose.—It is with the thought of extending constructive help to the busy but professionally alert superintendents and principals in their daily work that this book is written. Faculties and students in Colleges of Education may also find this book of value in studying problems in the supervision of instruction, and in the practical applications of educational measurements.

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ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SUPERVISION

CHAPTER I

THE TECHNIC OF SUPERVISION

Purposes of Supervision.—As a basis for the study of the technic of supervision, we should consider carefully what effective supervision should accomplish. There are several well-defined objects, which may be classified in the following manner:

1. The improvement of teachers in service should be taken as one of the most essential justifications for all supervisory duties. Some teachers who are young and inexperienced need sympathy, definite guidance, and loyal support; others of experience often need a new vision and a renewed enthusiasm which only the principal in daily contact with her can supply. Superiority in any vocation is largely dependent upon the alertness and the continued growth of the individual, therefore the principal in all his plans for supervision should recognize the fact that the growing teacher secures the best results, and that he must contribute to such growth.

2. The improvement in the quality of instruction is another important objective in supervision. This aim is not identical with the improvement of the teacher in service, as the one views the teacher from all possible angles of success, while the other views the subject-matter in its various aspects; the former deals with the human

aspects of improvement, while the latter deals with the tools and instruments of teaching.

3. The establishing of standardized goals of attainment is another important function of supervision which only expertness of the highest type and familiarity with local situations can determine. It is essential for the principal to know intimately accepted standards in all subjects and to be able to localize such standards to fit the problems of his school. The time and means for the attainment of such standards should be carefully studied by the principal. Standards should be high, but not so high that discouragement interferes with progress. As advances are realized such standards should be raised, so that there is always something worthy of the most conscientious effort.

4. Another important element in supervision is the co-ordination of all work, both as to quantity and quality, that all may be working with fairly uniform purposes in mind, each knowing the limitations of work in preceding grades and the requirements of the advanced grade. This demands the leadership of the principal.

5. Another justification for supervision is the characterization of the pupils from all angles, physical, mental, social, and moral. Classroom contacts alone will not suffice, as many characteristics can be studied only on the playground and in the home. The social and parental background often is a determining element in the degree of scholastic success. The progress of the pupil from year to year, often variable and erratic, throws considerable light on many problems. Such characterizations can be adequately studied and brought to the teacher's attention only by the alert and competent principal who has known the pupil for several years.

Teacher Participation.—The teacher should be familiar with the general purposes of supervision and with many of the detailed plans. She can work more effectively knowing such plans, and her counsel will often be most valuable to the principal. This relieves the teacher from a feeling of secrecy regarding the purposes of being supervised. Committees of teachers often plan valuable assistance in conducting the instructional aspects of the school. We might mention the use of standardized tests and remedial devices; the adaptation of the course to local and individual needs; the classification of pupils; the special programme for the retarded or the accelerated child; the efficient use of visual aids, all of which will improve conditions and throw considerable light upon the need of expert supervision.

Plans for Supervision.—The principal should do reflective thinking regarding the conditions in his school and how best to meet his problems, that improvement may be the most possible. Such plans may be yearly, semi-annual, monthly, weekly, and daily. Possibly the best time to make plans for a school year is toward the close of the preceding year, when the problems and shortcomings are clearly before the principal; these may have to be tentative, however, and subject to modification when the problems and conditions are studied the following fall. Daily plans can well be laid out at the close of the day when the work of the principal for the day is reviewed and evaluated by him. With the multiplicity of duties and the demands upon the time of the principal, petty administrative duties may take most of his time, leaving him so over-burdened that his chief function, that of supervision of instruction, may be entirely neglected. Something of a worth-while nature may be

accomplished each day if definite plans have been formulated by the principal.

Few principals have sufficient clerical and administrative assistance, which means that plans for supervision must be definite and followed as completely as possible. Victor Hugo says:

He who every morning plans the transaction of the day and follows out the plan, carries a thread that will guide him through the labyrinth of the most busy life. The orderly arrangement of his time is like a ray of light which darts itself through all his operations.

However, it is not only the time element which requires careful planning, but definiteness of purpose, so that accomplishments may be of a high type. Such plans should provide liberally for follow-up procedures and for concentration upon a limited amount of the field at a time. The keen analytic judgment of the principal and a continuity of plans and policies for a sufficient length of time are necessary, that accomplishments may be definitely realized before the efforts of the corps are re-directed toward another phase of the work. The planning may take up silent reading in its various phases; or oral reading, which has some value even though silent reading may be receiving considerable attention at the present time; certain phases of arithmetic often require concerted action; the study habits of the pupils could well be included in any principal's plans; the effective use of drill can be made a valuable undertaking and the socialized recitation will also prove to be a fruitful element in a principal's plans. It is well for the principal to keep a written record of his plans which should be consulted from time to time. This list should be a well-

balanced one that no phase of the principal's supervisory duties may be neglected; that all phases and aims of the elementary school may receive the concerted action of the corps under his direction and leadership.

Before a principal plans his line of attack he should consult the latest and most reliable authorities in education on that particular phase of the work. The field does not need to be covered, yet a few of the best investigations should be studied to refresh his mind and to keep him abreast of all progress. This will also assist him in citing his teachers to helpful material. After plans have been carefully thought out by the principal, he should call his teachers together for a conference concerning the school's needs, that they may give him the benefit of their view-point; that they may know his plans and receive his definite directions regarding the procedure.

Visitation.—A necessary step will then be to visit the teachers with definite purposes in mind. It is not enough to visit just to see the silent reading, but some particular aspect of it should be investigated at a time, in fact it is doubtful if a principal should ever enter a classroom without a definite purpose in mind and without accomplishing something of value and of assistance to the teacher and to the pupils. This does not mean that he should interfere with the recitation or with the study period. There may be times when he would like to ask a question of the teacher or of the pupils, but he should enter the classroom with an inquiring, helpful attitude. The teacher should often know his mission also. The time, length, and frequency of these visits will depend upon conditions found and upon the grasp of the principal. In subject supervision he should generally remain an entire class period, observe the next day's assignment, and, if pos-

sible, study carefully and intelligently the pupils' methods of preparing their work and the nature of the teacher's assistance. Underwood * speaks of three types of visitation, the *subject observation*, the *aspect types of observation* such as the hygienic, social, ethical, technical conditions, and the *scouting type*, which is brief, with little in mind except mere inspection, which is of doubtful value unless he is seeking to study a cross-section of the school.

The frequency of visitation depends upon the nature of the principal's plans and upon what he has discovered. Often it is an excellent plan to visit the same teacher for the same recitation several times, to ascertain what is habitual with her and with her class, as one day's performance may be no criterion of usual conditions.

Conferences.—Individual and group conferences should have a prominent place in a principal's plans. He should characterize definitely and accurately the conditions he has observed on his visits to the classrooms; these should be followed by conferences. If these partake of a personal or private nature, they should be individual conferences in which the principal should point out tactfully but clearly his views to the teacher. He should not fail to let his teachers know what he thinks regarding his visits to their classes; he should not visit continually without comments, and his comments should be helpful and so definite that no doubt is left in the teacher's mind.

Group conferences are valuable in improving conditions which are common to several, as the free exchange of constructive ideas will be of mutual benefit to the

* Underwood, F. M. "The Elementary School Principal as a Supervisor," *Bulletin of Department of Elementary School Principals, N. E. A.*, January, 1923.

teachers and to the principal. Here again the principal should seek all the assistance possible, yet finally he should decide upon a line of procedure and outline this carefully to the teachers. Here again the follow-up plans should function that results may be produced.

Meetings.—A principal should definitely plan for helpful meetings of his teachers. These should be carefully planned and should be made to function in the building policies for the improvement of instruction. He should take the rôle of their leader, but should invite freedom of discussion. Something definite should be accomplished; the meetings should be of vital interest to all and should not be of long duration, possibly from 45 minutes to an hour.

They may be for one grade or inter-grade, depending upon the problems to be discussed. The topics discussed at one of these meetings represented the results of a series of investigations by one principal who presented them to the teachers in the form of building assets and liabilities; following is this list:

Assets

1. Building spirit and team-work among teachers and pupils.
2. Silent reading.
3. Oral Spelling.
4. Applied Spelling.
5. Arithmetic Processes.
6. Oral Language.
7. Oral English in other subjects.
8. Standing and sitting postures.
9. Personal Hygiene.
10. Physical Education.
11. Locational Geography.
12. Socialized Recitations.
13. Content of written work.

Liabilities

1. Applied Penmanship.
2. Arrangement and neatness of note-books.
3. Variety and fluency of expression in written language.
4. Oral Reading.
5. The Memorizing of poems and gems of literature.
6. Pleasurable singing.

This list of assets and liabilities represents a bird's-eye view of many conditions and problems in one building upon which the teachers and principal then worked for improvement.

Use of Standardized Tests.—The technic of supervision should include accurate diagnostic plans with the use of the standardized tests, and carefully directed remedial measures to improve conditions discovered. There are two policies in vogue with the use of standardized tests; one is for the superintendent's office to originate all plans for their use, and the other is to hold the principal responsible for accurately determining conditions in his own school. Possibly the best policy to follow is to use both plans. The superintendent's office as well as the principals and teachers will wish to know many things regarding the entire system; hence, some tests should be given to the pupils in all schools. However, the principal in his plans should determine which tests will best suit his individual needs and should give them himself. In administering these tests, great care should be taken to secure absolute accuracy and uniformity, therefore one person should give all of a particular test. Often a principal has a teacher who is taking extension work in Tests and Measurements and who is sufficiently interested to give these tests accurately.

The principal should train himself also to give tests, that he may become thoroughly familiar with them. The principal should not be too sure that he knows all details concerning the administration of a particular test until he has made careful study. Such study should include thoughtful reading of all instructions as to the giving of the test, a study of the test itself, and a trial with a teacher or upon himself. The principal who is quoted as having stated he could give a certain test and understood it definitely as he had heard it discussed some months before is likely to give such tests inaccurately. A definite programme for checking the test papers should be planned that there may be dispatch in ascertaining the results and freedom from the burdensome features.

The proper use of these tests should be "sold" to the teachers by the principal. He should train his teachers to analyze their problems by means of standardized tests. Then follow as careful classification of the pupils as possible and the remedial work. In the larger schools, the pupils may be sectioned according to their ability and accomplishment, a policy not possible in smaller schools. However, in either case, remedial measures must be applied. These measures to a large extent must be devised by the teachers and the principal working together, as they can best study the need and type of drill exercises which are likely to remedy the conditions. The remedying of conditions represents one of the chief reasons for the use of standardized tests.

The Use of Informal Tests.—The testing programme should include the use of informal, unstandardized tests. Many of these tests may be arranged by the principal or secured from a neighboring principal, who is often glad to exchange work of this type. Each teacher, however,

should be encouraged to devise tests of this kind. She will know her particular needs as to content of subject-matter, progress, and capacity of her pupils and the habit of making such tests will be of great benefit to her. Such tests are the True and False in which the pupil merely writes true or false; the completion test which calls for the completion of some statement; the multiple choice test in which the pupil is given several answers to a statement and asked to select the correct one; the word or phrase test which merely requires a word or phrase to answer questions, and the arrangement test in which several events are given which must be arranged in chronological order. While such tests may not be as accurate in diagnosing individual differences as the standardized tests, they have the advantage of economy of time for both the teacher and the pupil, as they require little time by the pupils in writing and by the teacher in scoring. These tests may also serve as a more reliable basis for testing factual material than the essay form of testing. Some of this type of tests will be found in the chapters on History and Geography. The entire programme of tests should receive careful study by the principal and the teachers and here again the outlining of such a programme should be a co-operative undertaking with the teachers participating under the leadership of the principal. An occasional principal makes the mistake of giving long, burdensome and useless tests near the close of each term. Teacher participation in these plans will often avoid this mistake and place this programme upon a purposeful basis. Ruch* outlines the purposes of examination as follows:

* Ruch, G. M. *The Improvement of the Written Examination*, chapter I. Scott Foresman & Co., 1924.