IMPROVING INSTRUCTIO

IMPROVING INSTRUCTION

Supervision by Principals of Secondary Schools

BY

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THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

PREFACE

This book has grown out of a university course on the improvement of instruction in secondary schools that has been developing for twenty years. It is based on a conviction that supervision as defined and presented is the urgent need of every school and the supreme duty of every principal. Rejecting the too common idea that a supervisor should tell teachers precisely what to do to perform their duties, it advocates that his chief responsibility is to help them grow in professional effectiveness. Instead of corrective supervision it advocates that which is preventive, constructive, promotive, and creative. It proposes a supervisor who with a broad vision is a leader in the coöperative project of professional development of the school staff into a coördinate, unified body. Though it conceives of supervision as a democratic procedure, it does not become fanatical in losing sight of actual conditions and of practical demands.

Supervision is conceived as so fundamental and is presented as so vast and complex that principals, especially beginners and those long accustomed to devote themselves to administrative routines, may be at first discouraged by the immensity of the challenge. But the complexity is somewhat simplified by emphasis on the major structural features, and there is continued emphasis also on a few simple principles that are believed to be fundamental and sound. No leader can expect ever to do all that his vision shows as desirable, but everyone ambitious and earnest to grow into educational leadership can by intelligent and persistent effort learn to do much. Every achievement is just so much progress toward a goal that recedes as one's vision is extended.

This book endeavors to enlarge and dignify the conception of supervision and to indicate the major means of making it effective. It attempts to present an ideal and at the same time to be consistently practical. It is intended no less for the humblest beginner in a school of so few teachers that supervision must perforce be informal and directly personal than for the experienced heads of large urban high schools who must lead by training and coördinating assistants.

Readers will miss the many tabulations, with medians, P.E.'s, and percentages, all neatly graphed, that present the practices in the several parts of the country. Prevailing practices seldom indicate what a supervising principal ought to do. Only those tables are included that contribute to understanding and to direction toward procedures for development of desirable skills. Readers may miss also extensive bibliographies. References are included only as they are needed to direct the ambitious to sources for further practical study.

The words *ought* and *should* appear many times. Apology would be needed for their frequent use if they were not justified by underlying principles. These principles are based not on scientific research, which as yet has made only a limited ancillary contribution to supervision, but on principles which, though simply stated, are properly a part of the fundamental philosophy of secondary education. They must carry their own conviction. There is no "authority" that can give them validity. If they do not receive the sanction of common sense, then the reader is challenged to formulate other principles that do. Without fundamental principles that are sound and consistent there is no likelihood of such growth by teachers in professional unity of effort that a school will steadily grow in social usefulness.

Although it is believed that there are in the book some ideas that are original, or at least not widely known, probably most of the suggestions are of what experienced principals already know or of what any sensible person would know if he took the trouble to think through the problems of improving teachers in service. Many of the suggestions have already been well expressed by others. All of the suggestions are based on a philosophy of common sense, which has been developed and enriched by some experience, much observation, many discussions with those practically responsible for supervision, and wide reading—all interpreted and coördinated by reflection.

There is considerable value to a student of supervision in having presented in large outline a program for the continuous responsibility of improving instruction consistently based on clearly stated principles. This is ultimately more important than a series of practical suggestions. At every suggestion for procedure the reader should ask himself:

1. Is it sound?
2. To what extent can I put it into practice?
3. How can I carry it out in its present form or modified as I think it ought to be?

The exercises at the end of each chapter attempt not merely to increase understanding of what has been presented, but also to direct some practice, by no means all that may be needed, in developing powers that are essential in supervision. Every reader should be alert to present to himself other challenges that are suggested by the several discussions.

The only real value to such a book as this is that it influence and direct principals to improve their practices in supervision. It can indicate what the author thinks ought to be done and it can stimulate a reader to come to conclusions of his own. What the reader does subsequently is his own responsibility. Unless he accepts larger responsibility for supervision, unless he does his work differently and better, the book will have been written in vain.

Acknowledgment is made to the several publishers who have generously granted permission for quotations: D. Appleton and Company; American Book Company; The Clarendon Press; E. P. Dutton and Company; Ginn and Company; D. C. Heath and Company; Henry Holt and Company; Houghton Mifflin Company; Public School Publishing Company; Charles Scribners' Sons; University of Chicago Press.

THOMAS H. BRIGGS

NEW YORK CITY
March, 1938

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IMPROVING INSTRUCTION

CHAPTER I

THE MEANING OF SUPERVISION

A machine is bought to do certain very definite things. Though by the addition of gadgets its effectiveness may to a small extent be increased and the scope of its functions may be slightly enlarged, everyone expects in time a gradual deterioration. When a person is employed to teach school, however, the case is very different. He has been somewhat prepared for the job, but he can never be adequately prepared beforehand, for the challenges are constantly changing. He cannot remain at one standard of efficiency, for each new crop of pupils varies daily and there are inevitable, even though gradual, changes in the community and in civilization. If a teacher is prepared like a machine, he will tend to act like a machine, doing his work satisfactorily only when the situation that he was adjusted to meet is unvarying. Confronted by new situations, he is thrown out of gear; and though his engine may continue to run, the machine does no effective work. Human energies must find an outlet, else powers atrophy. Sometimes the energies that a teacher has at the beginning direct themselves to activities outside the school; sometimes, hampered by routines of little significance, they weaken until there is finally left only a fraction of the original potentiality.

What would it not mean to a school and consequently to civilization if the energies of teachers were steadily directed to outlets leading continuously to the most effective education! If a principal could give them proper direction and each year add even a small per cent to the growth of every teacher in effectiveness, he would justify himself many times over, even though he performed no other duties. Each unit of growth is cumulative; it invites and facilitates more growth. And many units of growth in teachers make the principal grow too—or his heels will be chafed by the toes of those pressing on behind him.

Business has found supervision a wise investment and a necessity. In every factory there are foremen to supervise the workmen, and a superintendent to supervise the foremen. In every large store and in every large telephone office there are supervisors to teach the employees their jobs and to keep them at the desired standards of efficiency. The duties of such workers are relatively simple as compared with the complex and delicate human materials worked with to induce the kinds of growth that contribute to the happiness of mankind. Neither the effectiveness of teachers nor their steady growth in effectiveness can be expected without the most skilled and persistent supervision.

Supervision cannot properly be defined in terms of the techniques it uses; rather it must be defined in terms of the purposes for which it is used, purposes that give significance to the means. In general, supervision means to coördinate, stimulate, and direct the growth of teachers in the power to stimulate and direct the growth of every individual pupil through the exercise of his talents toward the richest and most intelligent participation in the civilization in which he lives. Supervision aims at "the development of a group of professional workers who, free from the control of tradition and actuated by a spirit of enquiry, attack their problems scientifically in an environment in which men and women of high professional ideals may live a vigorous, intelligent, creative life."[1] It is with the means of achieving this high objective that the following chapters are concerned. "The supervisor," says C. R. Maxwell, "must have an ideal of an end which he wishes to accomplish, an ideal of the methods by which the goal will be best attained, and an idea of the obstacles which must be overcome in adjusting means to reach the end."

The Purposes of Supervision.—It is difficult, if not impossible, to present succinctly all of the purposes of supervision so that they will seem altogether inclusive. The following list, however, will prove at least suggestive to the principal who is preparing a comprehensive program of supervision. By keeping in mind the general purpose that has already been proposed, he will be able to supplement this list according to his need. Only a few specific purposes can wisely be sought at a time by intensive effort, but each one involves and is supplemented by others, so that all should be kept in mind. Each one approved will contribute later to the effectiveness of many supervisory activities.

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[1] *The Superintendent Surveys Supervision*, p. 344. Eighth Yearbook of the Department of Superintendence of the National Education Association, 1930.

1. *To develop understanding of the place of education in our civilization and of the special functions of secondary education.* No amount of skill in the techniques of administration and of teaching can lead to maximum effectiveness unless planned with the ideal of our society clearly and steadily in mind. The philosophy of society has often been too abstract to affect the daily work of teachers, and in consequence the schools have been remote from the real purposes for which theoretically they were established and maintained. Although there may be a lack of agreement on precisely what is the philosophy of the society in which we live, the principal, the responsible leader of the faculty, should have at least a working understanding of what is generally accepted. And this he must share with the teachers, accepting such modification as they cogently propose, in order that their work may have the soundest foundation possible. Even though this philosophy cannot be developed completely in any secondary school faculty, every approximation to understanding and acceptance leads to a more intelligent program of work by every teacher. The extent to which this purpose is sought will be limited by the competence of the principal and by the intellectual maturity of the teachers, but in no school should it be neglected.[1] Although a principal can be of much service in improving instruction without knowledge of the philosophy of society, he can build the soundest foundation for the development of his professional self and the program of the school only by attempting to understand and to use it.

Similarly the special functions of the secondary school, with its responsibility for contributing to the welfare of society, should be understood by every faculty. Obviously such functions cannot be developed unless an accepted philosophy of our civilization is first understood, but it is not difficult to build up at least a beginning realization of what the special functions should be. They will be one thing under fascism and another under democracy. Without agreement on them, teachers can make the school contribute effectively to neither; it will continue to be influenced by the decreasingly meaningful traditions of the past more than by the significant hopes for the future. These functions are discussed at some length in the report of the Committee on the Orientation of Secondary Education.[1]

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[1] One helpful reference for beginning a study of the philosophy of our society is *The Social-Economic Goals for America,* National Education Association, 1934.

2. *To enlarge the teachers' concept of the meaning of education.* Secondary school teachers are likely to emphasize in their thinking the mastery of a determined body of subject-matter as the objective of education, whereas this is, or should be, merely a means to an end. Education is far more comprehensive than intellectual learning, however important that may be. It includes physical, aesthetic, emotional, and moral development as well, and frequently the concomitant learnings in classrooms are more important than what is prescribed in the course of study. No education is of real significance unless it eventuates in a changed life; therefore teaching should always look beyond learning to its application. Keeping teachers' attention focused on the purposes of education—first the ultimate and then the contributing immediate purposes—is fundamental to good supervision. These purposes give meaning to the experiences in education and to the methods employed.

3. *To bring about a consciousness on the part of teachers of the problems that youth have in attempting to become effective members of society, and to help teachers continuously to help youth in solving these problems.* Adults tend to forget what the aspirations and problems of youth are, and as they change it is difficult for many teachers to get a sympathetic understanding of them. But it is highly important that teachers should not only realize youth's aspirations and problems but also that they be sympathetic with them. No one can be taught effectively unless he is understood; no one is really receptive of teaching unless he believes the teacher sympathizes with him in his ideals and ambi-

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[1] *Bulletin 64,* Department of Secondary School Principals of the National Education Association, January, 1937.

tions, and appreciates the difficulties he must surmount. The principal can contribute greatly to the creation of a hospitable atmosphere for education if he continually attempts to stimulate teachers to learn youth's aspirations before striving to substitute higher ones, and to realize the problems youth faces before developing acceptable solutions. In the truest sense, no one can solve another person's problems. But teachers can help youth so to solve immediate problems that they learn how better to solve later ones for themselves. Such help is possible only if the problems are first understood. The supervisor should constantly help teachers to keep in mind that the ultimate end is the fitting of youth into the society in which he is to live.

4. *To bring about a realization of local conditions and needs.* Education is not abstract from the community. It cannot be effectively and fully outlined by " authorities " who are remote from the conditions in which it is to be given. Though perhaps less than in the more elementary grades, secondary education should be highly concerned that its program contributes to the satisfaction of needs local in nature. Every community does not afford grand opera at first hand or museums of art and science, but every community does have its own interests and needs in the fields of music, art, and science; and unless these are kept in mind education will tend to concern itself exclusively with the contingent needs of those citizens who may possibly move to the richer cities. Many small communities have impoverished themselves by furnishing an education that only fires youth to move away to richer fields, instead of making the most of local conditions or improving them. The greater the possibilities of contributing to the betterment of the local community, the less likely individuals are to migrate. The supervisor has an opportunity for large service by keeping before teachers a realization of local conditions and needs and also the environment that affects the learning by each boy and each girl. The principal may not know the community as well as some of the teachers do, but he can perform this service nevertheless.

5. *To unify the teachers into a team, all working with intelligent and appreciative coöperation to achieve the same general goals.* Like many other professional people, teachers are highly individualistic. The organization and administration of secondary

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schools especially tend to make them so. One teacher is employed to teach mathematics, another to teach music; and their work confines them for most of the school day in separate rooms with pupils who pass at the ringing of a bell to other uncorrelated fields of learning. And yet all teachers are expected to seek the same general educative goals. Teamwork will result only if the supervisor keeps these goals constantly before all the teachers, if he leads each one to direct his work constantly toward them, if he makes it possible for each teacher to know and respect the plans and contributions of all the others, and if he stimulates coöperation of every possible kind. One of the most disintegrating influences in secondary schools today is the relative ignorance and the consequent disrespect that some teachers have for the work of others in different curriculum fields. For an effective school to function the teachers must have the same educational goals, a community of interests and problems, and mutual respect, all of which lead to closer correlation and coöperation.

6. *To ascertain the work in which each teacher is most successful and in which he is capable of most growth toward still greater successes.* As will be argued at more length later, the highest achievement of a school is effected rather by the capitalization of peculiar strengths than by the building up of weaknesses. Every person is weak in some respects, and though he can be helped in a measurable degree to overcome some weaknesses, he is not likely to be outstandingly successful because of this kind of growth. To this statement there are of course exceptions, especially in the case of some beginning teachers. Every person, too, has peculiar strengths and aptitudes, the direction and development of which will make him of the greatest possible worth to the school. One developed strength is worth a dozen improved weaknesses.

It is a prime duty of the principal first to discover what talents a teacher possesses or the respects in which he has the greatest possibilities of growth, and then to make such assignment as will give the maximum opportunity for the exercise and growth of these potentialities. Discovery may lead to the reassignment of a teacher to another subject or to another group of pupils—the backward or the bright, the young or the mature, the wayward or the well-behaved—with whom he is likely to be most effective. More often it will merely indicate an activity that may be encouraged and directed within the existent assignment. One teacher may show unusual strength or promise in diagnosing pupils' difficulties and helping them where help is most needed, another may be successful in putting heart into discouraged pupils or stimulating the lazy or the ambitious, and another may be especially skillful in the techniques of teaching. Often teachers are not aware of their peculiar gifts, which may be discovered by a penetrating observer. When they are led to appreciate their own power and possibilities, they inevitably feel a consequent ambition and responsiveness to such help as can be given. When a principal finds especial capabilities in a teacher, he has an opportunity and a challenge not only to encourage but also to give them such stimulation and direction as he is capable of devising.

7. *To induct new teachers into the school and into the profession.* Recall of one's own experience or observation of the experiences of others when entering a classroom for the first time as teachers will bring a realization of the importance of this purpose. "Beginning teachers are apt to be harassed by the least important details of their work. They practice the art of teaching not infrequently out of an experience in the classrooms in which they were pupils. It is difficult for them to carry their philosophy of education or their knowledge of the science of teaching into their own classroom procedures. They become slaves to routine; they may not appreciate their own strength. Their professional life is dependent upon a sympathetic leader who guides, restrains, and stimulates them during their period of probation."[1] If a beginning teacher is prepared for his specific work and inducted into it with courage and confidence, many difficulties will be avoided later. The help that a principal can give before teaching begins and during its early stages will pay dividends during the teacher's entire career, not only in greater effectiveness but also in greater receptivity to later help that will be available.

8. *To translate theory into practice.* It is not difficult to learn verbal statements of the theory of education and the techniques of teaching, but it is quite another thing to put them into prac-

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[1] *The Superintendent Surveys Supervision,* p. 10. Eighth Yearbook of the Department of Superintendence of the National Education Association, 1930.

tice, especially to make the practice habitual. The principal as a supervisor must first see that satisfactory theories are both understood and accepted, and then he has an unending responsibility to help teachers translate them into practice. He will need to use group meetings, individual conferences, and all the other means of supervision at his disposal. It is not to be expected that he has either the knowledge of subject-matter or the skill to translate theory into practical plans in every field, but he does have the responsibility to encourage and stimulate each teacher under his direction to do this.

9. *To furnish immediate help with difficulties that threaten disaster.* The implication in this statement is that many of the difficulties experienced by teachers are quite natural and relatively unimportant. Some of them will be overcome in time by the teachers' own ingenuity; attention to others can be safely postponed in favor of more important constructive supervision. But there are difficulties, some of which the teachers do not themselves realize, that not only endanger the teacher's effectiveness but also undermine the effectiveness of the entire program. Minor ones can often be cleared up by a suggestion or even by arbitrary direction. What teacher does not recall the gratitude felt when his principal gave him immediate help in a time of trouble? Other major difficulties may require extended coöperative work by both principal and teacher. " There is an obligation, whenever the teacher has failed, for the supervisor to present, both theoretically and through some sort of demonstration, the successful procedure." Sometimes it is wise to avoid difficulties altogether by the transfer of troublesome pupils to a class in which they may be better cared for.

The source of difficulty is usually in those teachers who are not bad enough to be discharged before the end of the year and yet not promising enough to be retained permanently. As they will continue in the school at least for several months, the wise principal will afford such immediate help as he can in justice to his other obligations; but when his judgment of the weakness and lack of promise in a teacher is finally determined, he should not allow any mawkish sentiment to force him into giving an inordinate amount of his time to the hopeless effort. He would very much better till more fertile soil. Help to teachers who are weak in some respects but strong and promising in others will result in a far greater yield.

10. *To make teachers receptive to help.* The first step in achieving this purpose is to make teachers conscious of their opportunities and their consequent needs. This consciousness often exists in respect to such matters as the need of help to get better attention and study from pupils, to make better assignments, or to frame better questions. But the greater need of making a subject contribute to the larger ends of education and to the betterment of the community will emerge after purposes earlier discussed are sought. Other needs will be revealed in observation and in conferences. A consciousness of need is not sufficient, however. To be receptive to help teachers must realize the harm that results from inefficiency in any degree, the opportunities for more effective achievement, and the competence of the supervisor. The appreciation of competence will come only from demonstration. Help in one need makes possible help in others. The principal may well be content to begin simply with help in some matter that he considers not highly important but on which he feels an assured competence, in order to make a teacher hospitable in more important needs. Supervisory help should seldom be considered as something handed down; it should rather come from coöperation by the teacher and principal in an attempt to devise means for making the work better and more assuredly effective of the objectives of education.

11. *To help teachers to analyze critically their own activities.* No help from an outside source is likely to be of lasting value. The only means of steady and continuous growth on the part of a teacher results from ability to recognize needs and opportunities and to plan for the future in terms of ideals and general principles. It is more difficult, as a rule, to analyze one's own activities and appraise their strength and weakness than to analyze another's. Therefore the supervisor, knowing the principles of education and experienced in observation, can be of great help to a teacher by discussing his work and gradually developing with him a pattern for analysis. This will be facilitated in some instances by the use of check lists and rating sheets prepared by others, but it is most likely to be used if coöperatively made in light of approved and accepted principles of good teaching. Even then the teacher will need repeated

help in learning to apply this honestly in analysis of his own teaching. Help can best be given in the conference following one or more observations.

12. *To make teachers ambitious to grow into the greatest possible professional effectiveness.* The best beginning for the achievement of this purpose is not to emphasize present weaknesses but rather to present the ideal and the possibilities. Here is the opportunity to use demonstration lessons, directed visits to observe superior teaching, and literature that reports unusually good practices. If the principal will set up by all possible means an appreciation of effective teaching, either as practiced by others or as possible theoretically, he will have laid the foundation for helping teachers build their own ambitions. The ideal should not at first be set so high as to result in discouragement; it should be gradually developed to make every teacher willing and eager to take the next step forward. This means that advance will be now in one detail of teaching, now in another. One does not grow in teaching effectiveness, any more than in morals, by moving forward the whole front simultaneously. However effective example may be, one can safely argue that the best stimulus to professional ambition results from appreciation of possibilities that exist in the ideal accepted for education.

13. *To help teachers plan a long-term program of growth.* After the stimulus to professional growth has become effective and effort has produced results in concrete instances, a teacher should be ready to plan a program extending over several years. If the principal has been alert to discover the teacher's special aptitudes, he will be enabled out of wider experience and knowledge to give counsel as to the directions in which the growth should be encouraged and as to the sources of greatest possible help. These sources may be the principal himself working coöperatively with the teacher, especially on simple experiments that can be conducted with the classes in hand, study of available literature in extension classes or summer schools, or directed visiting to observe the skilled work of other teachers or their ventures into new fields of subject-matter, method, guidance, and social direction. Real talent, however humble, when coupled with an aroused ambition should have a plan extending far into professional life.

14. *To stimulate cultural growth.* Every person who is a teacher is also an individual with an intellectual and aesthetic life outside the schoolroom. The richer this life, the happier he will be and the more effective his teaching can become. Every teacher should be so in love with the subject to which he is assigned that stimulation to further study in the field far beyond that demanded in the classroom should not be difficult. Evidence of interest in the field repeatedly expressed by the principal, sincere questions asked, and contacts made for the teacher with others who have interest and expert knowledge will go far toward awakening even a dormant ambition. When teachers make a hobby of intellectual life, whether or not directly related to the field of teaching, they accumulate a store of knowledge and an enthusiasm that not only enriches their teaching but also arouses ambition in many of their pupils. Interests beget interests, and a teacher without enthusiasms has little chance of kindling a flame in the boys and girls assigned to him.

15. *To ascertain and bring about needed changes in organization and administration that will facilitate effective teaching.* Neither organization nor administration has importance except as they contribute to the educational effectiveness of the school. It should be the duty of a principal to be constantly on the lookout for defects of both that hamper good teaching and for changes that will facilitate improvement. In observation of classroom instruction no less than from teachers' complaints and suggestions, he will learn how better to organize the school and to make changes in administration that will remove obstacles or irritations and clear the road for the teacher. It may be a matter of supplies or using the library and laboratories or the passing of classes or making reports, or any one of the dozens of details so frequently entered on score cards without considering the influence on a teacher's state of mind or contribution to learning.

16. *To help teachers to improve their techniques of teaching.* After teachers have come to realize their need for improvement and to appreciate some ideals of skillful instruction, they will be receptive to help in improving themselves. Every teacher has his own needs, but those most receptive to help from the principal are the ones who look for further growth in manifested

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