

Supervision for Excellence

By Don Weatherall

The uniqueness of Seventh-day Adventist education and the philosophy by which Adventist schools are conducted necessitate that educators in these schools have specific training and a special commitment to Christian education as well as a personal relationship with God.

To the teacher is committed a most important work—a work upon which he should never enter without careful and thorough preparation. He should feel the sacredness of his calling and give himself to it with zeal and devotion.¹

Inherent in this commitment is the need to provide efficient and meaningful instruction for the young people in Adventist schools. To facilitate this, effective supervision of instruction is a must.

Definition of Supervision

Supervision is an ongoing participatory, diagnostic, and cooperative process or transaction between the supervisor and the teacher. It produces new insights and practices aimed at improving instruction and ultimately affects student learning. Kimball Wiles narrows the definition of supervision even more: “Supervision is a *service* activity that exists to help teachers do their job better.”²

Improvement of instruction, then, is the main objective of supervision. All supervisory activities must focus on assisting

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The superintendent and teacher should see their relationship as a partnership.

teachers as they help young people learn more effectively.

Other objectives of supervision include:

- Establishing an atmosphere in which the teacher feels accepted and at ease.
- Providing a high quality of educational experiences for students.
- Providing opportunities for teachers to define problems, then discover and implement solutions.
- Providing a procedure for evaluating and changing programs.
- Assuring a measure of teacher success in the classroom, thereby fostering job satisfaction.

In order to most effectively improve instruction, a relationship of mutual commitment and trust that foster change and growth must be created and maintained

between a knowledgeable supervisor and the teacher. If the teacher is convinced that he or she will benefit from the observation and analysis of his or her teaching, then a closer relationship can be developed, and the quality of instruction will improve.³

Basically, a good supervision program consists of four parts: (1) good rapport with teachers, (2) well-developed observation skills, (3) the ability to conduct productive conferences, and (4) the development of a good follow-up program.

Supervision Problems in SDA Schools

Before discussing the four items listed above, we need to take a brief look at some problems inherent in the Seventh-day Adventist educational system that the supervisor of an elementary or secondary program must recognize and solve in his or her own particular work setting. Some of these difficulties include the following:

1. *Preparation.* Often the superintendent or principal's experience, formal education, or job orientation have not prepared him or her to be a classroom supervisor.

2. *Time limitations.* The superintendent or principal's administrative duties may demand so much time that supervision of the instruction program may receive little or no attention.

3. *Evaluation versus supervi-*

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sion. The structure of the SDA school system presents a special problem because the teacher is often hired by the individual who subsequently supervises him or her. This creates a stressful situation because the teacher has trouble determining whether the supervisor's evaluation is for the purpose of continued employment or to help improve instruction. If the supervisor is a superintendent or principal, this factor must be recognized and dealt with in order to successfully evaluate teachers.

4. *Conference limitations.* Many conferences have only a few teachers but cover a wide geographical area, while others have a large number of teachers but must operate with an inadequate office staff. These factors make any kind of follow-up program difficult or nearly impossible.

Setting the Stage

Both the supervisor and teacher must perceive the supervisor's role as that of a helper. In order for them to develop mutual confidence and trust, rapport needs to be established and developed through a variety of techniques and activities.

One of the best ways for a supervisor to develop rapport with teachers is to be personable, kind, and considerate. Activities such as welcoming new teachers, sending them personal notes, going out of one's way to talk to and show interest in them, and being willing to listen are noticed, remembered, and appreciated by teachers. The importance of such activities cannot be overstated.

During an early in-service meeting or during the orientation given to new teachers, the program of supervision should be described in detail. Teachers need to know the purpose of supervision, what to expect and how to react when they

are being observed. They need to be told in advance about formal conferences and the procedures involved when they occur. Such information will help alleviate uncomfortable feelings.

The Classroom Visit

Whether or not to inform the teacher of the supervisor's visit depends on the purpose of the visit. If the supervisor is just passing by to say hello and bring a word of encouragement, then notification is not necessary. However, if the teacher has called and requested a visit, then a definite day and, if possible, a time should be set.

Supervisors differ in methods of dealing with routine evaluation visits. Some supervisors say that teachers should never know when they will be visited, as the supervisor wants to observe a regular school day or period when nothing special has been planned. Others say that teachers should always know of the visit in advance so that they can do their best teaching job while being observed. Under this plan, a teacher who does a good job while being observed can presumably be expected to do a good job when not being evaluated. Conversely, if the teacher knows the supervisor is coming and still has a hard time, the supervisor will be in a much better position to offer assistance. Probably the best method would be a combination of the two approaches, with the personality of the teacher and the rapport that has been established offering guidance in making a decision.

The rapport existing between the teacher and supervisor also determines what the supervisor will do during the observation. A good rule to follow is, "See as much as possible as unobtrusively as possible." Experienced supervisors

have found that they make better observations when they understand the following generalizations:

1. A more accurate picture results when the observer concentrates on the students and their responses rather than on what the teacher does.

2. Observations will be more valid if the supervisor looks for trends in instruction rather than isolated instances of poor pedagogy.

3. The supervisor must never take over the classroom or use the class as a lab to "show the teacher how to do it correctly."

In observing the classroom, the teacher, and the students, the supervisor must be careful lest he or she leave the visit having only a rather nebulous idea of what actually took place. The following suggestions, while not all inclusive, offer an example of the type of items to observe:

- What is the feeling or tone of the classroom?
- Do the teacher and students seem relaxed with one another?
- Is there evidence that Christ is central to the teaching and learning?
- Is the classroom a "fun place" for children?
- Is the teacher involved in instruction rather than just supervising the completion of lessons?
- Have sound classroom management procedures been established?
- Are students on task?

Lastly, it is important that the supervisor recognize good teaching techniques as well as the components of a good lesson. Supervisors have found the four questions listed below helpful in determining the quality of teaching occurring in the classroom:

1. Did the teacher center on one objective?

2. Were the objective and materials appropriate to the achievement levels of the students?

3. How did the teacher facilitate learning?

4. What did the teacher do that interfered with learning?

Evaluating these four areas each time a teacher is observed will help a supervisor determine whether optimal teaching/learning occurs in that classroom and will provide background information for the supervisory conference.

Many supervisors have found checklists, report forms, and other types of worksheets useful in recording observations. These can be marked during the observation and used during the conference as a guide to discussion.

For additional information regarding the items in the lists above, see the concluding section of this article.

The Supervisory Conference

This conference, which occurs after a period of observation, allows the supervisor to share with the teacher what he or she has seen in the classroom. Even if the visit has revealed no areas of concern, the conference should be held to encourage the teacher to continue his or her excellent program.

The conference should take place as soon as possible after the observation with sufficient time allocated for the discussion. It should be held in a quiet, private room, free from interruptions.

The rapport existing between teacher and supervisor provides an important ingredient in the conference. *The attitudes of the supervisor, as perceived by the teacher, will be more important than the techniques used.* The supervisor's role is to support and assist the teacher in evaluating and improving instruction.

To avoid misunderstanding, the

supervisor needs to recognize that effective communication consists of an accurate sending and receiving of both verbal and nonverbal signals. In general, informal communication will prove least threatening. The supervisor can discuss his or her observations, ask questions, and ask for the teacher's reactions to the items discussed.

In conducting a conference, then, the supervisor needs to:

- radiate warmth and friendliness.
- demonstrate empathy and compassion.
- build on the teacher's strengths rather than stressing weaknesses.
- protect the teacher's ego.
- demonstrate competence and credibility while not being judgmental.
- elicit opinions from the teacher.
- establish a balance between frankness and tact.
- *listen.*

Most teachers want to improve and therefore welcome the supervisor's suggestions and advice. With such teachers, a nondirective approach works best. However, some teachers have difficulty perceiving the concerns of the supervisor. They become defensive and imply either by word or action that there is no cause for concern. In such cases, the supervisor may need to become more directive, assuming a major responsibility for identifying ineffective teaching practices and assigning remedial techniques. Dealing with the reluctant teacher requires special tact and skill.

A knowledgeable supervisor will always have at his or her fingertips a list of books, filmstrips, and magazine articles dealing with a variety of teaching techniques. Relating one's own experiences in teaching can be helpful, but when

a problem area appears, it is also useful to be able to pull out a copy of an article and say, "Here is the latest research on this technique." By so doing, the supervisor will greatly strengthen his or her position and will be able to assist the teacher in implementing the latest techniques in classroom instruction.

When the recommendations for improving instruction have been discussed and agreed upon by both the supervisor and teacher, the conference should be concluded. In doing so, the supervisor should follow these steps:

1. Agree on a procedure or plan for following through on the recommendations.

2. Provide in writing a description of the discussion including the recommendations and the plan for carrying them out.

3. Quickly review the items discussed, making sure that the conference ends on a positive note.

4. Close the conference with prayer.

Additional information regarding supervisory conferences will be given at the conclusion of the article.

Follow-up

Although follow-up is a must in classroom supervision, implementing it may present problems. In a senior academy this may not present difficulties, but if a conference supervisor must observe teachers in schools several hundred miles apart, the problems in developing adequate follow-up programs can become almost insurmountable. Here are a few techniques and suggestions for effective follow-up:

1. *Letters.* When specific directives are agreed upon during the conference, these directives should be clearly reiterated in a letter to

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the teacher, along with the time frame within which they will go into effect. The supervisor should plan another visit at the end of the

allotted time to determine whether the directives have been implemented.

2. *Telephone calls.* A phone call can further the establishment of rapport or offer encouragement regarding any suggestions the supervisor made.

3. *Follow-up visits.* Of course, all teachers should receive routine visits as often as possible, but if a potentially serious situation has developed or may develop, the supervisor may need to return to one school or classroom several times in a short period of time.

4. *Other possibilities.* Occasionally it might be helpful to have a fellow teacher visit the classroom where the problem is occurring or have a teacher in difficulty visit another school to observe and talk with other educators who can offer help and guidance.

What a Teacher May Expect From the Supervisor

A teacher may look for help from the supervisor in a number of areas:

1. The supervisor should act as a resource person for information about supplemental material, sources for audio-visual equipment and supplies, and types of tests for students with specific learning problems.

2. If requested, the supervisor should be able to observe specific students, listening to them read, testing as needed, and helping the teacher plan an individualized learning program for them.

3. The teacher should be able to call a supervisor at any time asking for counsel or even a visit to the school within a reasonable length of time.

4. Quite often a teacher has no one in the local church to whom he or she feels close enough to share personal problems. As a result, the supervisor may serve as

a personal confidant who offers counsel regarding decisions ranging from the purchase of cars, how to deal with social dilemmas, and techniques for handling personal finances wisely.

A teacher should be able to expect that the supervisor is there to help, wants to help, and is able to help.

In Conclusion

Space has not allowed for any section of this article to be covered in depth. Areas discussed above represent only an overview of the work of a supervisor. For supervisors or others desiring additional information, the NAD Office of Education has prepared two documents that will be of assistance. The first is *Improvement of Instruction Through Supervision*, which was issued in 1982. It describes briefly the various methods of supervision and includes a variety of forms that can be used for classroom observation. The second source is *A Manual for Supervision of SDA Schools*, which will be available late in 1985. This manual is a down-to-earth, step-by-step guide for the SDA classroom supervisor. These documents can be obtained from any union office of education. □

FOOTNOTES

¹ Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1943), p. 229.

² Kimball Wiles, *Supervision for Better Schools* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967), p. 5. (Italics supplied.)

³ Thomas L. McGreal, "Effective Teacher Evaluation Systems," *Educational Leadership* (January, 1982), p. 305.

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