

# **PLANS AND PEOPLE: The Role of the Supervisor**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In rapidly expanding education systems where national plans are the order of the day and education is considered to be the answer to so many problems, what thought is given to the means by which plans are translated into action? The classroom is a long way from the planner's office and what has been so carefully designed at headquarters may have undergone a radical change by the time it reaches the school. This transformation is often the result of a gap between planner and teacher. The teacher needs guidance to enable him/her to implement the new patterns. Where will such guidance be found?

The vital link between thinking and doing is the inspector/supervisor who has the dual responsibility of stimulating interest in new proposals and providing the necessary professional support to implement them. He must try to enlist the active co-operation of heads and teachers in order to create an atmosphere in which their joint confidence, competence and self-reliance develop and in which their schools will be alive and flourishing. As H.B. Holst has said, "I believe that the central function of an inspector of schools is simply that of guiding, as well as he can, the efforts of the teachers to serve children in the schools."<sup>1</sup> This is the ideal. But is the inspector competent to play this role?

## **THE DILEMMA**

Concern over the content and methods of teacher education programmes has been growing in recent years and much thought has been given to the role of the teacher and how he should be prepared. Those responsible for the development of the education system have begun to realise that the quality of education depends on the quality of teachers and some initiative has been taken to examine and improve the quality of teacher education.<sup>2</sup> Even so, progress has been slow and much of the work has been no more than trial and error. Nevertheless, some professional effort has been made to provide relevant training for teachers at all stages in their development. This

need for quality professional growth has not yet been fully appreciated for inspector/supervisors, nor, in many countries, for heads of schools.

Usually inspectors/supervisors are chosen from the ranks of successful headteachers with little effort made to define the criteria for selecting them and for their particular training needs. They are chosen because they are effective heads or next in line for promotion. Consequently the inspectorate in so many areas has not been prepared adequately for its role in schools and society, both of which are constantly changing and making new demands. The teacher has been seen as the prime target in the struggle for quality; but the inspector's competence has been taken for granted with little thought being given to equipping him for the job, yet with unreasonable expectations being made of his influence and his ability to support heads and teachers professionally.

The role of the inspector has evolved from the early days of mass education when *the system* had to be established and upheld. Initially the inspector was the overseer, ensuring that society was getting value for money and that teachers were jumping through the right hoops. The relationship between inspector and teacher was more that of master and servant than that of professional colleagues. Duties were clearly, if negatively, defined and inspectors had little occasion to exercise discretion and vary procedures. The emphasis on teacher assessment and the judge/executioner function of the inspectorate, the resulting formal relationship with little mutual respect, and the fear felt by teachers of 'authority' in the shape of 'the inspector' still influence relationships even today.

With the changing expectations which society has of its schools and teachers and with new approaches to teaching, the need arises for inspectors who can adjust to the changing relationships between schools and society and who can provide sound professional support for heads and teachers. This more flexible relationship is developing in many areas but often it comes about more by accident than by design. Methods of teaching and learning have changed but 'the visitation' in the shape of inspectors and inspection has remained static. Deliberate plans to prepare inspectors for their varied and challenging roles are rare. Is this largely because in the transfer from being a successful head to being an inspector, the headteacher is assumed to have assimilated all the qualities of a successful inspector and will thus continue to develop by divine intervention rather than through deliberate preparation and renewal? It is, after all, probably easier to be an educational policeman than a professional catalyst.

In some areas, inspectors are carrying out their duties to the letter but stifling individual initiative on the part of heads and staffs because profess-

ionally they themselves are insecure. The inspectors themselves are often not to blame. The widening gap between the inspectorate and serving teachers often comes about because the administration, the training colleges and the supervisory body do not co-ordinate their activities. Thus, when new developments are recommended they are not always fully known or clearly understood by inspectors who have to 'pass them down the line'. They then feel professionally insecure, unable to guide and support the school staffs who have to implement such developments.

There is a need in many countries for assumptions concerning inspectors and inspection to be re-examined so that the inspectorate sees its role clearly and feels that it is justified. So often attitudes and behaviour fossilise and continue to be displayed with little relevance to changing situations. "We've always done it this way" is a slogan for stagnation.

Good professional preparation and continuing development are, then, essential for the inspection and supervisory services: essential if the inspector and the system are to grow in quality. The problem is to define the present role of the inspector and to evolve ways of preparing him to play his role effectively.

## **THE ROLE**

The role of the inspector is changing and the rigid patterns of the past are being eroded, but in this period of transition there are many uncertainties and it is necessary for the inspector to assess his present role clearly if he is to be effective in the schools. What are some of the influences that shape his role and how far are they in conflict?

The influences come from the administration, the schools, parents and society, not to mention the inspector himself. Each of these has expectations of the inspector and the expectations are sometimes at variance. Ideally, the inspector's role should be defined after due consultation; this would enable him to make the most effective contribution to educational development, since what is expected of him must be known before he will be able to move towards achieving those expectations.

The administration sees him as a link between officials and the schools, an interpreter of policies and an agent for implementing change where this is required.

Heads and teachers look for support and guidance but are also aware that

he is the representative of authority and are therefore unsure which of these roles he will follow. The relationship with schools can be uneasy, especially if the inspector does not see his responsibilities clearly defined.

Parents are usually anxious that their children succeed in their examinations. They may therefore expect the inspector to enforce the old ways which teach the 'what' to pass examinations, but not the 'how' and 'why' which are the essence of modern educational thought.

These conflicting pressures must be resolved and in addition the inspector has to think out his own attitudes and decide on his own priorities and responsibilities. It is essential that the inspector sees the need for what he is doing and can justify his own existence in the system.

There are also the problems of how far the inspector is independent and able to initiate and innovate; whether he is there only to pass on information and maintain the stability of the school or whether he should try to stimulate and encourage heads and staff to take initiatives and develop professionally. Is he a passive or an active interpreter? Is he afraid of being surpassed professionally? Or can he be satisfied to have been the catalyst which has set in motion developments which sometimes go beyond his own competence?

All these doubts and questions demonstrate how necessary it is for *the role* to be clearly defined, with sufficient flexibility to give discretion to the inspector so that he is involved in the role-definition, rather than being a passive instrument manipulated by others.

Education is concerned with people. It is a social process. The inspector should, therefore, see his role as one that has as first priority the understanding of the needs of people and the provision of resources to meet those needs.

In the light of these expectations, what training programmes can be designed to provide inspectors with the professional skills required to enable them to be more effective and to develop personal confidence and competence?

## **THE PATTERN FOR TRAINING**

Once the need for inspectors/supervisors has been established and their role defined, the next problem is to ensure that they have the competence to carry out their responsibilities. The particular needs may differ from country

to country but is there a core of expertise that remains common and which a training programme can develop?

First, the *need* for training must be accepted by all concerned. The important concept is that training for professional development has to be a continuous process; there should be opportunities for the progressive widening of on-the-job experience, for self-development and for professional development off-the-job through courses, seminars and workshops. Responsibility lies with the employing agency which should provide the facilities and encouragement, ideally in response to requests from the inspectorate.<sup>3</sup>

The whole process should be aimed at building confidence and professional expertise as required by the 'customers' and the employers. There will not be a once-for-all preparation which so often results in people returning to their jobs with unrealistic expectations. All the time there should be close links between research, development and training with a constant interaction to keep the needs of the schools well to the fore. The inspector/supervisor must have training that is professional; he must know not only what to do but why he does it.

To provide a detailed schedule for training programmes is neither easy nor desirable; each area and individual will have different problems and needs. Guidelines may be defined, however, within which a programme can be developed. The following issues are suggested:

- (1) **The Changing Role of the Supervisor** — an appraisal of the role and responsibilities of the supervisor and an attempt to resolve conflicting expectations.
- (2) **Supervision and Development in the Schools** — the interaction of supervisors with schools and their influence on growth, change and quality.
- (3) **Introducing Change and Innovation** — problems of maintaining stability and encouraging change.
- (4) **Planning and Practice** — planning for the professional development of school staffs and organising training programmes.
- (5) **Professional Development — Needs and Priorities** — what are the needs of the supervisory staff and what particular expertise is required for effective performance? How best can inspectors/supervisors be prepared to meet these demands and who is responsible for the programme?

Are not the basic skills required in all these areas an understanding of how

to work with people, of good human relations reinforced by a sound knowledge of administrative skills, that is, the 'how' and the 'why' as well as the 'what'? People are important, as Alec Dickson confirms, "The nature of the operation changes subtly when in fact it is the utilisation of people which becomes your priority and not just productivity."<sup>4</sup> The inspector is fortunate to be concerned primarily with people and he should remember this always so that he can associate himself with the instructions given to HMIS in 1840 by Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth:

"One main object of your visit is to afford them your assistance in all efforts for improvement in which they may desire your aid: but you are in no respect to interfere with the institution, management or discipline of the schools or to press upon them any suggestion that they may be disinclined to receive.... When a system of inspection aided by public grant is for the first time brought into operation, it is of the utmost consequence that you should bear in mind that this inspection is not intended as a means of exercising control but of affording assistance; that it is not to be regarded as operating for the restraint of local efforts but for their encouragement; and that its chief objectives will not be attained without the school committees; the Inspector having no power to interfere and not being instructed to offer any advice or information excepting where it is invited."<sup>5</sup>

Is this the situation towards which the inspector/supervisor ought still to be working and will his training help him to achieve this end?

We must also not forget that training programmes depend on the quality of the staff carrying out the process of training.

"In all the planning for training, the quality of those who conduct courses is a key element. When it is hoped that the students will leave the course not only with a certain amount of technical ability but also with new attitudes of mind and a sharpened awareness of spirit, then what is asked of the course tutor is much more than straightforward knowledge and this makes him the more difficult to find. He has to agree that it is correct to open men's minds in this way and he must feel that the ultimate aim in doing so is worthwhile."<sup>6</sup>

## THE OUTCOME

If a training programme for inspectors is to be effective, it must involve the inspectors themselves and also seek to co-ordinate with teacher educators and administrators as well as heads and teachers. Thus, there will be a

pooling of effort and a sharing of ideas. Dickson again underlines this when he talks of the value of shared experiences and reminds us that it takes two to make a success of a job.

Until co-ordinated programmes for professional training are developed for all concerned with the quality of education in schools, we shall not effectively mobilise the full resources for stimulating and supporting professional growth and in consequence we shall not be "guiding as well as (we) can the efforts of teachers to serve children in schools." That is, if we believe that the inspector/supervisor is the link on which depends much of the success and quality of educational developments.

## REFERENCES

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6. Gibson, G.W. (1970), Conclusions after an experimental course for administrators, Papua New Guinea. Dr. Gibson is now in the Faculty of Education, University of Papua New Guinea.
7. Holst, H.B., **op.cit.**