

# WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE SUPERVISOR OF THE SMITH-HUGHES MAN?

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## Abstract

*Prior to the passage of the Smith-Hughes Act in 1917 there were essentially no statewide supervisory positions. Supervision was provided to agricultural education teachers by local principals and teacher educators. With the passage of the Smith-Hughes Act supervision became much more formal and oriented to rule enforcement. The objectives of this study included determining supervision in agricultural education prior to passage of the Smith-Hughes Act, determining how the Smith-Hughes Act influenced supervision, determining issues for supervision between 1930 and 1959, and determining issues for supervision between 1960 and 1980. Many decisions had to be made on not only the supervisor's role, but also on qualifications. The role evolved from one of the "ironfisted" supervisor to the consultant of the 1970s. The supervisory visit was not always welcomed by practicing teachers. Some viewed the position as doing what the teacher educator should be doing. The century is ending as it began with most of the supervision being provided by local administrators in the form of vocational directors and by teacher educators.*

## Introduction/Theoretical Framework

"Lonnie Maxwell, who taught science and agriculture, was a Smith-Hughes man; and his salary was a little more, since it was supplemented by the state" Circa 1930 (Stuart, 1950, p. 133).

"Boys, I don't care what you do today or what you did yesterday, but tomorrow I want you on your best behavior because that's when the state supervisor is coming to visit the vocational agriculture department" Circa 1961 (author).

For many years supervisors have played a prominent role in the development of the agricultural education program. The role has varied from informal to formal and from laissez faire to dictatorship. It has varied from legislative mandates to a more contemporary forced distance from the teacher and local program. The position has carried various titles such as supervisor and consultant. The role has sometimes been controversial, generally accepted, and sometimes merely tolerated. With several states having lost many of their state supervisory positions, it is time to examine the historical perspective of the

position of the supervisor and how it has changed over the years.

Nationwide, formal supervision in agricultural education began with passage of the Smith-Hughes Act. Charles Prosser (1918), Director of the Federal Board for Vocational Education, indicated his thoughts on the role of supervision as early as July 1918. Prosser distinguished between supervision and inspection: "Supervision through the idea of promotion of the work and inspection through the safeguarding of the funds" (p. 2). He went on to note that most schools would not meet all the standards considered essential for a successful program. He considered the job of the supervisor to be one of helping lift the program to the point of acceptance, not one of simply providing criticism and, subsequently, not approving it. He went on to write that his position would be controversial. "I know it is strongly criticized by those people who believe that every dollar of money ought to be rigidly accounted for" (p. 2).

Charles Prosser identified a fundamental issue that the agricultural education profession, in general, and supervisors, specifically, would struggle with from the beginning to the present

time. How would the supervisor's role be defined initially and to what would the role evolve?

### **Purpose/Objectives**

The purpose of this study was to document the changing role of the agricultural education supervisor. The specific objectives were to:

1. Determine how supervision was provided prior to passage of the Smith-Hughes Act.
2. Determine how the Smith-Hughes Act influenced supervision in agricultural education.
3. Determine the issues for supervision between 1930 and 1959.
4. Determine the issues for supervision between 1960 and 1980.

### **Methodology**

Historical research methods were utilized to accomplish the objectives of the study. Both primary and secondary sources were utilized to obtain the information needed. Primary sources included books, journal articles, doctoral dissertations, master's theses, federal law, minutes of a meeting, and bulletins. Secondary sources included magazine articles and books. Information was collected at numerous sites including the Library of Congress, National Education Library, National Agriculture Library, and various land-grant university libraries. All references were subjected to both internal and external criticism which tests for accuracy of material and to determine if the material examined was authentic.

### **Results**

#### Supervision Prior to the Smith-Hughes Act

While agricultural education existed in Congressional district agricultural schools, elementary schools, and some high schools prior

to passage of the 1917 Smith-Hughes Act, there was very little, if any state supervision at the time. What little agricultural education supervision existed was primarily provided by local administrators, typically the school principal (Field, 1929).

By 1912 proponents of federal vocational legislation recognized some of the important issues concerning supervision of teachers. As a supporter of the Page-Wilson bill, the National Society for the Promotion of Industrial Education (NSPIE) executive committee recommended that

... (4) an administrative scheme is established in which the Secretary of the Interior as the executive officer for the Act deals with one State Board for Vocational Education in each State which in turn must be given the power and responsibility by the State for the inspection and supervision of the schools receiving national grants; . . . (Minutes, 1912, p. 164)

NSPIE was advocating an important precedent which resulted in one board having authority over vocational education in each state. With the flow of federal money would come the responsibility of supervision which also would establish the authority of supervision and eventually the formal power of the state supervisor.

In 1952 Hawkins, Prosser, and Wright (as cited in Straquadine, Barrick, Case, & Miller, 1991) explained that some national leaders, prior to the passage of the Smith-Hughes Act believed that supervision was actually a function of teacher training.

Since supervision is, in the main, a teacher-training function, even through [sic] it deals with teachers who are already in service, it would seem advisable to make the teacher-training funds available for

the use of state boards in the maintenance of supervision as a phase of the teacher training. (p. 5)

While teacher educators were in short supply prior to 1917, unlike state supervisors, they did exist. The Nelson Amendment of 1907 provided federal support to land-grant universities to provide training for the purpose of teaching agricultural and mechanical arts. In 1908, \$25,000 was appropriated annually for its purpose (Wheeler, 1948). For statewide leadership and, at least informal supervision, it made sense for agricultural education teachers to turn to their teacher educators for assistance.

By the time of the passage of the Smith-Hughes Act, influential national leaders had decided that a more formal system of supervision was needed. The Act displayed such influence.

#### Supervision During the Smith-Hughes Era

The word supervision was mentioned 17 times in the Smith-Hughes Act (Vocational Education Act, 1917). In 1917 the Federal Board for Vocational Education issued a statement of policies in the form of Bulletin No. 1 for the primary purpose of assisting states in interpreting the provisions of the Smith-Hughes Act. The bulletin contained two references to general questions about supervision and seven questions specific to agricultural education. Examples of such questions and their answers are as follows:

II. May a person divide his time between supervision of agricultural subjects and the training of teachers of agriculture? If so, out of what Federal fund or funds may part of his salary be paid?

Answer. Yes; but a definite division of his time between supervision and teacher-training should be made at the outset of the fiscal year and adhered to. This is

necessary whether he receives all his salary through the State board or through a State institution or a part from each source. The accounts of the State should show both the division of his time and the source or sources of his salary.

IV. May the agricultural fund be spent for the salaries of supervisors or directors of agricultural subjects employed by the State rather than by local schools?

Answer. Yes, section 10 provides that any State may use the appropriation for agricultural purposes, either for the salaries of teachers in schools, or for salaries of supervisors or directors, under a plan of supervision for the State prepared by the State board and approved by the Federal board. (Statement of Policies, 1917, p. 37)

The next year after both passage of the Act and publication of the Statement of Policies, the Federal Board for Vocational Education established policies for the qualifications of supervisors. Bulletin No. 13 entitled Agricultural Education Organization and Administration (1918) emphasized that supervisors had to meet at least the same requirements as teachers. In addition to the appropriate background and a bachelor's degree, the supervisor was expected to have at least two years of teaching experience or supervisory experience. The bulletin reported that in the near future, it was quite probable that supervisors would have completed some graduate work.

As agricultural education supervisory work progressed, problems started to come into existence. By December of 1918, the Federal Board issued a publication with the rather pessimistic title of Agricultural Education Some Problems in State Supervision. The publication

noted the challenging task of the state supervisor. "The duties of the State supervisor are twofold. He must both render assistance to the teachers and at the same time check up their work" (Agricultural Education Some Problems, 1918, p. 5). The same bulletin indicated that not only was the state supervisor to work with teachers on an in-service basis, but also was to help communities where a desire had been stated to establish a new agricultural education program.

Acting in this capacity, provided he is administering a system of education in which the State has a responsibility for the success of conduct of a school, he is a policing officer charged with the duty of determining whether or not the school meets the standards set up for the State. This work is largely in the nature of inspection, and the responsibility for it is always increased where the State is putting money into the enterprise. (Agricultural Education Some Problems, 1918, p. 12)

The 1926 version of bulletin 13, Agricultural Education Organization and Administration, issued by the Federal Board for Vocational Education listed nine encompassing duties of the state supervisor of agricultural education:

1. The supervision of all schools receiving Federal money for the salaries of teachers or supervisors of agricultural subjects.
2. The supervision of all other schools or departments of agriculture in the State meeting the standards set up by the State board and approved by the Federal board, even though such schools are not to receive Federal aid.
3. The supervision of the training of teachers of agriculture.

4. Studying the agricultural conditions of the State and the school facilities of particular communities which seem best suited to the establishment of vocational schools or classes of agriculture.
5. The preparation from time to time of manuscripts for bulletins of information concerning the teaching of agriculture in schools or classes in a State and the setting forth of the possibilities of such instruction.
6. The preparation of reports for the State board concerning agricultural instruction in the State.
7. Holding conferences of teachers engaged in the teaching of agricultural subjects.
8. Promoting in other ways vocational agriculture in the State.
9. Assisting teachers of agriculture to improve their method of instruction. This improvement may be done by personal consultation, by conferences, by correspondence, and through publications. (p. 10)

By 1929, Field had identified some concerns with reference to letting the principal serve as the supervisor of agricultural education teachers. The first concern was that principals had little time for supervision of instruction. The second concern was that frequently principals were young and inexperienced; often the agricultural education teacher was more mature and more experienced. Thirdly, the agricultural education teacher had more education and background in agriculture than did the typical principal.

Field reported in his thesis (1929) that 54.3% of the state supervisors had bachelor's degrees, 42.9% had master's degrees, while 2.8% had some college, but no degrees. He went on to report that 76.3% of the state supervisors had

completed some graduate work. He noted that only 5.71% had less than one year of teaching experience. The median salary for a state supervisor was \$3,650, which Field noted compared favorably with others in educational work.

In the conclusion of his thesis Field (1929) recommended 10 important roles to be played by the state supervisor. Two of the 10 roles worked directly with instructional expertise on the part of the teacher. A typical statement was

The state supervisor would assume the major responsibility for the general conditions of the teaching in the state. He is to determine the general policies and plans of procedure in directing the learning activities of the people who come within the scope of the program of instruction in vocational agriculture. (p. 308)

Four of the roles had to do with working with the local supervisor. Two roles had the supervisor working with statewide standards and using them as a basis of comparison for local departments. One role was for the state supervisor to work directly with school departments where a local supervisor did not exist. The last role was to assist in the use of Smith-Hughes funds to stimulate local work.

#### Agricultural Education Supervision 1930- 1959

After a burst of activity with the initial development of agricultural education and its supervision, issues on what it should be like slowed down for a period of several years. By 1940 the qualifications for being a state supervisor had been elevated a bit. Twenty states required graduate training, with several states requiring a master's degree. All states had a requirement of farm experience with a range of some farm experience to 10 years. All but two state plans required vocational agriculture teaching experience, with a typical range of three to five

years (Swanson, 1940).

Typical of the 1950s was concern over the evolved role of supervisor. Mitchell (1952) examined the roles and duties of area supervisors in Texas and reported the results in his master's thesis. In his survey of teachers, superintendents, and supervisors, he found a one day visit per year to be inadequate, exceptions to rules for local level interests were beneficial (a minority of supervisors disagreed), and a majority believed the supervisor should not be concerned with the departmental inventory nor checking the teacher in or out of the department.

James Dougan (1954) reported, in his master's thesis, the desirability for some of the activities performed by supervisors. The subjects for his study consisted of practicing agricultural education teachers in Ohio. The data he reported were what percentage of the teachers found an activity desirable. More teachers preferred a once a year visit (58%) to twice a year visits (38%). More teachers preferred half day visits (65%) to full day visits (35%). Dougan noted that the more experienced teachers preferred the shorter visits. More teachers preferred the supervisor to observe two class periods (65%) than those who preferred observation of four class periods (29%). Dougan (1954) also asked what items should be used to evaluate a local program of vocational agriculture. The top six items, as determined by a weighted index, in order were (a) the farming program report, (b) student's project record book, (c) the program of instruction, (d) FFA program of activities, (e) teacher's summer program of activities, and (f) young and adult farmer reports.

In the mid 1950s Peterson and Swanson co-authored a publication for the Central Regional Research Committee on the functions of state supervisors. They identified the four major functions of the agricultural education supervisor, which illustrated the original Prosser identified dichotomy of supervision versus inspection; to be administration, public relations, improvement of instruction, and evaluation. Peterson and Swanson (1955) defined administration as ". . . that function

of state supervision in which the state supervisor of agricultural education represents the State Board of Education and carries out its policies on the organization and operation of agriculture education” (p. 12). Among the administrative functions identified for the state supervisor was approving departments of vocational agriculture only where a satisfactory program can be provided by having the facilities and equipment necessary. The same two authors defined evaluation as “Literally, evaluation means to ascertain the value or amount of any entity under study or review” (p. 29). The criteria suggested by the authors for consideration for evaluating local departments of vocational agriculture by supervisors included desirable changes in student learning; effectiveness of teaching method; organization of facilities and equipment for teaching; administrative organization and operation; and differences among teachers, supervisors, and communities.

Peterson and Swanson (1955) also noted the dual role conflict that had been represented over the years. “Traditionally, supervision was largely an inspection to determine the state of affairs” (p. 26). “Coercion openly dominated supervision” (p. 26). They noted that cooperation was a relatively recent entity. However, they further noted improvement of instruction activities that had either direct or indirect conflicts with the evaluation function. Such activities were improving the course of study and the curriculum, improving materials of instruction, and improving the factors related directly to instruction. There appears to have been a great deal of overlap between the functions of evaluation and improvement of instruction.

#### Issues for Supervision Between 1960 and 1980

Early in this time period Shroeder (1962) used the term consultant with reference to the supervisor’s position. In his dissertation he reported that teachers in the Pacific region perceived the ideal state supervisor as a consultant, while teachers in the other regions perceived their supervisors as stimulators. The same study found that teachers viewed supervisors

as needing to help with improvement of instruction more so than did the supervisors who were surveyed. Supervisors, on the other hand, gave more importance to their administrative role than did the teachers.

Edwin St. John (1970), state supervisor from Michigan, expressed concern over supervisors needing to make changes in the procedures and activities they followed. He noted that some state supervisors “. . . blew in, blew up, and blew out” (p. 165). He went on to discuss the old Prosser conflict of assisting teachers versus inspection. Part of his discussion was that teacher educators were in a better position to help teachers with the instruction part. He also reported a large increase in local supervisory assistance being available for teachers.

McMillion (1974) listed an array of possible titles for the position. The titles included supervisor, consultant, and director. He noted that other English speaking countries might use the term inspector. By that time more local vocational directors were being hired. McMillion indicated the local administrator is a “. . . relatively new position which did not exist in the days when state supervisors ‘ruled with an iron hand’ ” (p. 267).

McMillion (1974) went on to report the weakening of the positions of state supervisors and identified four reasons for such weakening. The reasons he identified were as follows:

- 1) holding the numbers of state supervisors constant while the number of teachers and students increased,
  - 2) designating supervisors as consultants and telling them not to go to local schools unless requested,
  - 3) assigning supervisors (consultants) to levels of instruction across fields rather than according to fields, and
  - 4) paying low beginning salaries for state supervisory positions.
- (p. 267)

Several writers viewed the answer to the lessening role of the state supervisor to be one of placing more emphasis on the local supervisor. Day (1974) suggested reimbursing and developing local supervisory personnel in order to continue excellence in agricultural education. Mutchelor (1974) described how local supervisors located in Ohio Vocational Education Planning Districts could provide assistance. He listed 17 objectives and activities the local supervisor could provide, many better than the state supervisor. McCracken (1974) also described the role of local supervisor and listed 15 tasks that could be completed.

The 1960 to 1980 era ended with many issues unresolved. There was little question that the role of the supervisor was diminished.

### **Conclusions/Recommendations/Implications**

The role of the state supervisor in agricultural education has changed dramatically. Prior to the passage of the Smith-Hughes Act there was virtually no state-wide supervision. The supervision was provided by local administrators and teacher educators.

With the passage of the Smith-Hughes Act, concern was expressed that the funds be spent wisely and such organizations as NSPIE sought a solution by having supervisors monitor the use of funds, among other things. At this time the new role of the agricultural education supervisor became formalized. This created the need for precedents to be set and qualifications to be established. The dual, and often conflicting roles, of the supervisor were difficult to fulfill. If supervisors were to provide instructional assistance to teachers, then teachers had to open up to them with their problems. At the same time, the supervisor had the responsibility of inspecting for weaknesses and making certain the government's money was being spent correctly. And after all, teacher educators were probably better prepared to help teachers with their instructional problems.

Truly talented individuals had to be found

who could walk the fine line between supervisor and inspector, be accepted by teachers, and have school visits that were welcomed. Generally teachers did not look forward to the supervisor's visits and viewed them as the "iron hand." On the other hand, most supervisors were respected classroom teachers before they assumed their new positions. Many successfully maintained the proper balance between the opposite roles that Charles Prosser so prophetically identified in 1918.

The peak of the formal influence for the agricultural education supervisor appears to have occurred in the 1960s. As with most extremes, regression set in and the powerful supervisor of so many decades became the much weaker consultant of the 1970s. Responsibilities became more generic and across-the-board. Local administrators, often in the form of vocational directors or area administrators, assumed more responsibility.

Another historical cycle has been completed. Just as the twentieth century began with teacher educators and local school administrators having the most influence over agricultural education teachers, the century will end with the same situation. This trend started to occur in the 1970s. It was influenced by federal legislation that no longer named vocational service areas and by a general trend toward less central authority and more local control for schools. It was also sped up by the iron-fisted supervisor who made inspection visits more frequently than he was welcome and tried to do the teacher educator's job. Contemporary supervision takes many different forms. It may be administratively located in a state department of education, a state department of agriculture, a college of agriculture, or some other place. The uniformity of the past no longer exists. Numerous problems in the past came about because of mismatches between supervisory needs and perceived needs. As different administrative formats are currently being tried for supervisors, the history of the position should be examined for implications. Hopefully, lessons have been learned. Certainly, one thing that had been learned was that the role of the

supervisor of the Smith-Hughes Man had changed a great deal.

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