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A n outstanding teacher of young children, a consummate teacher of teachers, a respected colleague and cherished friend—this is how I see Carol Hillman. I have known Carol for more than a decade. Our connection began when she worked as an early childhood consultant in the elementary school where I was the principal. As she visited classrooms, her sensitive spirit and knowledge of child development and best teaching practices shined brightly for all to see. Her keen observational skills were matched by her ability to listen intently and to guide with respect. She shared her insights and depth of experience, but most of all she posed thought-provoking questions. Her queries often prompted a teacher to redesign the classroom environment, to examine an instructional issue from another perspective, or to view a child in a new light.

During my work as a principal, I hired many new teachers. Each time, the same haunting thought pulsated through my mind: This person will influence the lives of hundreds of young children. Are this teacher’s intellect and heart well prepared for this daunting challenge and awesome responsibility? Once one recognizes the power of a teacher to positively influence or irreparably harm a child, it becomes abundantly clear that the supervisors and mentors of teachers-in-training need to be our best educators. It is for this reason that I am thrilled and grateful that Carol Hillman has written *Mentoring Early Childhood Educators: A Handbook for Supervisors, Administrators, and Teachers.*
In this book, Carol continues to live her passionate commitment to children and to the field of early childhood education. Her writing is grounded in her profound beliefs about what young children need. These beliefs are supported by her years as a nursery school teacher and her experiences as a skilled supervisor of student teachers. Within the pages of this book, early childhood supervisors will discover, or be reaffirmed by, the importance of quiet observation, focused listening, trust building, clear, honest communication, and a commitment to positive, supportive relationships.

Mentors and supervisors of teachers-in-training need to instill in their students the ability to reflect upon every aspect of their teaching practice in order to grow and to be worthy of children. Since reflection is the key to lifelong professional development, I encourage each early childhood educator reading this book to do so with a commitment to self-discovery and professional renewal. With each chapter, I invite you to savor the guidance provided and the questions posed, and to be open to reexamining your own practices in the light of the model presented. Your teachers will benefit and, in turn, so will our children. The quality of what you give to your student teachers or teachers-in-training will reverberate in their classrooms for years to come.

I once asked Carol about feedback she had received from a group of student teachers with whom she had just finished working. One young teacher’s words speak to the power and significance of an effective educational supervisor: “You inspired me to open my eyes wide and learn from all around me, especially from the children.”

—Carolyn Caselton Spence

This book is written for many different kinds of teachers, each with a different role to fulfill, each with a different skill and expertise. Each person's role plays an important part in striving for and creating more perceptive and effective learners. Each role is worthy of respect. Supervisors, teacher mentors, staff developers, educational administrators, directors of early childhood centers and nursery schools, and principals of early childhood programs in public, independent, and faith-based schools all know the various requirements of their work. It is not those differences that I will address, but rather the similarities which bind all of us together as a steadfast community of educators. It is this community, philosophically linked together, that believes that together we can make a difference in the life of each child that we touch. This book is for all of us.

Teaching is a gift . . . a gift for all persons in the field. Above all, teaching is an opportunity to create meaningful relationships with others. It is an opportunity to make a difference, to open new windows, open new doors, and allow rays of light to spill across a given space. Teaching is a thoughtful process . . . a process that calls for listening, observing, evaluating, and reflecting. It is a process that pleads for time and quiet and much introspection along the way. Teaching is more than just knowing: it is knowing and feeling in very close harmony. It calls for much understanding of how to best analyze and balance the two, and then to proceed with wisdom. Teaching is a gift, a gift to be unwrapped slowly over time. Teaching is a gift to enrich your life, so that you, in turn, can enrich the lives of others.

What binds us together has to do with how we present ourselves, our degree of dedication and humility. It has to do with the words that we choose and the inflection and tone of voice we use as we speak our
well-chosen words. What binds us together is the knowledge of how important it is that we are good listeners, that we pay particular attention to individual differences and needs. What binds us together is our attention to detail, our knowledge that organization and follow-through are such important factors in being effective in our work. What binds us together is our yearning to be our best selves, our yearning to do the best possible work that we can. To be role models in everything we do and say, and also in what we don’t do and don’t say. How we comport ourselves is our common denominator. It defines our raison d’être. It personifies our profession.

Haim Ginott, in his classic work *Teacher and Child*, speaks about “congruent communication, where communication is harmonious, authentic; where words fit feelings” (1972, 81). He speaks about the importance of capturing a child’s heart, feeling that “only if a child feels right can he think right.” It is this same principle that I want to convey to all early childhood educators, so that they, in turn, can inspire the student teachers and teachers with whom they work to be genuine with children.

The word *genuine* carries along with it many beliefs . . . beliefs about honesty in whatever we say and do, beliefs about keeping our word, about being accountable for the work that we are certain needs to be done. Because we know that a child’s self-respect, motivation, and attitude toward learning all have their beginnings in these early childhood years, it also carries with it the responsibility to see that good things happen to young children. Today we know how to create early childhood classrooms that are filled with materials that both allow and encourage exploration so that children can experience the delight in discovery. We want to see that each child has the opportunity to actualize his own potential and live out his dreams. Rachel Carson, in her monumental work *The Sense of Wonder*, wrote: “If a child is to keep alive his sense of wonder he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement, and mystery of the world that we live in” (1956, 45). Let us pool our expertise and work together for those goals.

For the sake of clarity and ease in reading the text, I have chosen to speak about the mentoring process through the eyes and ears of a supervisor. In this case, the teachers-in-training are college students. All that is set forth here is, of course, applicable to all teachers-in-training. This includes new teachers, or more experienced ones, in-
involved in the mentoring process who may not be affiliated with a college or university. Mentoring and supervision should ideally be done with the same spirit. Both look at the strengths of the teacher-in-training, with a view toward helping each teacher grow to his or her fullest potential. Mentoring, in whatever form it takes, should be based on a partnership created out of trust and collegiality. I have used the term *cooperating teacher* to designate the classroom teacher who works with the teachers-in-training on a daily basis. I fully recognize that both men and women hold all positions mentioned in the book. However, in order to simplify the text, I have attributed either male or female gender to each of the key players: The supervisor is female, the director or principal is male, and the cooperating teacher is female. The student teachers are both male and female. The term *student* always refers to the teacher-in-training here, and *children* is always used for the young learners in the classroom.

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**The Reasons for Writing the Book**

My reasons for writing this book come from several deep convictions: (1) the belief that the supervision process is a collaborative effort, calling for the supervisor to work closely with the student teacher, the cooperating teacher, and, if possible, the director; (2) the belief that the supervisor can do the best possible job by joining the student teacher in the field placement classroom for extended periods of time; and (3) the belief that sharing thoughts and ideas through conferences, written observations, and journal responses creates a powerful form of communication. Together these convictions form the foundation for the supervision model.

**The Book’s Unique Features**

The book’s most unique feature is that it highlights the inclusion of the cooperating teacher as part of the supervision model. The cooperating teacher shares in the supervisor’s written observations,
the student’s journal responses, and the conference time. This makes the supervision a truly collaborative effort, giving the student a substantial support system. The cooperating teacher’s participation in the process greatly enhances the possibility of change within the classroom.

The book deals with everyday classroom issues, taken from my experience as a supervisor. Each chapter includes objectives, summaries, and reflective questions. Several chapters also include personal accounts. These are stories from the field—a supervisor’s reflections.

The Organization of the Book

The book contains six chapters, a list of suggested readings, and three appendices. Chapter 1, “The Role of the Supervisor,” describes what the primary strengths of the supervisor should be. This chapter also addresses some of the responsibilities that go along with the position. Chapter 2, “Great Expectations,” looks into the student-supervisor relationship and how to work with the student teacher in the classroom. In Chapter 3, “What to Listen and Look for in the Learning Environment,” I speak about what a supervisor should observe in an early childhood setting—and how this impacts the student teacher. Chapter 4, “Facilitating Student Learning,” describes the student’s responsibilities in dealing with both the classroom and written work. Chapter 5, “Handling the Challenging Issues,” addresses various approaches for working alongside a resistant student, cooperating teacher, or director. Chapter 6, “Finding a Balance,” describes how to put your work, including both the challenges and the successes, all into proper perspective.

The appendices include many pedagogical features: letters written to the student teacher and the cooperating teacher, observations, reflective journal responses, and evaluation forms. All information, except where otherwise noted, is gained firsthand from the author, except for two journal responses that were written by an esteemed colleague, Josephine Kellman.
Throughout my work, I have placed great emphasis on the art of communication and what it can mean in people's lives. I want to take the time to listen to what young children are saying. I also want to take the time to listen to what my students are saying. Listening helps me discover who these young people and students are. I like to take the time to watch how young children react to their peers and how they interact in their environment. Watching helps me understand the workings of their minds. I like to watch how my students react to other adult educators in the classroom and how they use the materials in the room. Watching my student teachers helps me understand the way they think. Taking the time to sit down with each of my students and discuss our shared experience, both on a philosophical and a practical level, brings us closer together and provides an opportunity for me to be supportive. All of this, in essence, is what I want my students to do with the children in the class. I want to model the art of communication and let my students know what a difference they can make in the lives of young children.
Acknowledgments

There is a Chinese proverb that says: “A journey begins with the first step.” Writing a book is also a journey, albeit a solitary one. Yet my journey became greatly enhanced by the wisdom of friends and colleagues. Listening to their words has extended both the depth and breadth of the journey—and for that, I am ever grateful. I valued their time, support, and encouragement. Thank you, Jane Schoenberg, Carolyn Caselton Spence, Natalie R. Garfield, Melissa Heckler, and my dear mentor, Dr. JoAnn Shaheen. You were my guiding lights. My deep appreciation goes to Josephine Kellman, my esteemed colleague, and Sheila Hanna, Chair of Early Childhood at Westchester Community College, for believing in my work. My thanks to Jacalyn Rodriguez and Marcia Kingaton, two outstanding students at the college, whose work is included in the text, and Jennifer Davidson, for allowing me to use her son Dylan’s story. And my heartfelt gratitude to my editor, Danny Miller. His enthusiasm for my work and clear vision have taken the revision process to an art form, filled with intelligence and esprit de corps.
The Role of the Supervisor

Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should understand

• the importance of establishing a caring student teacher–supervisor relationship;
• the importance of being flexible in order to accommodate the various learning styles of your students;
• what information you need to obtain about each student teacher for your own files;
• a number of ways to begin assessing the students' abilities within the classroom; and
• the role the supervisor can play as an agent of change.

Relationships are in large part what life is all about. Through these wondrous connections we become motivated to seek new heights, ask more of ourselves, and nurture our very beings. A student, in turn, responds in a positive manner within the context of a caring relationship. A student who feels at ease with a supervisor tends to discuss his uppermost concerns about his field placement work. So, from the very beginning, it is in everyone's best interest to build into the student teacher–supervisor relationship a high level of comfort and mutual respect. For the student, a high comfort level
may include the freedom to question and discuss various ideas and activities that are at work in the classroom setting. A student should also be encouraged to question and discuss the ideas that the supervisor presents.

For the supervisor, the comfort level includes the freedom to question, discuss, and guide the student teacher toward greater self-awareness and fulfillment within the field of early childhood education. Over the semester the mutual respect grows as you work together, exchanging ideas and discussing why some things worked and others did not. You can use the classroom setting, which you both have shared, as the basis of your work together. With this as a context, you can ask the student questions: “How would you have handled the way Yi-Min refused to go to the end of the line after going down the slide?” or “How do you feel about Mohan spending all of his work time in the block area, never showing any interest in the art or science projects that are offered?” Spending time together creates the potential to foster and maintain a supportive relationship. Observation, conferences, written communication, critical thinking, and much reflection all fit together to form the foundation of the supervisory process.

Profiles of the Supervisor

Being a supervisor of college students of early childhood education offers many wonderful opportunities. Because the population of students is diverse in terms of age, ability, ethnicity, and learning style, there is a continual challenge to offer appropriate individual counseling. As an educator, you can revel in the image of what your diverse group of students can bring to many classrooms. Exposing young children to a variety of cultural traditions helps to crumble walls of discrimination and allow for a wider and clearer vision. Encourage your student teacher to share her special talents with the children—her singing and storytelling, her love of cooking favorite foods from her childhood. Let your student know that the pride in who she is may help young children feel that same emotion about themselves.
You will want to give yourself as much time as you can to learn about your student. What are her particular family responsibilities at this stage in her life? Are there problems around her command of the English language? Are there any health issues that must be addressed? Does your student have learning problems? Whatever the degree of interest you show in your student, hopefully, this will be reflected in your student's interest in getting to know the children in her class.

Over the years I have found that one very successful method of getting to know each student teacher was to ask him to write me a paper titled “What I Would Like You to Know About Me.” The paper was not mandatory. In order to best guide each of my students, I wanted to understand them as individuals, without being intrusive. Through each essay I learned about personal struggles, heartaches, and joys, which, in turn, allowed me to view each student with a deep respect for who he was. Each supervisor, knowing herself, must judge the extent of her emotional involvement with her students. However, it is imperative to always keep in mind her professional responsibilities to the field of early childhood education: to provide no less than the highest standards of training.

Being a supervisor calls for a keen sense of responsibility toward the student to support her efforts, struggles, and accomplishments throughout your time together. Hopefully, you will have had many years of experience in the field, including being a classroom teacher, and thus will be able to speak from your own personal experience. Just as classroom teachers try to understand each child’s likes, dislikes, sensitivities, special abilities, and disabilities, so must you strive to know your student teacher and her unique qualities as an individual learner.

Having the chance to work one-on-one with an aspiring teacher is a notable opportunity. It is particularly valuable in today’s hurried world, where many people feel pressed for time, always having to move quickly to meet the next appointment on their schedule. The student-supervisor relationship strives to be an unpressured and sustaining force for the teacher-in-training. The most important factor for the supervisor is the expectation that she enter into these personal and academic relationships with an open mind and a deep caring for the welfare and growth of each student.
It is appropriate for you, the supervisor, to present yourself in a professional manner, to be neatly dressed and have your papers well organized. It is helpful to have a separate file folder for each student teacher with her name correctly spelled on the tab. Each folder should hold an information card with the essential information about the student's whereabouts that keeps you and the student well connected. In addition you can request that the student provide very specific written directions (turn left at the Sunoco station) on the back of the card to guide you to her job site. See below for information that should be requested on the card.

Upon entering any new center, it is imperative, for reasons of security, to always present yourself at the office, introduce yourself, and obtain permission to visit your student. Once you have arrived in the classroom, it is important to greet Juanita, your student, and meet the cooperating and assistant teachers. If class is already in session, then these formalities can be deferred to a later time. The thrust of the moment is to settle yourself as quickly and as unobtrusively as possible and begin to take in the climate of this particular room. How does it feel to be there? Are the children moving freely from one activity to another, or are they required to sit quietly until the teacher directs them to the next activity? How do the adults manage their

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time in terms of being available to the children, and most impor-
tantly, what is Juanita doing?

What Does the Supervisor Look and Listen For?

As a supervisor it is important to be unhurried. You want Juanita to
know that you are there to focus on her and the quality of her inter-
actions. How often does she ask questions in order to clarify what
needs to be done? Observe the way she watches the other teachers in
the room to determine how deeply she is invested in the teaching
process. You should be eager to focus on her interactions with the
children as well. You will want to watch the way she moves and see
how quickly she responds to any given situation. Does Juanita move
from one group to another, happily involving herself in different play
situations, or does she get stuck, unsure of how to move on? Does
she pick an appropriate spot to read *Gilberto and the Wind*, which
Seth has requested, so that there is room for others to join them if
they so choose? Does Juanita willingly bundle up to join the class on
the playground, even though the temperature is low? Does she keep
a watchful eye on the children outside instead of huddling together
with the other adults who are engaged in social banter? Does she put
forth the same interest in observing and interacting with young chil-
dren outside as she has shown inside the classroom?

Categories of Competency

Body Language

You will want to pay attention to Juanita's body language. Is she at-
tentive, smiling, and very present, or does she sit back and wait for
things to happen around her? You will want to know how much
physical contact she has with Bianca and Trevor. Is Juanita at ease
taking Trevor on her lap to comfort him after a difficult Monday-
morning separation from his mom? Does she feel comfortable giving
a hug, if a hug seems called for, after Bianca bangs her finger at the
workbench? Will Juanita move a puzzle out of the way if it has been left on the floor in the line of traffic? Will she mop up some snow that has been brought in on the children’s boots, without being asked, before someone takes a spill? Will she move alongside Antonio if he is having difficulty staying quiet at story time? Does Juanita usually have a smile on her face, indicating that she takes great pleasure in being in the company of young children?

**Language**

It is important to listen to the student teacher’s words, not only for what she says, but also for what she doesn’t say, as well as the inflections and tonality of her voice. Is Juanita soft-spoken and patient, or is she sometimes demanding and accusatory? Does she speak to children respectfully and then give them all the time they need to say what is on their minds? Does she express herself in simple words that the children will easily understand? Will she repeat a sentence a child has said using correct English, rather than tell Colin that he made a mistake? Will she take Natasha aside, to ensure privacy, and talk quietly with her if she has something very personal to share? Is Juanita specific with her praise instead of just saying, “Good job”? Has she learned each child's name and how to pronounce it just the way the child wants it pronounced? Does she listen to the way the cooperating teacher uses language and try to incorporate some of those phrases into her own vocabulary? Does she enthusiastically join in the children’s singing or teach them a new verse to “The Garden Song”? Does she take on the two different voices of Frog and Toad when she reads the story *Frog and Toad Are Friends*? Is she able to project her voice in order to gain the attention of the group?

**Group Management**

You will want to observe if Juanita is able to keep an eye on everyone in the class, even though she is playing Farm Lotto with only four children. How capable is she in pinpointing trouble spots? Does she hear and respond to the rising decibel level of Shaniqua’s voice from the block corner and then move in that direction? Is she aware that Oona has been sitting very quietly by herself with her head resting on the table? Will she draw up a chair in the pretend area and have
Omar style her hair at Walt’s Barber Shop? How does she react when Lucas, Nina, and Suzanne all want her to sit next to them at snack? Is it hard for her to say, “No, I cannot allow you to do that,” when Hendrik kicks Josh’s block building and it crashes to the floor? Notice if she seeks to work only with individual children or if she looks comfortable working with larger groups. Does Juanita shy away from a flare-up that could call for conflict resolution? Is she a good anticipator? Do children listen to what she has to say? Does she seize the teachable moment?

The Role of the Supervisor

The Supervisor as an Agent of Change

A supervisor has the opportunity to act as an agent of change within each center or school where she works. Each student and each cooperating teacher has the potential to influence the lives of children, now and for the future. Sitting down with one another as colleagues, sharing ideas in an open and free-flowing way, often leads to an invitation for you to offer some of your thoughts. During these times you can make it clear that your words are to be taken only in the light of “things to think about and talk about among yourselves.” Ideas are exchanged in the general spirit of improving the overall learning environment, and specifically in offering the possibility of a new approach or new way of looking at an existing problem. Within this framework, coming together can become a relaxed, meaningful, and often productive time. The thrust of working together is to learn from one another.

Imagine you have just spent the morning in a classroom full of four-year-olds. It appeared to you that there were problems in making the transition from work time to snack time. Many of the children simply went on doing whatever they had been doing after the teacher said, “It’s time to clean up.” Naiyana and Mark went right on building with blocks, Zachary sat comfortably reading *Harry the Dirty Dog*, and Pippi and Mary Jane continued to push around a shopping cart, still adorned in high heels and long skirts. The teachers spent most of their time asking Zachary, Pippi, and the others to put this away here or that away there. In conversation at
conference time, after the class has ended, you might lead into the subject by asking the cooperating teacher and your student, "How did you feel the cleanup time went today?" This type of question can often bring forth sighs, moans, declarations of frustration—and much discussion. Further into the conversation, at an appropriate moment, you might ask, “Would you consider singing a short rhyme like ‘Five more minutes left to play; time to put the toys away’?” This, or some other animated expectation, could be used to build in a greater definition and bridge between the two activities. These words could help the children gain a greater awareness of how they need to structure their remaining work time in order to put the finishing touches on the blocks or check out the groceries from the store. Perhaps there will be the right opportunity to ask, "What do you think about the idea of getting children more involved in the cleanup process by asking them to select their own jobs?" These pivotal questions can become pathways to an even more in-depth discussion. However, whether the timing is right for posing such questions is a critical decision that only you, the skilled supervisor, can make.

In my four-year-old classroom, the excitement that was engendered by cleanup time was something to behold. Whether it was brought on by the children's sense of pride in and ownership of their own room or by the anticipation of a delicious snack was never really determined, but it was an important part of our day. I had an old autoharp that I used to strum as I moved around the room, kneeling in front of each child and singing, “What would you like to do today, what would you like to put away?” (I did this after I had given the children a five-minute warning.) I never felt that it was necessary for a child to clean up where she played; rather, I wanted each child to understand the larger concept of teachers and children working together in a community effort. Cleanup time was just as exhilarating as work time!

Another possible topic for a conference discussion is room arrangement, which often is given little thought after the initial setup of the room is done. Sometimes simple changes in the placement of furniture can allow children to use a particular space in an alternative or expanded way. In one child care center, there were up to twenty children in a rather small room. The left-hand side of the room contained a large pretend area and a small portion of space
that was allocated for blocks. The positioning of the block shelf allowed for an area of only approximately two feet by four feet for building. Adjacent to that area was a table where the children sat to eat their breakfast. After spending the morning there and observing the quality of the play, you could pose the question: “What are your feelings about the activity that went on in the block area this morning?” If you have already established a good working relationship with the cooperating teacher and your student, you might ask, “Did you feel Ian, Richard, and Byung were getting in each other’s way, despite their trying hard to build a swimming pool together?” After the three of you explore the subject, you might touch on the frustration the children must have felt while trying to retrieve more blocks from the shelf without knocking down part of their work. Here again, when the timing seems appropriate, you could offer the following thought: “Would you consider the possibility of moving the block shelf back three or four feet to enlarge the area for block play and reduce the size of the pretend area?” You could explain that this would give the children a much larger area in which to work and be out of the traffic pattern as their classmates come to sit down for breakfast. As the conversation proceeds you can constantly weigh how animated and receptive the cooperating teacher and Juanita are. You can make decisions as you talk about the amount of additional material you want to include. Should you mention the need to always have the block shelf look orderly and inviting. Yes! Should you mention the need to have accessories, including hard hats, right on top of the block shelf, or should this wait for a later date? It is your choice. You also have the option of looking at your work through a wide-angle lens. Even if your “thoughts to consider” are not incorporated into the program this year, there is always the possibility that the cooperating teacher or the student teacher will begin the following year with some of these new concepts or approaches set firmly in place.

Change can come about in small ways and can come about gradually as well. Sometimes it is the shift of something tangible—a shelf, a table, a chair, or even the removal of a rusty gym locker. Whatever the change, it can make a difference in how the children use the space and how they feel about their play. Change can come about in the way a word or phrase is spoken or in a new way to regard a child. However small the change may be, it is the repositioning that opens up a space for new insights to emerge.

*The Role of the Supervisor*
As a supervisor you want to be there in all the ways that you can, knowing each student through her actions and reactions. You want to read the expression on her face and, thus, fine-tune your own perceptions. You want to know how she thinks and what thoughts guide her to make the decisions that she makes, by walking along the thought processes of her mind. You want to discuss all this in an open and honest way, so she will know that you are available and there for her. These are the important things you bring as you walk into a center.

**Summary**

Supervision is the art of working closely with students and teachers as colleagues, supporting one another in a quest for greater self-knowledge and knowledge in a chosen field. It is presenting yourself as an organized person, intent upon watching, listening, and recording the sights and sounds of the classroom. It is sharing observations as “thoughts to consider” in bringing forth an improved climate of learning within any given classroom—and being appreciative of the opportunity of just being there.
Reflective Questions

1. Can you think of additional ways to put your student teacher more at ease?

2. What other questions would help you evaluate your student’s performance?

3. If you feel conflicted about talking to both the student and the cooperating teacher at the same time, what measures can you take to increase your own comfort?

4. Considering your degree of commitment, as well as your own schedule, how much time can you realistically give to observe your student in the classroom?

5. What struggles do you have in drawing and maintaining the fine line between responsibilities to yourself and responsibilities to your student? Do your empathy and involvement allow you to keep your focus on the student’s work?
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