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# Chapter 27

## Tips for Novice Supervisors

by

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### Outline

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Introduction  | 465 |
| A Note on Terminology   | 466 |
| 1. How many times should I visit student teachers?                                    | 466 |
| 2. Are there any particular records I should keep?                                    | 466 |
| 3. Should I meet with student teachers as a group?                                    | 467 |
| 4. There is no way I have time for such a meeting<br>Is there anything else I can do? | 468 |
| 5. Is there anything I need to do before I leave for the school visit?                | 468 |
| 6. Do I need to do anything special in order to supervise<br>primary teachers?        | 469 |
| 7. How can I observe everything in the class?   | 469 |
| 8. How can I deal with the kind of teachers who don't want<br>to cooperate with me?   | 469 |
| 9. Should I tell teachers that I am making a visit or not?                            | 469 |
| 10. Do I have to meet with teachers before the lesson?                                | 470 |
| 11. Is there anything the supervisor should not do<br>in the pre- lesson session?     | 470 |
| 12. How should I handle the post lesson stage?  | 471 |
| 13. What should I do or say about the teacher's mistakes?                             | 471 |
| 14. What should I do if the teacher performs poorly?                                  | 471 |
| 15. What things should I avoid in the post-lesson discussion?                         | 471 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| 16. Should I give feedback in English or Arabic?   | 472 |
| 17. Should I give the teacher anything in writing?   | 472 |
| 18. What should I do about language errors made by<br>the teachers in the lesson?                              | 472 |
| 19. Are there any differences between supervising pre-service teachers<br>and supervising in-service teachers? | 473 |
| 20. So, is there anything I should do because of these differences?  | 473 |
| 21. General tips for supervisors in their relationship<br>with teachers  | 473 |
| Conclusion   | 474 |
| Resources  | 475 |
| Summary Handout for Chapter 27   | 476 |

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# Introduction

When we decided to write this chapter for the SPEER Project, we asked ourselves, "Who is going to read this chapter? Who will benefit from it?" Although it is mainly targeted at the pre-service level (student teachers who are learning to teach), we think that all supervisors of English in Egypt should read this chapter so as to become familiar with the latest techniques of supervisory skills. We also think that all newly promoted supervisors will particularly benefit from this chapter.

This chapter summarizes many issues raised elsewhere about supervision. In previous chapters authors looked at best practice in supervision - in Egypt and from around the world - but they frequently did not offer any one model, leaving it to the reader to decide on the best way forward. In this chapter, we will try to answer directly some common questions that new supervisors ask. If you are new to the job too then we encourage you to talk to people in charge of supervision in your area and get their views on these issues as well. In this chapter we will give you suggestions which we hope will help you to do your job better. If you want to know more about any of the areas mentioned here, please refer back to Chapters 23, 24, 25, and 26 for more detailed background on some of the points we raise.

Before we start the chapter, we would like to tell you how much we suffered in our first years of supervision. We looked for any resources, information, or handouts to help us in our new jobs, but we found no specific guideline criteria to help supervisors carry out their job in an effective way. In contrast to student teachers who undergo extensive training before graduating, supervisors don't get any real training for this important job which is why we regard this chapter as necessary and important. We hope that it will satisfy your needs and help you in your work.

In preparing to write this chapter, we spoke to a number of our younger, more freshman colleagues. We found they had many questions about supervision. We will try to answer some of these questions one by one. Most of the detailed questions and responses here are specifically relevant to supervisors at the pre-service level, however, the discussion of general approaches will be of relevance to all supervisors.

## A Note on Terminology

As stated above, in this chapter we are dealing mostly with the supervision of teachers at pre-service level who are embarking on their teaching practice. However, many of the general hints are also appropriate to practicing teachers. Therefore when we use the term "teachers," we are referring to both pre- and in-service level. When we use the term "student teachers" we are referring exclusively to teachers at pre-service level.

### 1. How many times should I visit student teachers?

The way that teaching practice is organized and the number of visits carried out will vary from one faculty to another. When student teachers are on weekly teaching practice, supervisors usually visit twice a month. When student teachers are on block teaching practice, they may be visited almost daily. You will need to coordinate with your colleagues in the faculty to determine the frequency of the visits which may vary from daily to two or three times during the term.

### 2. Are there any particular records I should keep?

Again the faculty may have its own requirements so you should check with them. It is important, however, that you keep your own records, too. Some details which you may find useful to know are:

- full name of the teachers you will observe
- name of the regular class teacher if applicable
- name of the school
- what training teachers have completed
- how much previous experience teachers have had
- what periods teachers/student teachers are teaching.

You can get this information when you first meet the teachers. Then each time you observe, keep a record of the advice you gave. You can either file your observation notes or use a form summarizing the important information such as the one below.

Name of teacher .....

| Date of visit | Lesson taught | Comments and things discussed to work on for next time. |
|---------------|---------------|---|
|               |               |   |
|               |               |   |
|               |               |   |
|               |               |   |

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### 3. Should I meet with student teachers as a group?

Ideally, you should meet with your student teachers as a group in addition to classroom visits. You can use these meetings to:

- get an idea of student teachers' personal details (see above)
- tell them something about your role and what you will be looking for.

Check that the teachers have copies of the books and tapes they will need. In the early stages, they will particularly appreciate tips relating to classroom management such as the ones on the sheet below.

This handout is for student teachers

#### TIPS TO HELP YOU BEFORE YOU START YOUR TEACHING PRACTICE

What should I do before my first lesson?

First of all, find out all you can about the class from the teacher and about the individual children in the class. Familiarize yourself with the *Hello! Books*. It is not enough to know only about the lesson you are teaching. You need to understand what the class has learned leading up to the lessons you will teach. Also, make sure you know where the classroom is. You do not want to be late. You also need to familiarize yourself with any equipment e.g. cassette players before the beginning of the lesson

What if I am teaching with a colleague?

If you are sharing your classes with another teacher, then remember to consult and enter into discussion with him or her about who is doing what before you put your own ideas into practice

How friendly should I be with the children?

It is best to be strict at first. You can always relax later on. This does not mean that you should not smile or praise the children, just do not allow any bad behavior at all early on. Behave in a natural and pleasant way with the students but keep a professional distance

What if they don't understand what I am saying?

Remember to match your language speed and level to that of the students. You also need to match your expectations with the ability of the students in the class

What records do I need to keep?

You should, of course, make careful lesson plans. You should also keep a clear and up to date record of what you cover in class. This will help the regular teacher of the class to know what you have done.

4. There is no way I have time for such a meeting. Is there anything else I can do?

You can give all the information in written form and ask teachers to complete their details too. Write a letter of welcome explaining who you are and what you will be doing. See the example below. Give out help in written form, such as in the example above.

### SAMPLE WELCOME LETTER

Dear Student Teacher,

My name is Mr. Ahmed and I will be supervising you during your teaching practice. I will be coming to see you on 3 occasions. My role is to help you as well as evaluate you so please feel free to ask questions or request advice. I will show you the form I will be using before the observation.

So that I can better help you, I would be grateful if you could complete and return the form below.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

School in which you are doing practice teaching \_\_\_\_\_

Periods and levels taught \_\_\_\_\_

(If your timetable changes, please let me know)

Have you any other teaching experience? (Circle) Yes/No

If yes please specify \_\_\_\_\_

Is there anything else you would like me to know?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. Is there anything I need to do before I leave for the school visit?

There are two things you should do:

1. Make sure that you have the right pupil's book and teacher's book for the lesson you are going to observe. If you are not sure which book the teacher will be teaching from, then bring a set of books. You should not expect to borrow books from either the teacher or the pupils.
2. Check your records to see what information you have about the teacher. If you have visited the teachers before, check what advice you gave the last time you saw them.



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6. Do I need to do anything special in order to supervise primary teachers?

I have observed and supervised teachers at prep and secondary level before. Many of the supervisory and communication skills you need are the same, but if you are really going to give the teacher useful advice, then you yourself need to:

- Be familiar with the course books at the level the teachers are teaching.
- Learn about child development and child language development.
- Be familiar with methodologies for younger learners. There are many techniques appropriate for primary pupils that you would not use with secondary school pupils, for example. Many chapters in this book will help you to prepare to supervise primary teachers.

7. How can I observe everything in the class?

This is very difficult, but you have to concentrate and keep an open mind. You will not necessarily comment on everything that you see, but you should aim to observe the teacher, the students and the progress of the lesson. Make notes about all these things and then consider which are the most important areas to comment on when you talk to the teacher. This is useful to do even if you have to fill out another evaluation form.

8. How can I deal with the kind of teachers who don't want to cooperate with me?

First of all, try to find out why they won't listen to you. Do they really want to become teachers? If not, perhaps you should suggest a change of career. Do they trust your expertise? If not, you will need to be patient with them and work toward building their confidence in you by offering relevant and useful suggestions. Share ideas with them and prepare materials which might help them to do their job. Try to provide a good example of someone enthusiastic about teaching, to inspire them, to encourage them, and to make them feel self-confident. Don't lose hope.

If they still will not listen to you, you may need to meet with them privately to advise them that you will be strict with them if they don't cooperate with you. You should also inform the person responsible for them in the faculty that you are experiencing difficulties.

9. Should I tell teachers that I am making a visit or not?

Does the faculty have a policy on this? If not, then the decision is yours. The following are a few points that you may bear in mind when making your decision:

Advantages in not telling teachers you are coming:

- You stand more chance of seeing a normal lesson (which is what you want to see) rather than some special polished effort that is put on for your visit and which bears little resemblance to what normally happens.
- You may find it difficult or inconvenient to organize things so that teachers always know you are visiting. Is it fair to tell some and not others?

Advantages in telling teachers you are coming:

- You can be sure that the teachers have an opportunity to prepare the lesson and therefore they might be less nervous.
- At times you may want to see a particular sort of lesson that is needed to follow up on advice you gave last time. For example, you are not going to see if your advice on how to conduct a reading lesson has been taken if the prepared lesson is based on a listening activity.

The decision you make will vary according to the circumstances. It is best to adopt a practical approach. Tell teachers when you have a particular reason for wanting them to know and do not tell them at other times.

#### 10. Do I have to meet with teachers before the lesson?

The pre-lesson session with the teacher is desirable, but it cannot be required given some of the constraints we have. A pre-visit can enable you to check whether the teachers have a clear idea of what they are going to do in the lessons they are about to teach.

To find out if teachers really understand their goals, ask them to tell you the aims of the lesson in their own words. The aims they have written in their lesson plans may have been copied from the teacher's book and are not a good enough check on whether the teachers have the aims of the lesson clearly in their minds. (For more on the lesson phase see Chapter 23: *Approaches to Supervision*). The pre-lesson session can be quite short - perhaps ten minutes - and still be long enough to put the teacher at ease.

#### 11. Is there anything I should avoid in the pre-lesson session?

When you look at the lesson plan and discuss it with the teacher, you will often see what may appear to you to be weaknesses in the lesson plan. By all means, ask the teacher why the lesson has been planned in this way, but don't suggest that the teacher alter the plan at this stage. Firstly because a last minute alteration is likely to cause problems with the lesson. Secondly, making mistakes can be good - people learn from their mistakes. Thirdly, you cannot be certain that the problem you have spotted is a mistake - the teacher may be right and you may be wrong.

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12. How should I handle the post lesson stage?

The first thing to do is let the teachers comment on the lesson themselves. As far as possible, let the student teacher lead the conversation. Ask questions, such as "What would you do differently if you were teaching this lesson again?" (See Chapter 28: *Reflective Teaching* for a list of possible questions and Chapter 25: *Giving Constructive Feedback* for one approach to handling the feedback session.) When you do offer your comments, make sure they are balanced. Include both strengths for the student teacher to build on as well as weaknesses to be overcome.

13. What should I do or say about the teacher's mistakes in teaching the lesson?

Of course you should mention mistakes teachers make but not all of them at one time! No teachers like listening to a great list of errors and omissions, especially when they have tried to do their best. Put yourself in the teacher's position. How would you like to hear your best efforts torn to pieces? Pick on the most important mistakes, three at most. Discuss these thoroughly and make it clear to the teachers that you expect them to work on these in the future and that you will be looking for improvement in these areas when you return.

14. What should I do if the teacher performs poorly? What if the lesson is poorly prepared, badly taught and unsuccessful. What if the teacher has taken no notice of my past advice and just does not seem to care?

Make sure that you are talking to the teacher in private. Follow the usual procedure of asking the teacher what they thought about the lesson. There may be personal reasons why the teacher has not taught well. If the teacher is able to analyze the lesson, then let the teacher take the lead. There may be occasions, however, where teachers are unaware of, or simply not interested in, their performance. In this situation, do not ask the teachers to analyze the lessons. You are not discussing the lesson this time; you are telling the teacher about it. You must be direct, telling the teachers that their teaching is not up to standard and making clear what should be corrected and how.

15. What things should you avoid in the post-lesson discussion?

1. Don't use inappropriate language. Use language suitable for the linguistic level of the teacher concerned. Explain yourself in clear simple language; don't impress the teacher with your command of English. (See the discussion of whether feedback should be given in English or Arabic in

Chapter 26: *Giving Constructive Feedback* and question 16 below).

2. Don't give conflicting advice on different occasions. Keeping careful notes and reviewing them before your observation will help you avoid this error.
3. You should not give unclear advice. There is no point in giving unclear advice like, "*You must motivate your pupils,*" or, "*You must persuade pupils to do their homework*". If you can, offer suggestions on how to motivate pupils by having realistic objectives; including games in the lesson; making use of the learners' environment; using audio-visual aids, etc.

16. Should I give feedback in English or Arabic?

It depends. If your level of English is much higher than the teacher's do not use this as an occasion to show off. Remember the purpose of feedback is to help the teacher improve their teaching. Can you help them to improve better by giving them this feedback in English or Arabic? Of course, if teachers rarely have a chance to listen to and interact in English, giving feedback in English might provide them with a useful opportunity to use English for communicative purposes, as long as clear communication of the message is the most important thing.

17. Should I give the teacher anything in writing?

It is useful to give the teacher a written report so that they have something to refer to when you are gone. Remember that you are writing for the teacher to take notice of what you say.

Be as positive as possible when you have seen an honestly prepared and taught lesson even if there were many weaknesses. Always end the report with a section headed "focus points," or "action plan," or some such title. In this section, lay out some points that you want the teacher to act upon before your next visit.

18. What should I do about language errors made by the teachers in the lesson?

Most teachers make language errors in the classroom unless they are native speakers. If you end each observation conference by listing the language errors the teachers have made, it will not build their confidence. Try to make a distinction between language errors made in the actual teaching points of the lesson and language errors made incidentally in the course of the lesson. Teachers should not make errors in the actual structures and words that are the teaching points of the lesson. If they prepare the lesson properly, they can avoid such language errors.

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19. Are there any differences between supervising pre-service teachers and in-service teachers? I am a very experienced supervisor but all my experience is with in-service teachers. Now I am starting to supervise teachers in training with colleagues from the Faculty.

20. So, is there anything I should do because of these differences?

Because of these facts, you should:

1. Give your student teachers tips for controlling the class (see above and Chapter 20: *Classroom Management*). Without being able to control the class, student teachers cannot teach the children anything.
2. Remember that student teachers may not feel confident. Boost confidence wherever possible by noticing and commenting on things student teachers do right.
3. Try to make sure that student teachers are familiar with the *Hello!* books in general, not just the lesson they are teaching. This can be done by setting a familiarization task such as the one contained in the training module that accompanies this chapter.
4. Encourage student teachers to take part in school life in a wider sense. In-service teachers can help student teachers in this regard.

21. General tips for developing positive relationships with teachers.

1. Attempt to establish a positive atmosphere. Some suggestions:
  - a. Use a friendly informal tone of voice.
  - b. Make positive opening statements in relation to teaching.
  - c. Use encouraging nonverbal behaviors: smiling, nodding, and eye contact.
2. Discuss with the teachers the important features of the type of teaching they have done.
3. Invite the teachers to appraise their own performance and encourage them throughout to make their own analyses of the situation. Try to get the teachers to identify their own weaknesses.
4. Comment approvingly on positive aspects of the teaching.
5. Avoid criticism unaccompanied by positive suggestions.
6. At the end of the feedback session, invite the teachers to suggest changes they would make if repeating the lesson.
7. Keep a flexible attitude about what you have observed.
8. Give the teacher the chance to talk. This means you should minimize your own talk and learn to be a good listener.

9. Provide constructive and supportive feedback to the teacher after the lesson in order to help the teacher learn and develop.
10. Serve as a good role model: be professional, arrive on time and treat teachers with respect.
11. Share your reasons for visiting with the teacher and always show any forms you will be using.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we have tried to come up with tips to help supervisors new to the profession to improve their supervision techniques. As supervisors become more experienced, they will realize that there is usually more than one answer to many of these questions and that circumstances may alter the way in which a supervisor handles a particular situation. Nevertheless, as experienced supervisors, we wish we had had the type of guidance contained in this chapter. If you follow these general rules, you will rarely go wrong.

Note: There is no understanding check or key terminology accompanying this chapter. Technical language has been kept to a minimum in this chapter with no specialist use of language. For a more technical discussion of the issues raised here, see chapters 23 - 26. If you wish to check your understanding of the issues, you can use the questions in the summary handout below.

### *voices* from the field

We asked someone from a Faculty of Education about this. Here is the answer from Amal Abdel Fattah from El Arish:

From my own experience as a supervisor of teaching practice at the elementary stage in El Arish Faculty of Education, I would list the following differences:

1. Student teachers are less experienced than in-service teachers, especially in areas relating to classroom management and discipline. Supervisors need to bear this in mind.
2. Student teachers on teaching practice often feel less self-confident since they do not have real authority in controlling the students' grades. Because even young students in the primary stage know this fact, they sometimes do not respond positively to student teachers on teaching practice. In-service teachers, on the other hand, have real control over children's marks, a fact that helps them in all aspects of their work in the classroom
3. Student teachers are not fully familiar with the subject matter or content. This

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may be due to the fact that they prepare only for the lesson they are teaching. In-service teachers on the other hand, teach the same content many times and therefore become familiar with it. They are immediately able to see whether an item is new or recycled.

4. Students on teaching practice are less familiar with other school activities such as the morning broadcast activity, cultural activities, language activities, etc. They are not fully integrated into the school. Children are often able to sense this.

## Resources

Al-Ahmed, F. (1992). *Assessing and Improving Teacher Performance*. *English Teaching*. Forum, 30(2), 29-30.

Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison, R. 4th ed. (1996) *A Guide to Teaching Practice*. London: Routledge Publishers. This is a standard text for many students embarking on teaching practice in Britain. Although some of it is of particular relevance to the British educational system, it has useful introductory chapters on the basic practicalities of teaching which would also be useful in other contexts.

Edwards, C. & Healy, M. (1994). *The Student Teacher's Handbook*. London: Kogan Page. This is another useful text designed for student teachers.

Griffiths, G. (1992). *Guidelines and Information for Regional Inspectors of English in the Sultanate of Oman*. Sultanate of Oman: Ministry of Education: Department of English Language.

Malderez, A. & Bodoczky, C. (1999). *Mentor Courses: A Resource Book for Trainer-trainers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. This is a useful resource for supervisor training. McIntyre, D. (1994), *The Management of Student Teachers Learning*. London: Kogan Page. This is a text for supervisors and other teacher educators at the pre-service level.

Randall, M. with Thornton, B. (2001). *Advising and Supporting Teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. This book deals with the giving of advice in feedback to teachers at pre and in service levels. It contains a section consisting of text and also tasks to use in the training of supervisors, many of which have been trialled in the Egyptian context.

Waynryb, R. (1992). *Classroom Observation Tasks*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. This is a comprehensive selection of observation instruments, useful for developmental purposes.

The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development website also contains useful material for novice supervisors: <http://www.ascd.org/>

## Summary Handout for Chapter 27: Tips for Novice Supervisors

### Questions Asked by Supervisors

**Directions:** Look at the list of questions that follow. After reading the chapter, answer the questions below. Compare your answers to those of a colleague.

1. How many times should I visit student teachers?
2. Are there any particular records I should keep?
3. Should I meet with student teachers as a group?
4. There is no way I have time for such a meeting. Is there anything else I can do?
5. Is there anything I need to do before I leave for the school visit?
6. Do I need to do anything special in order to supervise primary teachers?
7. How can I observe everything in the class?
8. How can I deal with the kind of teachers who don't want to cooperate with me?
9. Should I tell teachers that I am making a visit or not?
10. Do I have to meet with teachers before the lesson?
11. Is there anything the supervisor should not do in the pre-lesson session?
12. How should I handle the post lesson stage?
13. What should I do or say about the teacher's mistakes?
14. What should I do if the teacher performs poorly?
15. What things should I avoid in the post-lesson discussion?
16. Should I give feedback in English or Arabic?
17. Should I give the teacher anything in writing?
18. What should I do about language errors made by the teachers in the lesson?
19. Are there any differences between supervising pre-service teachers and supervising in-service teachers?
20. So, is there anything I should do because of these differences?