

# The Principal Looks at Himself

VIRGIL E. HERRICK

This article, by Virgil E. Herrick, professor, School of Education, University of Chicago, is addressed to the principal, but could have been addressed to the supervisor, the critic teacher, the educational consultant, and the superintendent. The principal, in this process of self-evaluation, therefore, serves as a symbol for all persons concerned about giving leadership to the improvement of educational programs.

LEADERSHIP IS A FUNCTION—not a position or person. Leadership is concerned with how people can be brought to work together for common ends effectively and happily.<sup>1</sup> Leadership is the ability to contribute to the achievement of those ends either through ideas or through ways of working to accomplish them, or both. Leadership is often confused with command but command is concerned with power over people, while leadership is concerned with power over problems.

Kimball Young says,

There is always temptation to make use of power, but power always weakens leadership. Power that ultimately rests on force is not real, but only seeming power. Real power, so far as a leader is concerned, arises through an integration of the desires of several people so that there is a group loyalty to the collective objective or desire; and any person or any symbol which represents this objective or desire has the power of the collective support. . . .<sup>2</sup>

Mary P. Follett perhaps expresses this more simply,

When you and I decide on a course of

action together and do that thing, you have no power over me nor I over you, but we have power over ourselves together. We have, however, no authority over John Smith. We could try to get 'power' over him in a number of ways . . . but the only legitimate power we could have in connection with John Smith is what you and John Smith and I could develop together over our three selves. . . . Genuine power is power-with; pseudo power, power-over.<sup>3</sup>

The implication of this definition for the principal is that he is not a leader merely because he is a principal. He does have the power of command, but, more important, he has a great opportunity for leadership. He becomes a leader when he aids the staff in seeing common problems and in making a contribution to their solution. He becomes a leader by what he does, not by the right of his title and office. His title to the office of leadership is his constructive contribution to an educational program.

To say that leadership is a function—not a person—that it is an opportunity to make educational contributions, is helpful in placing emphasis upon the importance of contributing, but it is not particularly helpful in suggesting to principals the important elements to

<sup>1</sup> Ordway Tead, *The Art of Leadership* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1935), p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Kimball Young, *An Introductory Sociology* (New York: American Book Co., 1934), p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> Mary P. Follett, *Creative Experience* (New York: Longmans Green & Co., 1928), p. 199.

consider in going about making that contribution. Five abilities are suggested, therefore, which any principal who is at all concerned about leadership should consider carefully—(1) the ability to accept individual teachers as worthwhile members of the staff, (2) a willingness and a desire for learning, (3) the ability to lead group discussions and give direction to group work, (4) the ability to carry on individual counseling, and (5) the ability to develop and use a personal and professional philosophy of life and education.

### **Is Each Individual Important?**

Every person must have a feeling of worthwhileness—an assurance that one is someone—as a first condition before that person is going to be willing to consider and make contributions to the common educational problems of a staff. This is a factor in the basic nature of behavior that no principal should ever forget. Teachers on the staff will be successful in interpreting policies and objectives to the degree to which they can discover that in them the interests and desires close to their lives are being given adequate consideration. One must attend to his own feelings and concerns first before he is free in any degree to attend to the concerns of the group.

In the staff of the school this feeling of importance is directly related to the prestige one feels he has in the eyes of his fellow-workers. The principal has an opportunity to lay the foundation for that prestige by accepting the members of the staff as worthwhile persons. As a person, one will like some persons more than others, one will feel that some teachers are doing better work than

others, and one will feel that others either like you or are antagonistic to you. That is a part of all human living and it is not suggested here that one should love all his fellow men or believe all teachers to be equally competent and interested before he can be a leader. Far from it. What is suggested is that these differences of feeling and competence take on quite a different connotation to the individual when he feels that he is accepted by another person or by his group.

For the principal, the acceptance of the staff has to be based on something more fundamental than calling them all by their first names, having them sit around in a circle in faculty meeting, having picnics together, or having teachers do administrative odd jobs. It has to be based on such things as the consideration he gives them as persons, his willingness to consider their problems, the opportunities he provides for them to participate in important things, their feeling that he feels they can learn, that he has not made up his mind about them on an absolute basis, and that he is not so concerned about his own ego that he cannot pay attention to theirs. To a principal the acceptance of the staff as worthwhile individuals is of primary importance, for without it the rest of his leadership contribution cannot be built.

*Is he a big enough person to include others in important projects without having it be a threat to his own security?*

### **Is Learning a Two-Way Affair?**

In giving leadership to a staff trying to improve its educational program, it is very easy to urge learning for others and not for oneself. It is easy to mis-

take verbalism and ability to quote books and authorities for real understanding. Leadership in the sense of meeting this ability is shown by having a concern for problems, in wanting to find out not only better solutions to these problems, but also better ways of attacking them. The principal must know what real learning is and what it means for his own behavior as well as for others. He must be willing to face the discipline of facts, logic, and values in the same way he expects the children and the teachers to face and develop such discipline. He should expect his decisions to be open to the same scrutiny and on the same bases that he expects the staff to use in examining its own decisions or that children will use in examining their own.

Leadership, then, in respect to this willingness and desire for learning, will cause the principal to demonstrate his desire for and skill in learning by working with the staff or with individual teachers on projects where this skill and understanding can demonstrate itself. All the degrees, courses with learned professors, or number of books read can never substitute for the demonstration of this competence in situations that make some sense to teachers. Such a demonstration will also bring some humility and appreciation of what learning means and the cost one must pay for its treasures.

*Is the principal interested in learning for himself? Is he willing to move from the authority of persons to the authority of problems, ideas, and values?*

#### **Do Group Discussions Have Direction?**

Group discussion by the staff or by small groups within the staff is not

meant to supplant individual conferences, carefully prepared talks, reading, or research. Group discussion is important because it provides the major opportunity for cooperative intellectual activity. Group discussion is concerned with the creative contributions of all concerned to a problem which the individuals of the group hold in common. It is one of the major procedures through which the staff identifies and analyzes its problems, taps the ideas and experiences of the group in formulating plans and in carrying them out, evaluates present accomplishments, and plans next steps. It is also of major importance because it is an important technique in all teaching wherever there is concern for improvement in capacity to recognize and think out meaningful connections. Thus, if the leadership of the school is interested in having children increase in their capacity to think through problems, the best insurance that this will actually take place is to have teachers become more skilled in this same process in dealing with their own problems.

The first ability mentioned, that of accepting teachers as worthwhile persons, is pertinent at this point because since the value of group discussion is based on the assumption that the total experience and intelligence of the group will be brought to bear on the problem being discussed, it is extremely important that all members of the group feel sufficiently secure to be willing to reveal their ideas. Unless they do, the full power of the group will be lost. The difficult problem of leadership in group discussion is just at this point, however. It is the problem of how to keep tapping the ideas of the group

while at the same time making sure that errors, unrelated ideas, key ideas, and fundamental relationships are being recognized and appropriate selection and use of them is being made. The difficulty as well as the importance of this two-headed problem in group discussion can probably be brought out by the following example.

A principal and a staff are discussing the problems of an individual child—in small closely knit staffs—a situation frequently highly charged emotionally. The staff has agreed that their discussion might be clearer and move a little more rapidly if they would make a distinction between what might be considered as facts about the child or what the child actually did, and the factors or motives which the faculty inferred from that behavior to explain it. The making of this distinction is an act of leadership on the part of some member of the group because it accomplishes two things immediately—it points out an important distinction which clarifies two basic elements in the problem—that of fact and the one of interpretation of fact, and it provides the staff with a working sequence which they can use in attacking the problem as well as settling the limits within which they are to work. This important contribution does not, however, eliminate the problem of how to keep all the avenues of communication open and at the same time make sure suitable evaluation of the ideas contributed is being made.

At this point, some principals have stifled their natural impulse to have each fact or interpretation critically evaluated and reviewed by themselves or the staff while everyone is able to attach such contributions to individuals.

They see their behavior as leaders consisting of two major steps: first, to get all the facts or ideas about the child on the blackboard without any attempt to evaluate them or attach them to individuals; and second, after the group has become acquainted with all the ideas contributed, to proceed to evaluate them on the basis of criteria developed by the group as a whole.

The problem of evaluation in group work is usually handled by having various members of the group make personal judgments about the value of certain ideas using frames of reference for this judgment which are unknown to every other member. Where this takes place there cannot be a meeting of the minds in testing ideas because the basis for making judgments is unknown. The function of the leader at this point, therefore, is to make sure that the group is able to define and place on the blackboard the criteria or generalizations about behavior which they will want to use in interpreting the behavior of this child. When all members of the group have access to *both* the ideas and bases to be used for evaluation there is greater security and willingness on the part of each individual teacher to attempt to actually make the evaluation and to understand the child.

When group discussion is carried on under the above conditions, errors are valuable in that they may lead into constructive inquiry by the group or point out areas that need clarification and further understanding. When a teacher can find this out for herself in a situation where the tools and techniques for improvement are being used, there is much greater reason to believe that her

incentives for continued learning will be correspondingly great. Good leadership makes sure that this kind of experience is possible for every member of the staff.

The final point which might be made in discussing the place of leadership in group discussion is the function of the summary as a means of closing this activity. The summary should make sure that the loose ideas are tied together, that the group receives a perspective of the course the thinking of the group has taken in order to know where it is and how it got there, that the conclusions reached are pointed out, and that the responsibilities and topics for next meetings are known.

The summary may be made by one person or by the group and may be left until the end of the discussion period or interlarded at appropriate points in the course of the discussion. The summary of the thinking is an important preface to the decisions of what to do, who is to do it, and when and how to do it. Such decisions cannot be made without first considering the nature of the problem, the nature of the group and its leadership, and the place they have reached in thinking about their problem. The responsibility of the leader is to see that summaries *are* made and that the group becomes increasingly skilled in facing and making decisions. The principal has an opportunity for leadership in actually making such summaries and in pointing up the direction in which the thinking of the staff is going.

*Is the principal willing to think through problems with teachers? Is he trying to develop the skills necessary in group discussion? Is he able to pull group thinking together and actually*

*use it in making decisions and in seeing next steps?*

#### **Are Opportunities for Individual Counseling Provided?**

As has been said before, the principal must deal with the problems and anxieties of individual children, teachers, and parents. He is in the key position for making some contributions to the development of the individuals with whom he works. Skill in individual counseling is an important attribute in his being able to give some leadership in this area of his educational responsibilities.

The chief purpose of this kind of counseling is to enable those persons who are emotionally disturbed and anxious to talk the matter out, to express their feelings and emotions, and, with the aid of sympathetic and discerning help, to map out and work toward a solution of their own problems. The person seeking counsel sets his own goals and works out his own adjustments. Such counseling is not for the purpose of providing the principal with an opportunity to admonish or persuade or tell the teacher what should be done. The assumption is that most adults who face problems are able to remap their own lives if they are given an opportunity to bring their feelings and systems of values out into the open where they can be examined. Another assumption is that the teacher who works through to a solution of his own emotional problems develops a feeling of security as well as independence and resourcefulness that will stand him in good stead under a wide variety of other circumstances.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Stephen M. Corey and Virgil E. Herrick, "Adjustment Counseling with Teachers," *Educational Administration and Supervision*, March 1944, pp. 87-96.

Some of the rules which have been worked out for such counseling are:

The counselor should listen to the teacher in a patient and friendly, but intelligently critical manner.

The counselor should not display any kind of authority.

The counselor should not give advice or moral admonition.

The counselor should not argue with the teacher.

The counselor should talk or ask questions only under conditions such as:

to help the teacher talk.

to relieve any fears or anxieties on the part of the teacher which may be affecting his relation to the counselor.

to praise the teacher for reporting his thoughts and feelings accurately.

to veer the discussion to some topic which has been omitted or neglected.

to discuss implicit assumptions, if this is advisable.<sup>5, 6</sup>

From the point of view of the writer, group work provides a basis for good individual counseling. It completes a system of counseling opportunities and provides experience from which suggestions for help can be inferred. Individual counseling growing out of group work is more likely to deal with the problems of the individual than would be the case in individual counseling alone where the personal associations are limited to a conference room. With group work as a background, the counselor has the advantage of a common language, common experience, and common scales of values to be used in interpreting the behavior and motives of the individual teacher asking help. Here, both the teacher and counselor

are able to come to the problems of adjustment with an understanding which is usually lacking in the individual counseling relationships. The counselor becomes a fellow worker. Judgments are not made in terms of the counselor's omniscience, but in terms of the teacher's growing ability to see and interpret his own feelings and needs. Words take on common meanings because they are understood in the sense that both participants have taken part in situations where these values have been clarified through application and use.<sup>7</sup>

*Is the principal sufficiently relaxed in his own egos so he can help other people attend to their own feelings and problems and become more competent in dealing with them?*

#### What About Personal and Professional Values?

The discussion of leadership up to this point seems to show the importance of the fifth ability as a capstone for all the others. The principal to be a leader must not only have some special area of competence which gives vertebrate character to his thinking and acting but he also must have some concept of important values of life and education and how all these things go together to give direction and scope to his thinking and writing. After all is said and done, the important element in the kind of leadership which is now being discussed is the integrity of the person and the sincerity of his purpose. It is the core around which the consistency of his behavior as a principal and as a person takes on form and direction.

<sup>5</sup> F. J. Roethlisberger and W. J. Dickson, *Management and the Worker* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1941), p. 287.

<sup>6</sup> Carl R. Rogers, *Counseling & Psychotherapy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin & Co., 1942), pp. xi-450.

<sup>7</sup> Virgil E. Herrick and Stephen M. Corey, "Group Counseling with Teachers," *Educational Administration and Supervision*, September 1944, p. 330.

This fifth responsibility of the principal is the most difficult and most important of all because a philosophy has meaning and reality to the extent it is reflected in his thinking and action. A philosophy grows out of one's work, study, and thinking. Working with the staff to improve educational programs for children can be the testing and annealing experience out of which improved and more vital philosophies can grow.

*Does the principal have a consistent set of educational and personal values which he consciously uses in dealing*

*with personal and professional problems? Is he willing and able to let other people examine it with him?*

Leadership is the helping of a group of people achieve their common ends effectively and happily. The principal of the elementary school has an unusual opportunity to provide such leadership to his staff. The five factors of importance in the development of such leadership which have been discussed may be used as the starting point in the principal's personal evaluation of his own claim to leadership as he works with the personnel of his school.

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## *I Don't Want to Be Like That*\_\_\_\_\_

J. B. SCHOOLLAND AND MARJORIE SIMPSON

Why the unmarried woman teacher is often forced to become a social isolate is an enigma to many people. This frank discussion by J. B. Schoolland, director, Student Counseling and associate professor of Psychology, University of Colorado; and Marjorie Simpson, graduate student, University of Colorado, and counselor, University Hill Junior High School, Boulder, highlights important factors existing in school administration and in the community which militate against the teacher's gaining acceptance as a normal member of society; and also offers some suggestions to the teacher herself in solving her personal and professional difficulties which bar the way to balanced living.

"ARE YOU A TEACHER? You don't look like a teacher. You don't act like one." Now, just how is a teacher supposed to look and act? When remarks like this are still being tossed around by the general public, shouldn't the teacher and society disillusion each other concerning these antiquated ideas?

In this day of psychology, psychiatry, and psychoanalysis, when the adjustment of the veteran to civilian life is

uppermost in the minds of the public, when the "problem" child is dissected, diagnosed, and prescribed for by the schools and professionals, there is one group of individuals long ignored by the public and kindly humored by the professionals that needs the attention of society as a whole. Those individuals are too often the ridiculed, harassed, thwarted, and unhappy unmarried school teachers. One has only to ob-

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