

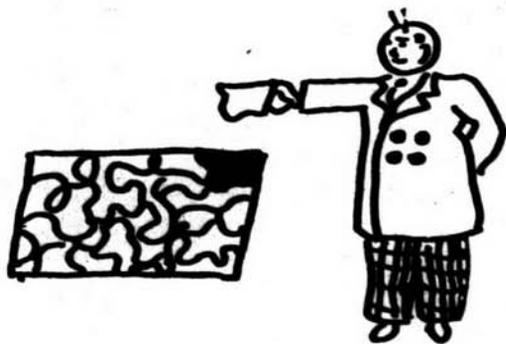
# Releasing Teacher Leadership

LORENE A. BAHN

Who can measure the loss to a group when an individual talent is left undiscovered? In this definition of leadership Lorene A. Bahn, a teacher in the Blair Elementary School, St. Louis, directs attention to the opportunities administration has in exploring abilities, releasing creative powers, tapping experiences, and, consequently, developing the quality of teacher leadership.



Pulling names out of hat



Fitting in

LET US take a look at an ideal community and its school. The majority of the people there believe that education is primarily a process of social interaction and not a process of absorbing preconceived ideas, attitudes, and dispositions nor a process of bringing forth hidden but innate behavior patterns. They expect the school to help each individual to develop an ability to meet situations, satisfy needs, and solve problems intelligently. It is to encourage him to consider critically the accepted social institutions. It is to stimulate him to work to bring about any desired changes in the direction which his analysis has found desirable.

This school, being a thoroughly democratic one, is free from administrative domination. There is no regimenta-

tion. Policies are determined by the groups most vitally concerned. Responsibilities for arranging the details of educational experiences are placed in the hands of the staff. There is no outside pressure or interference. There is a continual conscious effort on the part of all to release and utilize the distinctive contribution of each individual—child, teacher, parent, and specialist—in order to stimulate personality growth and to achieve group efficiency. In every activity of pupils, parents, or staff this group efficiency is always closely allied with individual development and is recognized as a definite aim in education for democratic citizenship.

In this community and its school, harmony and unity are achieved and

maintained because of the basic common interests of their members. Each group uses the divergent interests of its members to enrich its life. Its guiding principles are always considered relative and not absolute. This is very important for it is this which makes growth possible and which guarantees the rights of individuals and the freedom of minority groups. In any mature society both a degree of equilibrium and an ability to change are the two necessary conditions to liberty and justice.

This, admittedly, is the ideal situation. Probability denies its complete existence anywhere. However, it points the way to a more democratic administration of schools which will make it possible to use to the fullest extent the leadership abilities of all individuals whether they be teachers, children, parents, or other adults.

### **Leadership Defined**

The concept of leadership referred to above is admittedly a complicated one. All individuals are not alike; neither are they equally capable. However, each should have an equal opportunity to develop to the limit all of his abilities. John Dewey has often said that each individual should have the right to contribute whatever he is capable of contributing and that the value of what is contributed should be determined by its function in the organized whole. This means that each teacher as well as each student has the right to expect that the school-community in which he works will make it possible for him to explore fully his abilities and to develop his creative powers; that it will endeavor to make

him feel that he can do something of value, that he belongs, and that he is needed. He has, in other words, a right to security and self-respect.

If teachers are helped to build up these feelings of security and status, there will be developed in them at the same time attitudes of kindness, consideration, cooperativeness, and sympathetic understanding which are so necessary in their work with children and parents. Insecure teachers without any group status, regardless of academic degrees, cannot be the emotionally mature individuals needed to guide children.

### **Values Recognized**

The alert principal, supervisor, or superintendent will be searching continuously for opportunities for using teacher leadership. Too often a teacher fails to find the satisfaction he has a right to expect in his job simply because an administrative officer has not learned that leadership is something very different from directing or pushing or pulling people into either belief or action. Teachers should share in the creation of plans and in the formulation of policies. When policies and programs evolve out of the intelligence of the group, they are firmly grounded and carry with them the friendly support that insures action.

The question immediately arises as to how teachers can be helped to participate when they have had no previous experience in and show no readiness for participation in planning.

### **Individual Appraisal**

Teachers, like children, are persons who can do at least one thing better than anybody else in the group. This

special ability or talent must be discovered and utilized. It would be extremely foolish to attempt to encourage participation simply by providing for the rotation of important committee chairmanships or by pulling names out of a hat when a job is to be done. Social, emotional, intellectual, and physical factors must be carefully considered. Perhaps the most important thing to remember is the fact that many teachers who have not had any significant experiences in actual participation will be unable to show any enthusiasm for cooperative studies, faculty meetings, committee memberships, or community contacts. An enthusiastic person in the role of administrator who is really willing to relinquish his leadership role when an immediate situation seems to call for the special abilities of another can make possible the provision of learning situations for teachers.

There are many areas in which teachers may show unusual abilities. Some teachers may exhibit many; others, only one. It is important that the teacher with only the one apparent ability is allowed to make his contribution. In the process of social interaction other abilities will be revealed and the individualization and socialization of another teacher will move ahead.

#### **Uncover Abilities**

Let us examine briefly some of these leadership possibilities. In many instances it takes a careful search into the backgrounds of teachers to locate interests and to discover aptitudes. A person interested in his religion can contact various church groups in making a community survey. He can work with a group of children who are study-

ing the religious practices of the different groups whom they meet daily in their neighborhood. Another individual who enjoys reading and spends every spare minute in the company of a book has much to contribute. He can help in the selection of additions to the library or in the recommendation of textbook changes. A teacher who meets people with friendliness and poise is an excellent person to work with parent groups or to contact other community adults. One who loves the out-of-doors can accompany groups on nature walks or sponsor camping trips. The staff member with a wide experience in a particular field can share with those who do not possess his specialized knowledge. The teacher who spent his early life in a rural community can be invited into another teacher's class in a large city school to help children get a more accurate picture of rural life.

#### **Kindle Ideas**

Such illustrations can be multiplied by the hundreds. Teachers do have many leadership possibilities but it is the task of the administrator to inspire them to want to participate in the activities of the school outside of their own classrooms and in the activities within the community. The administrative leadership of a school conditions the quality of the leadership of both teachers and children and the procedures which are used reflect the guiding philosophy. The entire staff must have a respect for and an appreciation of ability and training. Each individual member must realize that the more highly specialized individuals become, the more dependent they are upon each other. In an evolving social order the

ability to participate in the process of group thinking is necessary to the solution of social and individual problems. The participation is dependent upon

the recognition of the leadership function of every individual and the encouragement of it according to each person's interests, needs, and abilities.

## Peers in Planning for Children

KATE V. WOFFORD

At present, while we are still facing the problem of the shortage of teachers, supervisors have the responsibility of giving to each individual teacher the particular help which he or she needs. In this article by Kate V. Wofford, head professor of elementary education at the University of Florida, Gainesville, a supervisor and a teacher summarize experiences of growth and give us a clear picture of supervisory activity.

THE KEY WORD which perhaps most adequately defines the relationship of the modern teacher and supervisor is cooperation. Gone is the traditional concept of the supervisor as the person who knows and the teacher as the learner—and good is the riddance! The modern teacher and supervisor are peers. Each learns from the other and both learn from the children. The supervisor usually has the advantage of wider experiences and longer years of schooling. From these deep springs, help is to be had for those who seek it. The teacher, on the other hand, clearly has the advantage of day by day contacts with children. These are deep resources, also, since from an intelligent knowledge of child development comes all that we best know of educational method, philosophy, and curriculum practice.

In modern education, curriculum is truly an *inclusive term*. It is also a *weasel word*. Meaning all things to

all men, the curriculum is gradually achieving a common definition as all of the experiences which children have. This is a large concept and it develops from the assumption that we learn through experiences, whether these be good or bad, and that we learn all the time. This means, of course, that many people are responsible for the curriculum—fathers and mothers, bankers and bakers, the postman, the manager of the movie house, librarians, policeman, and all others who compose the labyrinth of the modern community. But the most important of all people is the teacher. It is the responsibility of the teacher to see that the experiences had by children achieve meaning and direction and that they square with acceptable educational objectives. This is a large task and for it the average teacher needs help. Most frequently the teacher appeals to her supervisor who, in turn, looks to her teachers for help in the

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