

A Workshop for Supervisors ---

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In this account of a learning experience sponsored by the Council of Directors and Supervisors of the Los Angeles City School District, Jessie Graham, supervisor of business education, Los Angeles City Schools, reviews the aspects of democratic leadership considered by supervisors. Miss Graham reviews briefly the various problems with which the group dealt and their implications for supervisory leadership. Her personal account of what the workshop meant in terms of a learning experience will prove helpful to other professional leaders contemplating similar experiences.

CONDUCTING CONFERENCES and workshops for teachers is one of the most important and time-consuming activities of the school supervisor. The occasions when the supervisor is on the receiving end, when the conference is conducted for his benefit, and when his problems are studied are all too infrequent. The eagerness with which supervisors welcome guidance in mastering the techniques of group leadership was evident in the rapidity with which the quota was filled after a recent workshop for supervisors was announced in the Los Angeles City Schools.

The Problems Defined

On the assumption that good supervision is good individual and group leadership, this workshop was organized to provide learning opportunities through discussion of and practice with the skills needed for democratic leadership and supervision. The group members themselves defined the kinds of situations in which such skills are required of the supervisor. Attention was given to such questions as:

- What is the nature of the group process and what are some of the more important patterns of social interaction?
- What are the characteristics of a democratic work group and how is democratic leadership differentiated from domination?
- How does the process of group discussion function as an application of democratic principles and what are the kinds of discussion techniques that may be employed?
- What elements contribute to effective group leadership and the creation of a productive group discussion?
- How can reality practice and role playing be applied in supervisory techniques and teacher improvement?

Concentration on these problems of group process and the implications for leadership provided the agenda for the workshop. A brief review of factors considered in the development of each problem illustrates the way in which the workshop was conducted.

Group Process and Types of Meetings

After introductions of leaders and other group members had been performed, the first session was devoted to consideration of the types of meetings planned by supervisors for teachers.

Although it is true that the type of meeting planned depends upon the purpose to be accomplished, the workshop type is especially productive in the

stimulation of group thinking. The lecture-type meeting is planned when the knowledge desired is technical and beyond the experience of the group. It may be likened to a "one-way transmission line pattern" wherein reliance is on the speaker or resource person, relieving individuals of the responsibility for active participation. By contrast, the workshop should encourage the relationship of co-equals combining their knowledge with the help of the resource leadership. Furthermore, as a stimulus to group thinking, psycho-drama and role playing are being re-introduced into high school and adult education classrooms. In fact, there is particular need for these techniques in adult education, which has suffered from its inheritance of "telling" instead of drawing out the thoughts of others.

It was agreed, then, that the well-planned workshop is an effective means of achieving group thinking—a pooling of ideas with the assistance of resource leadership.

A Group at Work Democratically

The second session was devoted to a conference on the characteristics of a democratic work group. Planning and leadership were considered, with the realization that the concepts developed during these meetings would have no value unless used in a democratic atmosphere.

Factors that enter into building a democratic work group were listed as:

1. Purpose
 - a. We take too much for granted, in many instances, without building a background
 - b. Pre-planning is necessary
2. Group atmosphere
 - a. Security of the group

- b. Attitude of the leader
- c. Elimination of confusion between facts and opinions
- d. Group feeling of permissiveness to have problems
- e. Feeling on part of group that something will be done.

The group decided that a democratic leader exhibits these qualities:

1. Participates as co-equal member
2. Understands his motivations
3. Knows how to motivate participation
4. Believes in group process
5. Practices democratic living outside the group
6. Demonstrates impartiality and fairness
7. Demonstrates sense of timing
8. Knows how to use resource people.

Group Discussion As an Application of Democratic Principles

The process of group discussion was demonstrated by means of a conference on the problems of supervisors. The following problems were suggested and discussed by the group:

1. How to have good staff meetings
 - a. Called by someone else
 - b. Called by us
2. How to get more out of institutes
3. How to make committee work more effective
 - a. Administrative staff committees
 - b. Lay-advisory committees
4. How to improve P.T.A. meetings
5. How to release creative powers of members of groups with whom we work
6. How to lead meetings
 - a. Problems of organization
 - (1) Meeting by directives
 - (2) Pressure of too many meetings
 - (3) Interpretation of directives
 - (4) Heterogeneity of interests
 - (5) Setting up planning groups
 - b. Clearcut leadership situations
 - (1) When to call meetings

- (2) Planning responsibilities
- (3) Translating talk to action
- (4) Getting out those who need it
- (5) Defining common aims
- (6) Eliminating clock watching
- (7) Dealing with dominance
- (8) Releasing creativeness
- (9) Making my problems the group problems
- (10) Motivating participation.

Elements of Effective Group Leadership

Concepts of effective group leadership brought out by special resource people helped each individual to define more clearly his own responsibility as a leader. Specific reference was made to examples of growth evident in the immediate group:

We had used ourselves as a laboratory.

We had listed areas in which our problems lay.

Attention was called to the fact, however, that the problems we had proposed were all in fields in which we believed persons or policies beyond our control were sources of frustration. It was suggested that, as usually happens, no one had proposed a problem which he believed to have either direct or indirect root in his own personality or equipment for his job.

It was further pointed out that each person has his own "power field"—an area in which he has some responsibility or authority to move or produce movement. Frustration occurs where an individual fights against or seeks to change by direct action something lying outside of his "power field."

Of additional help to the group in the consideration of this problem was a list of "do's and don'ts" for conducting a discussion meeting.

1. The group should be small in size—not more than thirty-five.
2. The group should have some common denominator of interest.
3. The topic should be "discussable" and within the competence of the group—if expert technical knowledge is desired, plan a lecture-type meeting.
4. Plan sufficient time to cover the subject.
5. In general, one meeting should not consume more than one and one-half hours.
6. Pay attention to physical arrangements—seating, lighting, ventilation, and acoustics.
7. Be sure members of the group are introduced to one another.
8. Make clear the purpose of the meeting, what is to be discussed, and what should be accomplished.
9. The primary purpose of a conference is the sharing of ideas and opinions.
10. The leader should give members of the group confidence and encouragement, drawing out hesitant members with questions.
11. The leader should break the ice and start the discussion.
12. A good leader has some knowledge of the subject and knows the pertinent source material, but is not necessarily an expert. When he does not know the answer to a question, he should refer to a source where the answer may be found.
13. The leader should have faith in the group and in the value of discussing the topic.
14. The leader should show no partiality. He should find something good in the contribution of each member.
15. The leader should keep the discussion on the topic—no two-member debates should be allowed.
16. The leader should have a pleasing voice, a sense of humor, a sense of timing, and often a sense of the dramatic.
17. A good leader ties up the discussion now and then and summarizes it at the end of the meeting.

Role Playing in Programs of Teacher Growth

Two or three meetings were devoted to dramatizations of group problems. First one and then another of two supervisors—supposed to have called together teachers whom they felt to be somewhat skeptical of, or even antagonistic toward—their supervision, came before the group and impersonated the supervisor's dealing with such a group in trying to establish more confidence and friendliness. There were dramatizations, too, of the supervisor's relationships with principals. The discussion which followed the dramatizations developed the following principles:

1. In a situation such as that outlined above, a supervisor would do well to open his meeting with a clear discussion of some problems common to both him and his teachers, thus not only capturing their interest but establishing rapport. From this the supervisor might well move on to encourage a frank statement of problems from his teaching group, from time to time outlining a problem of his own and possibly placing in two columns on the blackboard (1) the problems that are proposed by the teacher and (2) the problems that are his own. If time did not permit discussions of the problems listed, a second meeting should do so.
2. The final suggestion at this meeting was that problems are very likely to be *blame* problems. The leader should keep on digging until he succeeds in getting teachers to outline problems in his and their "power fields."
3. It is important that the supervisor

make two things very clear to his group, (1) there are limits to his powers of direct manipulation of certain things of which teachers complain—most of them are administrative matters; (2) there are things which he can attack directly; many things out of his direct "power field" can be attacked indirectly. Suggestions which will help the teacher and the supervisor make the indirect attacks which will move toward solutions of difficulties are part of the supervisor's job.

Evidence of Growth

Written comments by group members constitute an effective evaluation of a workshop. Two samples of the comments on this workshop illustrate its value:

"I think I am now better able to obtain from a group an idea of what their common problems are and to help them work out the answers instead of giving them the answer to what I think their problems are."

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"The conferences challenged me to evaluate constantly the very real ideas that were expressed by colleagues and leaders by a continuous sifting and struggle to make practical application for my own use. I am determined to try to improve my leadership with these points in mind: (1) push into the background my problems that seem to hinge on decisions outside my 'power field' until I solve problems in fields in which I can be effective; (2) work out better techniques for releasing the great creative ability of principals and teachers; (3) demonstrate democratic techniques in my daily work."

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