Some Hints to Leadership Needs

What experiences in my training as a supervisor (or director of curriculum, curriculum consultant, principal, superintendent) have proven of greatest value to me in an operating situation?
What gaps in my preparation led to insecurity and inefficiency in dealing with actual problems?
If I could take a year of graduate study right now, what experiences would I most need in order to increase my skill?
What types of in-service experiences should supervisors (or directors of curriculum, curriculum consultants, principals, superintendents) have?

These were the questions which we sent to a number of individuals charged with major responsibility for instructional improvement in school systems throughout the country. Twenty-two of these persons shared with us their judgments concerning the values and shortages in their preparation for the positions they now hold, and their opinions concerning their greatest needs at present. In turn, we share with you these views from rural and city supervisors, curriculum consultants, directors of instruction, elementary and secondary school principals, helping teachers, and assistant superintendents. They come from school communities of all sizes in West Virginia, Iowa, Oklahoma, New Jersey, Utah, Michigan, California, Delaware, Texas, and the District of Columbia.

Other individuals in like positions will undoubtedly indulge in contrasts and comparisons as they read the views expressed. And those responsible for the preparation of persons who will hold positions of instructional leadership should find it profitable to compare the offerings of colleges and universities with what people on the job say they got, failed to get, and needed.

It is not surprising when an evaluation of preparation for any profession includes some judgment of the “courses” which were taken as requirements for completion of that preparation. Neither is it surprising when judgments include some reflection on the individuals who taught the courses. Comments by supervisors indicate the importance of the “teacher” in any learning situation. One pays tribute to individuals who “challenged me to practice what I really believe, built confidence that problems can be solved when people work cooperatively, taught that the leader is constantly seeking and finding new avenues through which he can serve.” Others say:

The experiences I had under the guidance of the first teacher I had at the college level who gave me the opportunity to participate in discussion, to explore various authorities, to question and relate my experiences as a teacher to those of authority, were of infinite help. I learned at this late date (after ten years of teaching) that I could discover some things for myself. I discovered I had creative ability and I began to use it. Up to this period of awakening I had accepted the opinions of others. I had only re-

December 1948

135
peated by memory what others had to say about teaching and I tried to fall into their patterns. It was this experience that started me on my way to supervision as I began to help others to question and explore.

During a course in administration I learned to recognize the infinite worth of a fine man’s conception of democratic values. As a result of stimulation thus afforded, and as I tried to put into practice what I heard discussed, I discovered that strength came to the leader who gave away ideas; when others took credit for your ideas to give them credit unre-servedly, for to a good leader it mattered only that a good program for children be cooperatively developed; that as a result of sharing and not trying to possess one’s ideas, the source seemed to fill with a flow of new and better ideas—constantly keeping the supply rich enough for the needs of all.

Pros and Cons of College Courses

As these individuals evaluate the courses which were of most value to them they mention some in the areas of child development, in curriculum, and in supervision. A director of elementary education cites as of particular value:

Courses under instructors who had previous experience in public school supervision and administration. Too often the college professor has had too little or no experience in a town or city school system. Consequently, the students get an inadequate textbook and theoretical information. The most satisfying and helpful experiences come from those who had actually experienced the hundreds of problems in the public schools.

A secondary school principal testifies to the value of courses in general curriculum and educational psychology in developing curriculum programs. But he goes on to say:

I gained very little from my training in administration and supervision courses in college. Particularly lacking were experiences in group work which would enable one to understand the group processes necessary for success in working and planning cooperatively, either on a building unit basis or on the city-wide level.

Indeed, the evaluation of college courses would indicate that there is room for a considerable amount of improvement in this area.

There was too much theory. The professors had not been in an elementary school for years and years. I learned that theory would not necessarily apply to the particular job or problem.

I was given no experience in classrooms with children of various ages—such as a one-teacher rural school. I had no idea of how a school could be organized and operated with children of so many different ages. Yet my work as a beginning supervisor was located in forty-six one-teacher schools. I had methods without operation technique. I had methods without the study of children. I was taught children’s literature in isolation of children. I was taught methods in isolation of school-community interaction. In fact, I learned the difference in classrooms long after I had my training. I was taught children’s literature in isolation of children. I was taught methods in isolation of school-community interaction. In fact, I learned the difference in classrooms long after I had my training. I was trained as though all classrooms and all schools were alike—since good methods seemed to be the answer to all problems.

The greatest gaps were probably in lack of opportunity to learn more about group dynamics and human growth and development. In addition, there was little opportunity to find a definite philosophy of education. Formal courses do not accomplish this.

The biggest gap in my training was the total lack of practice in working with others. My problems as I see them now seemed to stem from my inability to work with others whose point of view differed
from mine. Consequently, I operated from a set of standards that were handed down and were not accepted always. This caused emotional conflicts in some cases.

Specifics Which Helped

A number of the persons responding recall specific experiences which were of value to them. One elementary supervisor testifies to a preparatory period which helped her recognize good teaching, gave her skills in planning conferences and in curriculum building. Another mentions a series of experiences in which she includes seminar work with supervisors, special training in journalism, and freedom and time to explore a good curriculum laboratory.

A third lists observation of classroom work with small groups of teachers followed by discussion under the leadership of good teachers who knew much about how children develop; observing with ten teachers in various classrooms and writing up the observation without previous discussion — followed by pooled discussion; sitting in on parent conferences; and participating in a round-up of public opinion concerning the job of the school.

Of the latter experience she says, “I had the assignment to interview twenty people in various walks of life and bring back to the class their views as to what they believe the function of the school is in relation to their children or the youth of the community. This was an eye opener!”

Still a fourth supervisor counts of particular value “an invitation to project myself into a supervisory position in a known rural school district and to formulate an over-all supervisory program based on probable or known needs in harmony with my philosophy of supervision and the best educational thought on current trends in supervision.”

Says another individual in commenting on the particular value of specific experiences:

One experience in my days of beginning supervision stands out. The instructor had had supervisory experience and knew some of the problems involved. Various members of the class were paired and given a situation involving a conference. One acted as the teacher and the other the supervisor. Although we “played conference” there was more reality than just talking or reading about a conference.

And a director of instruction judges as his most valuable preparatory experience:

Seminars, small study groups, and workshops that revolved around the problem of how to work with people, how to exert leadership, how to influence people to direct their own efforts creatively. I find that such experiences were infinitely more helpful than formal courses or studies of curriculum organization. This is true, I believe, because real curriculum development takes place when the attitudes and behaviors of teachers are changed.

Skill in Group Living Is Needed

Group processes, group dynamics, experience in group living are terms found over and over again in an examination of the responses. A few individuals testify to the value of experiences in this area. One member of a state department of education puts at the top of the list of valuable preparatory activities:

Experiences in Group Living in a six-weeks summer workshop. In this work-
shop participants lived, planned, solved, and evaluated as a group. Curriculum experiences included an elementary school in session in the building, managing of the cafeteria, and many social, recreational, creative, and field activities. The resource staff was very large in comparison to workshop enrollment. Negro and white, Jew and Christian were included by plan. Leadership value was high!

An elementary supervisor comments:

I working with people at college in many different kinds of situations gave me a much-improved ability to understand how group thinking and behavior operates in the solution of problems. This help on “process” has also proven of great help in making supervision a cooperative experience.

Fifteen individuals indicate a desire for further experience in group planning or a feeling of lack in this important aspect of preparation. The comments below are illustrative:

I should like to know what principles are at work when there is successful group planning, the role of leadership, how to release leadership.

I had less confidence in meeting lay and parent groups than in any other phase of my experience. Part of my problem was the fear of parent reaction to the things I was trying to do. My training had given me little skill in handling discussion groups. This I have learned the hard way.

I would want some work in human relations and also in group dynamics. I would want to understand the true meaning of leadership and all that it entails. More specifically, I would want to improve my techniques in working with both individuals and with groups. I would want to know how to act as chairman, and also as a consultant to a group. I would want my instructors to practice a way of work-

I should like first-hand experience in group dynamics as a participant in the roles available in group situations.

The Individual Is Important, Too

Neither do the comments omit responsibility in working with individuals. An elementary supervisor feels that she needs “guidance in counseling teachers,” and an elementary school principal asks for “training for understanding of individual differences in training, philosophy, age, personality in teachers.” She goes on to remark that “emphasis was so completely on the child that the thought of the teacher as a person and the problems she faced were almost completely neglected.”

A helping teacher and an assistant superintendent comment in a similar manner.

My training for supervision was more adequate than most people got because there were supervisors interested in giving me a good preparation for supervision. Any inefficiency or insecurity I have felt as a helping teacher had its roots in my background and development as a person. My own helping teachers helped me considerably with this and I want to pay tribute to them. Most people aren’t so lucky. There are few institutions and few supervisors who care about teachers as human beings and try to help us to be fine human beings first. Being a good teacher or supervisor follows easily, then.

Stress the personality of teachers, supervisors, all. We need to know more about the ticking of an individual.

Workshops and Conferences—Essentials

High on the list of desired experiences, both in the college situation and
as a part of in-service activity, are workshops and conferences of all kinds. State- and system-wide workshops, national conferences, workshops in which instructional leaders work together, workshops where principals and supervisors and directors of instruction work side by side with classroom teachers—all of these were on the list of desired experiences. A large number of the comments point up this need specifically:

1. **We need to have the opportunity to attend a workshop or conference and meet educators from other parts of the country and thus broaden our outlook and see our problems as part of the whole educational process and not something unusual in our own situation.**

2. **Attendance upon or responsibility for a productive curriculum workshop is almost mandatory for perhaps no other device offers so many possibilities for self-improvement. Second in importance to the curriculum workshop is participation in locally organized groups for study and self-improvement, for definition of and subsequent consideration of local instructional problems, and for productive contributions to local educational philosophies.**

3. **Frequent conferences should be held within small areas, for travel convenience, to permit the pooling of ideas and discussion of problems. Too little information is exchanged between and among schools.**

4. **We need many, many opportunities for people who are teaching on all levels or holding administrative or supervisory positions to work together to break down the feeling of status and build better relationships.**

5. **The practical work of conferences, workshops, and participation in meetings where you actually work with and share with one another are musts. These are more real experiences than college courses. Bringing teachers and pupils into the total picture and seeing the whole group will better enable the principal or supervisor to work toward a common goal.**

6. **Let's have conferences within the state planned around real problems and solved on a cooperative basis in which skill in working with others and the practice of good human relations were observed.**

We had a feeling of satisfaction when national ASCD meetings were mentioned by several people as valuable in-service experiences. The following comment, however, sobered our thinking and indicated opportunities for improvement in planning for professional meetings.

7. **We need small group study or workshop experiences that would provide sufficient time for participants to explore thoroughly the problems that confront them. Such conferences should be over a period of days or weeks and should not be subject to other distractions.**

8. **I do not believe that listening to speeches is either an educational or enlightening experience. There is a place for the qualified expert, but it should be in an informal, face-to-face situation.**

Pardon my tenacity, but deliver me from the usual type of “educational” conference with which we are burdened. I think ASCD is making a noble effort to get away from this type of conference, but has not yet succeeded. The large number of people, the size of the city, the number of meetings of various kinds are inimical to real learning.

**We Must Know Children**

“Probably the fault is mine, but the most severe single handicap encountered in my present position is the lack of sufficient training and knowledge in new developments relating to the na-
ture of growth and development in the child,” is the frank comment of one director of instruction.

That others feel this same lack is indicated by further statements. A secondary principal, if he could take further graduate work, would engage in research and study in child development. A helping teacher indicates a workshop in human development as one of her most valuable experiences. An elementary supervisor in a rural area wants to know “a great deal more about developmental tasks, maturational sequence, inner potential, and other problems significant in guiding children.”

Another supervisor would like to engage in a study of the twelve to sixteen-year-olds. She asks, “Is the school program failing? Are the interests of this age group being met?”

And a supervisor adds:

My concern for graduate study now would be to become more skillful in the interpretation of behavior of young children. I should like to do more work in child development with emphasis on the phases of social and emotional growth. I should like to help teachers to do much better planning of programs which would emphasize a kind of group living to promote the development of adequate social skills in children.

A concern for really knowing children is indicated in several of the responses. One supervisor would like to have “occasional, intimate experiences with children as individuals and groups.” Another indicates the importance of centering the attention on the learner in all efforts to improve teaching. A third person suggests the need for actually being a participating member in a classroom situation, and a secondary school principal feels the need for actual teaching experiences.

A director of elementary education suggests that desirable in-service experiences ought to include actual classroom teaching and hastens to add—“not to be confused with demonstration.”

A Curriculum for Today

These who carry leadership responsibility for improvement of the quality of instructional programs are concerned, too, about better meeting the needs of children in terms of the kind of curriculum best suited to the needs of today’s children and youth. They speak of the need for continuous participation in curriculum planning, guidance in meeting the needs of the gifted and the underprivileged child, help in developing programs in resource-use education in the elementary grades.

One supervisor deplores her personal lack of understanding in the areas of science and sociology; another expresses a need for “keeping abreast of changes in the social order and how to meet these changes in our present curriculum”; a third indicates that if she could do further graduate work she would want “to give some time to a study of the needs of children in the area of social studies in the light of present-day conditions with emphasis on implementing the needs discovered.”

A fourth asks for help in “the development of an on-going program based on a philosophy in keeping with world-mindedness—today, now, here.”

The Community Is Important

Neither are contacts with parents and community overlooked in statements of gaps in preparation.
"Participation in and responsibility for community improvement projects"; "skill in maintaining a good public relations program"; "meeting with people from social agencies, health centers, child guidance clinics, recreation centers, and church groups in order to be a part of a community group and see education as a part of society and not an end in itself"; "wider observation and study of community resources"; "guidance in learning how to survey the community and coordinate effort for educational purposes"—these are typical statements from those who are concerned with making education truly a community enterprise.

An elementary supervisor observes:

Misc. My training did not emphasize the importance of working with patrons of the school in each community. This has handicapped my efficiency in getting wide participation in policymaking. ... I'd like opportunities to work with community groups on the solution of community problems. This would help me to experience group action and help me to understand the problems from a different perspective than that ordinarily viewed by the school person.

Consultant Service, Experimentation, and Visitation

And there is an expressed need for guidance and help from outside the immediate working situation. An assistant superintendent deplores the lack of stimulation for participation in professional organizations in her early preparation; a director of instruction says that "all persons charged with responsibility for leadership in instructional improvement should engage actively in state and national efforts for instructional improvement."

Over and over there is mentioned the need for consultant service—from state departments of education, colleges, and universities. A high school principal asks for "association with field services or cooperative studies sponsored by higher institutions of learning and tied in with local programs of curriculum development."

Research is still another term found frequently in the statement of needs. One supervisor wants to be able to spend some time on "research in a shared situation of intergroup cooperation, attitudes, democratic planning by and with children, social interaction of personalities, building of acceptance in the classroom, re-evaluation of curriculum and purposes of general education." Another would like "more opportunities to carry on informal yet systematic educational experimentation."

There is every indication that the educational clinic idea, discussed in another article in this issue, would receive wide acclaim from the individuals whose responses are recorded here. They ask for more time to visit and observe—community schools; teachers, curriculum workers, and superintendents who are carrying out successful programs; and individuals carrying responsibilities similar to their own.

Understanding the Business End

A variety of needs in the area of administration and organization is indicated in a number of comments:

Misc. My relationship to administration was never clearly defined except as I interpreted it in various situations. The "courses" which I "took" never helped me see the role of the elementary principal in relation to the in-service growth...
of teachers. Consequently, I have tended to assume more responsibility for shaping the educational policies of the local school than I should have done.

If training could have provided more actual practice in budgeting, much of my work and that of principal's would have been more efficient.

We Need Guidance, Too

“Supervision of supervision” or “practice supervision” is a request of several persons charged with leadership responsibility. Says one:

To do some practical work in supervision under guidance as part of a workshop for supervisors and elementary principals would be the same type of experience that teachers have when they are practice teaching. They work with the slow learner as well as the bright child, and then have an opportunity to talk over their experiences with the critic teacher and quite often with their college group.

I had too little help and guidance at the period of induction when one feels insecure. Perhaps we should expect some close supervision from state departments and universities during the first year on the job.

There was no opportunity for me to observe or talk with others doing supervising. A kind of student-supervisory setup would have been very helpful. Much of the training was on subject matter rather than people. I had little or no guidance in ways of handling parent conferences or in working with teachers in groups. My training seemed to center around me as an individual rather than as a member of various groups.

Values from In-Service Activities

That on-the-job learning can provide valuable lessons is indicated by a number of comments:

Those who were guiding me into supervision saw to it that I had a varied teaching experience in the middle grades of a two-teacher school, grades one and two in a large consolidated school, and all grades in a one-teacher school. This was invaluable in helping me to understand the problems of all age levels in different situations. In the consolidated school I also taught music to all grades and assisted the principal so that I could get some insight into the administration of a school.

I also had experience in working with adults by being a member of curriculum committees and later being chairman of them. Everything I learned, I learned on the job with guidance, which is the best way, in my opinion.

A background of classroom teaching experience helped me translate ideas from books and theoretical class discussions into actual live situations. It became the frame of reference against which to check ideas, suggestions, and practices; and to sift and select what would be feasible and what would not be in an operating situation.

For three years I was a member of the Social Studies Production Committee in the State Curriculum Revision Study. For several reasons this was the most important single group of experiences I had as preparation for the responsibilities with which I am now charged. The experiences offered training in setting up and managing complex organizations, defining and attacking broad and significant problems, and helped to develop a peculiar insight into situations that constitute a continuous handicap to improved instructional programs and procedures.

I acquired my first impressions of the real potentialities of the group process. Much of the production committee’s work was connected with university seminar courses to which the leading curriculum experts of the country were drawn. Leadership and guidance furnished by these experts during the period of active production was particularly helpful. Our method of operation was a fore-runner
of the modern curriculum workshop, and the experiences gained in these early years have been invaluable to me in organizing and directing productive in-service curriculum workshops. Nor can I forget the unusual benefits that accompanied newly developed concepts of the dynamic nature of the public school curriculum.

As a teacher I worked with a principal who did all the wrong things: ignoring teachers, never giving encouragement but only criticism, not being available when support was necessary in conferences with parents and/or children. Thus, I learned what not to do through actual experience.

The most valuable help I received came on the job. I was placed in the position on an emergency. I learned more practical applications under the guidance of the superintendent than anywhere else. He had a modern philosophy of education, understood the elementary school, and was most patient when he realized I was new to the field.

But even this type of experience has its disadvantages as indicated by an elementary school principal.

I had taught for nineteen years before becoming a principal. The last nine years were spent in schools in which the teachers were selected for demonstration purposes so that our faculty discussions and informal conversations showed an interest in pupil progress and a desire to provide materials and experiences to promote child growth and development.

It came as a shock to me after my appointment as a principal to find on my faculty teachers who were using methods of thirty years ago, using horrible methods to shame and punish children, and showing no interest or desire to plan cooperatively or make any changes. It was quite frustrating to sit in the classrooms seeing so many undesirable things happening to children and know that progress would have to be made slowly.

Wouldn’t it be necessary and valuable for supervisors and principals to work with experienced, inexperienced, good, and poor teachers through classroom visitation, conferences, and meetings and then meet with a workshop group to share experiences and receive guidance?

Many More Needs Are Expressed

And there is a variety of personal needs and desires (or should they be termed professional as well?) expressed in brief comments. One individual deplores a total lack of experience in living, courtesies and social customs, and recreation at an elementary and high school level.

Three individuals ask for more attention to public speaking in the program of preparation and one aptly remarks, “It is only experience which now keeps my knees from knocking when addressing large groups of people. The blood pressure still rises and probably always will.”

“Time to read”—the wealth of professional literature and the variety of literature not labeled professional—is the plea from several sources. “Time to write,” says one, while another asks for help in learning “how to write.”

And high on the list of desired experiences of one director of elementary education is the “opportunity to learn foreign languages, to prepare myself for possible educational work in other countries.”

Yes, certainly our leadership concepts are constantly enlarging.