

Organizational Blocks to Creative Leadership

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Gilbert S. Willey, superintendent of the Lincoln, Nebraska public schools, outlines here five major barriers to creative leadership in our school systems; and recommends continuous study, experimentation, and exchange of experiences in removing these organizational blocks.

TO PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES for creative leadership to flourish on all fronts is the chief responsibility of the superintendent of schools in these times. It may be assumed that creative leadership flourishes best and most generally in a democratic environment. That this assumption is well founded is best illustrated by a review of the conditions which are most essential if democracy in any social group is to prevail:

► A belief in the unique worth of each individual, providing freedom for individual growth and development.

► An understanding that no man can live unto himself alone. There must be social interdependence and cooperation for the individual to achieve his greatest self-realization.

► A faith that it is possible for groups, large and small, to solve their own problems in a spirit of mutual helpfulness and good will—through study, discussion, and friendly persuasion.

Creative leadership will have a chance to flourish in school systems when all lines of human relationships are drawn in agreement with the principles mentioned. Unfortunately there are serious blocks to creative leadership found in the organizational plans of most school systems. Five such barriers are: procedures and policies of Boards of Educa-

tion; internal plans for administering the schools; organization for supervision; provisions within a school building for improving instruction; and administrative demands made upon teachers.

What Kind of a Board?

A representative Board of Education elected by the citizens of a community to "see that the schools are run" still remains an effective organization for obtaining desired results. However, members of these boards are usually busy people and often do not have the time nor training to "run" the schools. Their function is largely legislative or policy making. Their outlook on school problems depends largely upon the reaction of the public toward the schools and upon information provided by the members of the administrative staff. Board members who discourage initiative on the part of members of the school staff are definitely blocking creative efforts which may have a profound effect upon the educational results of an entire school system.

There is definite danger, however, in a Board of Education accepting too readily the recommendations of school administrators. This may tend to develop the attitude in some communities

that the Board of Education is a "closed corporation" and that the public should have no voice in school affairs. To overcome this situation some Boards hold meetings open to the public and work with community groups in determining school policies. Providing easy channels of communication between the members of the Board and the citizens of a community will do much in developing leadership among citizens as well as school people in evolving an effective school program.

Must Teachers Be "Told?"

The history of school administration in America has been one of gradual transition from lay administration to administration carried on by well-prepared professional people. Various kinds of administrative organizations have evolved to expedite the work of the schools. Each has its merits and limitations.

Some school systems are administered like clockwork and in lock-step fashion. Their concern has been chiefly economy and a certain kind of efficiency. Experts and special committees have "told" the teachers what to do. Communications and directions have been largely one way, namely, "from the top down." And indeed, many teachers still want to be told what to do and have not yet experienced the greater satisfaction that comes through group participation and planning.

In other words, school administration in general has not provided the type of organization which permits all educational workers to work in freedom and security. The administrative plan of authority, which encourages administrators to tell principals and super-

visors what to do and people in these positions, in turn, to tell teachers what to do, is a good illustration of an organizational block to creative leadership. The dignity and worth of all individuals involved are too generally overlooked in such a plan. Consideration for the human factor has been of only minor significance.

This fact is coming home to us now. One of the chief reasons for persons not returning to the teaching profession after leaving for war service has been the monotony of the work and the lack of challenge which they experienced as teachers. Ways must be found in administering schools for all groups of workers concerned to have a vital part in shaping policies which affect them.

How About Creativity in Supervision?

The purpose of supervision has been mainly that of improving instruction. This is a worthy purpose, but too often the human element has been overlooked as supervisors have planned programs for special areas and have been deeply concerned about time in the schedule for special fields. There seem not enough hours in the school week to get all subjects in the schedule.

In the meantime, educational thought has been moving away from a subject-centered curriculum toward a more general approach to problems which are of deep concern to childhood and youth. In this transition too frequently provisions have not been made to help supervisors understand their role in the new scheme of things. Without such understanding, creative leadership on the supervisor's part can hardly flourish.

In any organizational plan for instructional change and improvement it is essential that the role of the supervisors be clearly defined in order that the persons concerned may continue to serve creatively in their various areas of responsibility. This is a task requiring continued study and experimentation. Some systems, however, are finding suitable ways of providing creative supervisory helps. A promising plan for supervision is one which provides a "generalist" with marked ability in art or music or some other special field, who may work with several faculty groups regularly on instructional problems.

How Work with Individual Schools?

The principal of a school is essentially an instructional leader. Upon the quality of his leadership the quality of instruction will, to a great extent, depend. He may, for example, work in fear of central administrative officers. If so, this feeling will be shared by most of the teachers in the building. Unless careful plans are made to assist principals in assuming responsibility for educational improvement within buildings they will, too often, continue to be deterrents to whatever creative leadership may be waiting to find expression among teachers, pupils, and parents.

It is possible, however, for principals to share in the total planning for a school system in such manner that they will feel stimulated to creative effort and exert the leadership needed by faculties within individual buildings. As principals study their responsibilities, they will realize more and more the value of utilizing the interests and talents of teachers, pupils, and parents in planning many phases of school work.

When a principal becomes a student of educational processes and trends, often the road to instructional improvement is opened. There is an increased utilization of talents of coordinators, teachers, pupils, and parents in evolving a school program. To get such a program into action requires careful planning from central offices in order to help principals to assume this different role of leadership.

What About Teacher Leadership?

In the final analysis, the teacher who works with children is the person who has a definite responsibility in developing leadership on the part of the young people. In order to accomplish this, the teacher must be permitted to work in an atmosphere of trust and understanding. He must be encouraged by his associates to try new ways.

Too often the beginning teacher has entered his career with misconceptions about teaching. He has been prepared to teach a "subject" instead of taking his cue from the needs and interests of those whom he is attempting to teach. Teaching so-called subjects to succeeding groups of learners becomes, in time, monotonous and unchallenging.

Rigid dependence on courses of study may constitute another block to creative leadership. Teachers frequently get new insights and inspiration through attendance at conferences, summer sessions, and professional gatherings; but, upon resuming their teaching duties, they are forced to fall back into the same old patterns and receive little guidance in the application of newer concepts. Too many school systems make little or no attempt to utilize newer ideas which teachers often bring.

Connected closely with the course of study difficulty is the *perfect* system of grade stratification which characterizes American education. With two or more grades in a classroom, what can a teacher do! How can the course of study requirements for two groups of pupils in the same classroom be met?

Teacher rating, designed to improve teaching and commonly used in school systems, represents another practice which contributes to a teacher's dilemma. Fears, suspicions, and unwholesome attitudes surrounding the rating of teachers tend to keep many teachers from giving of their best. The items on which ratings have been made too often have had little relation to qualities which make for successful teaching.

It would seem that administrative requirements of the nature of those mentioned are sufficient to thwart the initiative of many teachers who would be creative if given proper encouragement. An effective way of overcoming some of these blocks to creativity on the part of classroom teachers is to base efforts for instructional improvement upon the

real problems of teachers rather than upon what administrators think teachers need. If our schools are to benefit from the creative efforts that educational workers are willing to exert when given opportunity and encouragement, the first approach is the only sound one.

Can Blocks Be Removed

As school administrators seek to provide opportunities in school systems for democracy to work, many old values will have to give way to new concepts and practices. There should be deep concern in educational planning to keep alive the creative urge on the part of all educational workers. The organizational blocks to creative leadership in school systems which have been presented are only typical of innumerable devices or systems which are daily thwarting school people in their efforts to render effective service. It is hoped that through continuous study, experimentation, and exchange of experiences ways will be found in school systems to remove a large share of the organizational blocks to creative leadership.

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