

Letters to the Editor

Role of Director of Instruction

Salt Lake City, Utah
November 30, 1960

Editor

Educational Leadership

Dear Sir:

Glen Hass, in "The Role of the Director of Instruction" (*Educational Leadership*, November 1960), has written a paper that should be of value to a new curriculum coordinator or to a superintendent and administrative staff who are adding this position to the system but are unfamiliar with its responsibilities. Most of those who have done work of this kind, however, will find that the proposals made are familiar to them, and many are performing most of the functions described, but the most difficult problems and unresolved issues in defining the position are omitted.

While it is true that there is little literature devoted specifically to this position, most of the rather voluminous literature on supervision is pertinent and surprisingly similar in point of view, particularly that published within the last twenty years or so.

It is not altogether clear, however, either from research or practice, whether a leader's "perception of his role governs his action" or the reverse; that is, whether behavior defines the role. There is considerable disagreement, also, with the notion that "the position of curriculum

director is both administrative and supervisory." A group of Wisconsin coordinators with whom I have worked ranged all the way from those who saw the position as primarily an administrative one to those who perceived it as one carrying no administrative authority or responsibility, and functioned accordingly. It is true that many in such positions have administrative functions (with concomitant administrative authority over those with whom they work) and consider it desirable. It is also true, however, that some believe the position should be consultative only and that the possession of authority is a handicap in work which is essentially one of service.

While the seven areas of responsibility listed are probably widely accepted, the word "coordinating," which appears three times in the list, is of uncertain meaning. I have been a curriculum coordinator, and I still do not know what the term means. One of the problems I had (perhaps in role definition) was that many seem to perceive the term as implying some degree of uniformity or similarity in curriculum content and organization, and I could not see it that way. It is possible to have central personnel and committees for the exchange of information, ideas, and practices, without expecting uniformity in textbook selection and other important curriculum decisions.

While it is true that some directors of instruction do not include all grades, all instructional leaders, testing of instructional procedures, the budget, or the selection of principals or supervisors, in their work, some do. A thorny problem lies here: if one has a hand in hiring personnel, should he not also have a hand in firing them; and if he does, can he be perceived as a "service" person if he takes part in hiring and firing?

Agreement on Goals

Finally, the director of instruction should be constantly active in assisting the staff to reach agreement regarding goals." I submit that this is relatively easy, if goals are stated generally enough, and rather unimportant. Is agreement so necessary, anyway? People can agree on goals and disagree violently on achieving them, and usually do, while people who disagree on their goals might be able to agree on means they are willing to use. Here, also, diversity may be more important than uniformity, as Hass suggests later on. This may mean, however, that there might not be any such thing as "the" instructional program, but many. The extent to which this is permissible and desirable is one of the curriculum worker's knottiest problems. Agreement on this point seems difficult enough within a group of curriculum specialists; it seems almost impossible for supervisors, teachers, administrators, and laymen to agree on it.

One of the most difficult parts of the attempt at a job analysis is differentiating between the functions of the coordinator and those of the building principal. Perhaps too many principals consider their school an autonomous kingdom, but you cannot have the different schools doing "different planning in different ways"

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without direction and leadership from a principal, and how to have this without some conflict with the central office staff is hard to see. Of course, if the director of instruction acts only as a consultant, this is possible, which is one of the reasons why I am one of those who hold that he should have no administrative authority, to return to an earlier argument.

The attempt at a clearer conception of the instructional leader's job is admirable, and the need for clarification of the role is well pointed out. Lest this paper seem unduly critical, let me say that those of us at the University of Utah are looking forward to having Dr. Hass with us next summer.

Sincerely,

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