

Recent developments in the

Role of the Supervisor

IN this age of unrest and revolution, the school supervisor has not been left undisturbed. Forces are at work which are reshaping supervisory positions and placing new demands on all instructional leaders who would not be bypassed in the rush of new educational developments. Before detailing the changed pressures and demands two key words will be defined.

Chronology of Role Influences

"Supervisor" is here used as a generic term to include all whose unique or primary concern is instructional leadership. Supervisors may be called helping teachers, curriculum consultants, curriculum directors or assistant superintendents in charge of instruction. The word "role" is used to indicate what the holder of a position does. While there are clear differences among the holders of various instructional leadership positions in respect to what they do, their professional activities are certainly interrelated and it is the contention here that all are being profoundly influenced by several recent developments.

The influences operating to shape the supervisor's role may be clarified, in

part, by a glance backward at the roles of the supervisor during the past 50 years. During the first two decades of the century, the supervisor was primarily concerned with quality control in respect to the teaching process. Teacher preparation was at a minimum and supervisors were charged with visiting classes, observing and conferring with teachers. Demonstration lessons and institutes on the content and method of various subject fields reflected the level of preparation of teachers as well as the introduction of new areas to the curriculum. Individual supervisors, in many instances, had a narrow range of responsibilities such as handwriting, music, art or reading. Their appointment resulted from a new addition to the curriculum or from a trouble spot in previous offerings.

By the 1920's concern was developing for the impact of the total educational program and much attention was focused on over-all objectives such as the Cardinal Principles of Education. Course-of-study development as a means of reorganizing the curriculum was the usual approach. Supervisors often became course-of-study writers, first with the help of outside consultants, and later with the assistance of committees of teachers. The general supervisor

gradually became increasingly common.

What had been viewed as a task of clarification of purpose and realignment of content in the 'twenties, came to be seen by the 'thirties and 'forties as a more complex task of changing teaching and teachers. The inadequacy of course-of-study revision alone became apparent and new approaches of numerous kinds were invented. Central to many of these were the ideas of participation and involvement of teachers in the process of curriculum change. By force of circumstances the supervisor became a specialist in group dynamics. American business and industry, with help from the social psychologists, had done the pioneering, and in many school systems group work supplanted close, individual supervision, as well as course-of-study writing, at least in the public and popular discussions among instructional leaders. The changes toward increased preparation of teachers as well as longer average periods of professional service went almost unnoticed. "Curriculum change as social change" or "curriculum change as change in people" became the slogans. The hectic pressures and deep fears of the depression 'thirties were largely forgotten as professional educators turned inward upon themselves in their preoccupation with "groupness," "consensus," "belonging," "morale" and the means of lifting oneself by one's bootstraps. Teachers were seeking to understand themselves and the social system within which they operated, and significant progress was made.

The outer world was not forgotten. There was much concern for lay participation. The rights of parents and other citizens to determine the purposes of public education were loudly proclaimed, and much attention was focused on the complexities of doing this.

Second World War a Turning Point

But supervisors as well as those in other walks of life lost contact with the substance of what was happening. The Second World War and its attendant developments had shocking consequences for all of us which were not fully evident until we were well into the 'fifties. The rise of automation, of electronics and of nuclear power during the war years, along with the injection of large private foundation funds into the education stream, hastened new developments.

Following the Second World War, there were many criticisms of education, some of which were linked with the patriotism-communism theme. Some were pointed at the claimed failure of the school to focus effectively on intellectual development or the teaching of so-called fundamentals. Increasingly supervisors became involved in interpretations of the educational program to the public.

As the problems of youth, especially in our large cities, began to shock the public and haunt the educators, and as the fear of communism rose, the nature of the numerous fundamental changes in our society became more widely understood. The importance of education as well as the difficulties in providing it for ever larger segments of our population, became abundantly clear. The popular demand for more and better education rose to new heights.

The sources of curriculum change largely shifted to the public and to the professors in the academic disciplines.

Gordon N. Mackenzie is Professor of Education, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, N. Y., and is Chairman of the ASCD Commission on Preparation of Instructional Leaders.

In some instances, the supervisory staffs in school systems were not even consulted as changes of various kinds were introduced by boards of education. It is probably safe to say that thousands of supervisors felt bypassed. Whereas they had regarded themselves as forward-looking professionals, sometimes impatient and weary in their efforts to bring about curriculum change, they suddenly realized that now they were being regarded as reactionaries who were blocking "progress."

Concern with Politics of Curriculum Change

The specific nature of some of the influences was clear, although the precise channels of influence were not always discernible. The vast sums set aside in foundation grants to support specific proposals for reform or to finance a careful study of particular aspects of the curriculum were obviously a new and powerful influence. The federal government became a financially generous party to changes at both the elementary and secondary levels. The revived interest of the academicians in elementary and secondary education lent new force and prestige. American industry saw potentials for the sale of products of modern technology to the schools.

For a time educators were literally assaulted by a great host of proposals of differing kinds. Some of these fostered especially by one of the foundations struck at the "things" of education. Organization and method were manipulated in an effort to reform the educational system. Varying proposals for new means of staff utilization, educational television, advanced placement, teaching machines, and testing to identify scholarship winners, exemplified this ap-

proach. The precise influence on the curriculum and on the learning products in the schools of these organization, materials and methods emphases is difficult to determine. Most of the claimed considerations were not directly educational in nature. Instead they focused on the teacher shortage or on such general claims as the need for excellence. Clearly there has not been adequate consideration of the curriculum implications of this great concern with the "things" of education.

Another category of proposals which has had a greater variety of sources of support, including foundations, has focused on a re-examination of the subject fields. The rapid increase in knowledge has made urgent a reconsideration of what should be taught through the various disciplines as well as how they should be taught. Significant developments within several disciplines in respect to content, structure and method have resulted in great demands for extensive in-service education of elementary and secondary school teachers. Both types of changes, those coming through the "things" and those coming through changes in the disciplines, appear to be moving public education toward greater uniformity, toward national as distinct from local initiative and determination. The politics of curriculum change which have emerged since the Second World War make new demands on supervisors. Fresh kinds of thinking as well as unfamiliar skills are called for. Board of education and internal school system policies not previously thought of are needed for dealing with the influences operating on the curriculum today. Skills are required for dealing with the rising power sources as well as for coping with the current in-service education demands. Several kinds of specialization

within the supervisory group will certainly be required.

Reactions to New Role Developments

While reactions among educators to the present politics of educational change and improvement have been varied, one significant development is the widespread tendency for professional groups to re-examine their qualifications, their preparation, and their responsibility for professional improvement. The NEA's New Horizons Project has helped to lay much of the ground work for this effort.¹ ASCD has established a Commission on the Preparation of Instructional Leaders and is actively coordinating its efforts with those of the American Association of School Administrators, the Department of Elementary School Principals, the National Association of Secondary-School Principals and the University Council on School Administration.

The ASCD Commission has in preparation a policy statement which will be discussed widely during the 1961-62 school year. By July of 1962, the Commission hopes to recommend a policy statement to guide ASCD actions in the area of further professionalization of supervisors during the years immediately ahead. While it is too early to predict the exact form of these statements, it is possible to indicate what may be the major areas of attention. The Commission is of the opinion that action in at least six areas is required at the present time.

¹ Margaret Lindsey, Editor. *New Horizons for the Teaching Profession*. A report of the task force on New Horizons in Teacher Education and Professional Standards, 1961. National Commission on Teacher Education and Professional Standards, National Education Association. Washington, D. C.: the Association, 1961.

First, [the qualities and abilities essential to effective operation as supervisors and curriculum workers need re-examination and redefinition.] The functions, activities and areas of required competence of those whose unique task is that of serving other staff members on instructional matters require clarification. This is no simple task in view of the changing climate within which schools are operating and the shifting requirements of specific assignments of those holding such widely varying positions as helping teacher, consultant, supervisor, curriculum worker and assistant superintendent in charge of instruction. Nevertheless, an effort is being made to define, in terms that will be helpful to supervisor-preparing institutions as well as to school systems, the expectancies held for those who serve in supervisory and curriculum improvement positions.

Second, standards for the selection of supervisors are an essential consideration in assuring competent personnel. Selection is viewed as a continuing process, starting with those who as teachers serve in curriculum improvement roles and continuing through initial identification of individuals who have the promise which is likely to be enhanced by further preparation, selection for specific kinds of preparation, tryout in leadership positions through internships, and selection for appropriate supervisory positions throughout a professional career.

Third, criteria for planning programs for the preservice and in-service preparation of supervisors are greatly needed. Many now enter supervisory positions without specific preparation or after having met only meager and inadequate certification requirements. At least a year and possibly two years of prepara-

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tion are needed to foster development in the various areas of performance which are significant for today's supervisor. This should include various kinds of study and learning activities with careful attention to substantial, well-supervised field experiences.

Fourth, if programs of preparation are to be fully effective, accreditation of higher institutions that provide appropriate programs for the preparation of supervisors appears to be an important cornerstone in professional advancement. Assurance that supervisors will have satisfactorily demonstrated their competence through approved programs of preparation should be given the American public. A national accrediting agency, National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, is now ready

and competent to implement this phase of the professionalization program.

Fifth, procedures for licensing of supervisors is in need of re-examination. Licensing of professional personnel and of workers of many kinds has long been a state function and several states have requirements for supervisors. Licensing might well be based primarily on the satisfactory completion of an approved or accredited program of preparation. Both the absence of requirements and the prescribing of two or three courses, the two most common practices, appear to be quite inadequate.

Sixth, professional organizations themselves should take action through membership policies and other programs to assure quality performance of their members. Self-policing by a professional group presents complex problems. There is little experience within the field of education to guide action in this area. It appears wise, however, for ASCD to recognize and identify those of its members who have its stamp of approval as being qualified members of the profession.

Recent developments relative to the role of the supervisor stem from changes in education and its increased importance in our rapidly shifting world order. Greater demands will be made on education in the years ahead and one of the most important responses of supervisors is to be certain that they are adequate to the task. To do this is no simple undertaking, but supervisors can do much to improve the quality of their own group by taking responsibility for clarifying their role, improving selective admission, setting standards of preparation, and developing requirements for licensing and for quality performance. The challenge to ASCD is clear. What will its response be?

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