

The Supervisor Reports

on curriculum developments

LEADERSHIP is an ability which every supervisor must possess in some degree that is satisfying to the school organization with which he is affiliated. The communicating of information and a sense of direction is an essential characteristic of his job. Without talent in communication his opportunities for service will recede rapidly.

Clyde Hill once described a leader as one who is so close to the crowd that they are forever seeming to step on his heels, yet never so far ahead that they will appear to be throwing rocks at him. A good supervisor is thus the communicator who maintains a close relationship with both his professional associates and the citizen interests of his community. His talents must be directed to the development and expansion of their understandings of the curriculum.

The personal status of the good supervisor is never a matter of primary concern. His bulletins, publications and public appearances are only aspects of his work as a communicator. He is concerned that his reporting not only relates the facts accurately, but also inter-

prets the trends. Moreover he perceives that the full responsibilities of his role involve a reporting to the general public of his school area even as it does to his immediate professional associates.

Most school systems have an administrative council or staff meeting at which the director of instruction may regularly report on curricular changes which have occurred. Such meetings frequently involve a personal type of reporting that is often lacking in the larger communities that must necessarily rely on bulletins of notes and special items.

In many school systems in which a curriculum council is still expanding its area of usefulness, the annual reports of a director of instruction or supervisor in some special area may become one of the major vehicles for passing along information. The interchange of these reports among other members of the staff is often one of the most neglected opportunities for informed communication. Smaller communities wherein there is less of a formal organization have often given a specific period of time in their preschool and post-school workshops to the reporting on curricular developments under way in that community. Certainly it has become the supervisor's responsibility to provide the time and the occa-

H. Leroy Selmeier is Assistant Superintendent for Instruction, The Grosse Pointe Public School System, Grosse Pointe, Michigan.

sion for the exchange of information lest those at home be among the last to learn what is so widely appreciated.

Reporting

Effective reporting requires interpretation rather than a mere relating of the assembled facts. Moreover frank discussion is often necessary before firm and final conclusions are possible. An excellent practice has developed in the Dearborn schools in what has been called the Citizens Advisory Committee. Meeting informally with the superintendent and his staff approximately once each month, the group provides ready reactions to programs as they are developing. In this way a unified arts program and also a continual progress plan were evolved satisfactorily on the basis of understandings developed through the reports and interpretations given by the supervisory staff.

Such developments only come as a supervisor maintains himself as a leader among his peers. Appropriate interaction then comes most often through indirect rather than direct supervisory activity. Citizen committees and neighborhood discussion groups for the public, and administrative or teacher group meetings for staff discussions, become not so much the telling off of some lesser person but rather the occasion for a proper reception and fertilization of the instructional leader's ideas.

However great they may be, these ideas will seem impoverished unless they are assimilated by the supervisor's professional associates and the general public. Even as good teachers, the effective director of instruction must recognize how people learn and so apply these principles to the learning situation which he is directing.

For example, teachers place great importance on the matter of readiness. Where readiness is seemingly absent, the professional educator either waits for the necessary maturity or he strives to build a satisfactory readiness. The instructional leader can and should use this readiness in working with his special groups. Certainly the remarks made to parents at kindergarten round-ups are made with a view to the readiness which these parents and their offspring have for the forthcoming educational experience. Moreover such meetings, as well as those conferences of parents and teachers which are spreading as a more acceptable form of exchanging information on pupil progress, can be used to develop a citizen interest and readiness for new curricular patterns.

Discovery

Consistent also with the knowledge of the learning process which as a good teacher he would use in the classroom, the supervisor ought to use the discovery principle in unrolling curriculum developments with his associates. The excitement of which Jerome S. Bruner speaks in *The Process of Education*¹ is something for all of us as teachers even as it is for our boys and girls in science, mathematics and history. The supervisor's role ought no more to be confined to telling than that of the classroom teacher is limited to listening. As an instructional leader he may help his associates to learn best by his guidance and direction in which the discovery and the decision-making are actually functions of the staff.

Local curriculum developments may

¹ Jerome Seymour Bruner, *The Process of Education*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960. p. 20-22.

thus come to a school system through discussion and analysis rather than by administrative blueprint and edict. Jefferson County (Kentucky) schools thus evolved their own concept of an ungraded school. This grew out of staff discussions of various problems and concerns that led to an investigation of various primary or nongraded schemes. This was a reversal of the operation by administrative decree of the traditional approach of imitating the curriculum developments of others simply because they are new and different.

Moreover coming to a practice because they have discovered its value seems to cause many people to become most ardent missionaries for this practice. Some of the most devoted advocates of the self-contained classroom are those who feel that they discovered the practice and adopted it because they believed they recognized merit in it.

Another phase of the learning process which the supervisor should recognize in his reporting is the degree to which we all learn from differences. While one may like similarities for the security they bring, one seldom learns more by simply repeating what he has already discovered. Thus a good supervisor will report developments that have many similarities to practices that are already being followed yet in which the differences will challenge one to evaluate his own thinking and time-honored decision.

Many good educators utilize this learning principle when talking with the parents of a special grade or classroom about the curricular practices in that area of common interest. Whether the major objective be the initiation of a new approach or the explanation to the parents of a well-accepted practice which they have misjudged from the limits of a memory as to what was one time con-

sidered best, similarities can establish only a favorable climate in which the real learning will come as new differences are apparent.

Audio-Visual Means

Again the supervisor needs to recognize that audio-visual devices can improve the speed and clarity of the reporting. A filmstrip or even a set of kodachrome slides, accompanied by a tape recording or by a human interpreter, can help the parent of a prospective kindergarten to have a keener appreciation of the forthcoming experience which his child is to have.

In Grosse Pointe a concern for improving the use of classroom bulletin boards saw little progress result from the proposals of a committee of administrators. However, when an audio-visual specialist started making a collection of the pictures of the bulletin boards that were better than average, many teachers began to be interested. Then, when the art consultant recorded on tape an explanation of the principles that made some bulletin boards seem better than others, almost all teachers became enthusiastic over a period of time for the improvement of bulletin boards. The newer audio-visual techniques had made converts where staff meetings and mimeographed bulletins had had no effect.

Television and radio are also good means for reporting developments both to the staff and to the community. Admittedly the public has come to expect such usage as being for the purpose of winning an election or a bond issue. Yet these means can also be effective in highlighting curricular developments.

Both South Redford and Dearborn have had experience in producing a television program and then using the kine-

scope thereof for PTA meetings or discussion groups among the professional staff. For example, a "kine" on how teachers can cooperate and work together has greatly interested the parents of the Stout Junior High and has also been effective with sectional meetings of the staff throughout the community.

However no principle or device for learning is more important than the involvement of the learner himself. Being consulted about projected practices, knowing that he is a participant in the evolution of a decision, and having some practical sharing in any curricular decision are all procedures which the supervisor should encourage among his co-workers. They make for a receptive partnership in the reporting to his associates.

A story has been told about a nationally known superintendent in an extremely fortunate Midwestern community of several decades ago. A successive series of test results showed his pupils to be decidedly below national norms in spelling. While other evidence indicated that a somewhat more optimum learning situation existed in almost all other respects, the superintendent, nevertheless, decided to do something about the situation. He was a reputable scholar and writer. Therefore, he reasoned, if he only worked out a good spelling program and reported it to the staff, better spelling proficiency ought to follow.

So he studied and wrote. He then reported his findings to the staff. Appreciating his worth as a supervisor, the staff tried to follow his outlines. Yet when spelling was again tested, the results were distinctly below the expectations. Then the teachers asked permission to work out their own approaches on the spelling problem. Realizing that almost any possibility might bring some im-

provement over the previous situation, the superintendent granted permission. To his amazement, the test results of the next year showed, for the first time in several seasons, the community above the national norm.

Certainly it was not that the teachers had more know-how than did this supervising superintendent. The failure was rather due to the lack of understanding and awareness in a program that was not their own. As they felt a personal involvement in the creation of the lesson design, their perception of learning needs so improved that the evidence of pupil learning climbed to a more satisfactory level.

Similarly, many supervisors have learned that the instructional leader cannot expect that his units will have the same effect on the staff as do those involving representative staff members. Yet such involvement does not absolve the supervisor of the responsibilities of leadership. Creating a sense of direction, involving personnel who are ready to evaluate new ideas, interpreting issues and locating satisfactory assisting personnel are all a part of the supervisor's role. Only when some of those who were formerly critical now turn to praise the new developments can the director of instruction realize how much progress has been made.

The supervisor's role as a reporter of curricular developments is one in which he must think and act with imagination and creativity as opposed to routine and assignment. He needs to utilize the learnings of others rather than anticipate that he may know-it-all himself. As a reporter of curricular developments he views his role as a service to his professional associates, to the citizens of his community and, above all else, to the boys and girls enrolled in the local schools.

Copyright © 1961 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.