

The Principal and Instruction

What is his new role?

AN elementary school teacher was weighing the advantages and disadvantages of asking for a transfer to a building nearer her new home. "No," she decided, "Mr. Z. leaves us alone. All three of the principals in my neighborhood make their teachers work."

Fortunately for boys and girls, this double-barreled indictment of a teacher and her principal can seldom be made.

It is true, though, that the image of the principal is changing. It is changing from that of a keeper of reports, a maker of schedules, an overseer of plant and equipment, and a fellow with the big stick. It is becoming that of an *instructional leader* with administrative ability and know-how.

Good principals have always concerned themselves with the educational program. They have always sought to facilitate learning in the classroom. The profession can be proud of its continuing efforts to improve instruction. Improvement has been made; it has been steady—yet slow, too slow. Events of the 1950's dramatized the need for acceleration in almost every aspect of American life, particularly that of producing in increasing numbers well-trained men and women with a potential for releasing teaching talent among their professional colleagues.

The fear of the sputniks-yet-to-come prompted some schools to jump on bandwagons; forced others to lie low. Anticipation of the age of astronauts launched many schools into an orbit of self-evaluation in terms of their fulfillment of purpose for a brand new and excitingly smaller world.

Pressures for improvement of instruction whereby current crops of youngsters could be taught to cope intelligently with the galaxy of problems of the distant future and possibly on distant planets could no longer be denied. State departments of education looked to local systems; boards of education sought answers from their superintendents; administrative and supervisory staffs turned to principals; they, in turn, declared that what goes on in the classroom is the key which unlocks—or which imprisons.

The principal has become the man "on the spot." It is he who serves children in the same building with his teachers; he sees them daily. In the average size school he can communicate without difficulty. He does not have to depend upon

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weekly memorandums or telecasts or brush-fire stops. He is there.

What kind of person does the school board seek as principal? What qualities does the superintendent expect? What direction should the candidate take? Leadership in any area for any purpose obviously requires personal qualities which enable the individual to get a job done through the cooperative efforts of others; it also implies certain managerial attributes. Instructional leadership requires, in addition, a solid grounding in broad academic areas, in the principles of learning, in methodology, and in child growth and development. Such leadership becomes effective when built upon successful classroom experience and continuing study. A master teacher may not become a good principal, but a principal who is an instructional leader must be a good teacher.

Setting the Goal

What responsibilities await the new principal of the 1960's when he (or, we hopefully add, she) accepts a position as leader of a school? He must assume that he has been recommended by the administrative staff and elected by the board to promote and achieve education of good quality, whatever this may be. First of all, then, he must come to grips with a working definition of an "education of good quality." If he accepts the fact that all the children of all the people have a right to the education that is best for them, he can move unerringly ahead to the goal of individualized instruction, not equal instruction.

Once the mark is set, the instructional leader can weigh with some equanimity the factors which will contribute most significantly to the realization of an education custom-made for each boy and

girl. He will take a look at the students, their parents, the community and its financial support, the teachers and maintenance staff, the building and facilities, the program itself. He will not permit himself to lose sight of the *raison d'être* of a school.

The principal's major task becomes that of upgrading the factor which most markedly affects the learner; he must make it possible for the teacher to grow on the job and to want to continue to grow. In the past, many a principal in an elementary school thought that he was doing a competent job of supervising when he inspected the classroom; but checking the relative degree of order and neatness in a room is not supervising instruction.

Today's principal must stimulate in the teacher an attitude of self-improvement. He may demonstrate in an area of special competence. He may bring along some colorful books that the hard-to-reach youngster will figuratively devour. He may take over a class while the teacher visits and observes an exceptionally effective instructor in his own or another building. He may suggest the particular film that tells the story of the cotton gin. He may assist with a trip to the dam when the class is studying navigable rivers.

These and similar activities have implications for the breadth and scope of a principal's leadership. He must have a liberal academic background if he is to demonstrate. He must know much about the teaching-learning process if his demonstration is anything beyond a sterile presentation, however brilliant. He must know boys and girls, his boys and girls, if he suggests specific instructional tools to meet the unique needs of individual pupils. He must know the educational program and the sequential de-

velopment of each instructional area if he is to make appropriate suggestions of learning activities and experiences.

Capitalizing on Resources

The principal cannot hope to achieve the versatility required for instructional supervision, leadership and administration during a flurry of graduate study or a minimum of teaching experience. A sure way of seeming to acquire this versatility and of eventually doing so is by capitalizing on the varying abilities of the individual members of his teaching staff who differ among themselves in much the same way that pupils differ among themselves. One teacher is said to have read every book in the central library; another has continued her keen interest in travel and photography and has hundreds of slides; another leads the youth choir in his church; another is fascinated with gadgetry and has made programmed teaching materials in his basement shop; and so it goes. This principal who is an instructional leader provides the time and sets the stage for teachers to share.

The competencies of resource persons within the school system are put to work by today's principal to strengthen the improvement program undergirded by contributions of his own faculty. The instructional leader makes it his business to know the available consultative services and has the professional astuteness to enlist them at appropriate times. He reaches out beyond the system's central staff to community resources and harnesses this supply of power to whatever is being generated within his own staff. He has the self-confidence to ask for help without fearing being labeled weak or inept.

The principal who earns the title of

instructional leader promotes a climate for experimentation. He encourages neither haphazard grabbing onto something new nor wholesale immersion in busywork. He does not lend support to programs which tend to create a multiplicity of school systems within a single organization. He believes that individual schools within a system must bear a family resemblance to each other if the community which owns the schools is to understand, appreciate and improve its financial and moral support of them.

The instructional leader, for instance, permits and encourages the elementary teacher in her emphasis on individualized reading if she proves first that she is basing her shift in direction on the established fact that children make progress by starting from the level where they are, by climbing the ladder of sequential word-attack and related skills, and by reading from curiosity and interest. In brief, the principal who is an instructional leader encourages, not indiscriminate dabbling, but intelligent experimentation.

Encouraging Professional Study

The printed page remains the shorthand route to learning. Despite the glamour of newer media, the book or periodical is the most compact and most accessible tool for learning. The instructional leader will invest school monies for the purchase of professional journals which report revolutions in the areas of mathematics and science, new emphases in the areas of language arts and social studies, midcentury renaissance in the fine arts and in foreign language study, springboards for better health instruction, and question marks about outmoded types of vocational training. Better still, the instructional leader will insure that

these and other professional materials are studied by utilizing the capabilities of the librarian and the resources of the materials center.

Continued study at institutions of higher learning in academic areas, in methodology and materials, and in child psychology is accepted as an expectation of all career teachers. The principal sets the example.

Firsthand experiences are as essential for teachers as for their pupils. The principal himself will take advantage of opportunities to visit in schools within and outside his own system to observe new plants, new equipment, new materials, and good educational programs, old and new. Further, he will encourage such trips by his teachers within the

framework of financial support in the system. Attendance at professional meetings on the state, regional, and national levels may serve as next best to observation.

The multifaceted curriculum of a given school is the principal's responsibility. The central office staff has its responsibility of facilitating, expediting, and coordinating, but more and more the responsibility for curriculum improvement is being placed in the individual school where the pupils are. The principal plans with his teachers, for their involvement is at least a fair guarantee that they will participate in the activities designed to improve the teaching-learning situation. However, the principal cannot afford to be reluctant to accept his responsibility for leadership. He may frequently find it necessary to make decisions without consulting the staff, but when faculty members perceive their principal as an instructional leader with professional competence and personal integrity they will accept his decisions in good faith.

The principal's leadership role with his staff in curriculum improvement implies his concern with guidance-oriented and cocurricular activities. He knows that the teacher who makes a difference in the behavior of pupils is the teacher who respects the uniqueness of each boy and girl. He knows that effective guidance services are the essential companion of the educational program. He knows that school-sponsored activities carried on outside the classroom often effect more permanent change in boys and girls than does the teaching within four walls. The instructional leader keeps constantly before him the relation of staff improvement to the achievement of the goal of high-quality education—the education best for each boy and girl.

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