

The Role of Leadership

as catalyst in change.

AS we approached the final session of an administrative seminar on human relations in West Berlin last year, a white haired "Schulerat" seemed to communicate the feeling of the group. He said, "For almost twelve years under the Federal Republic of Germany we have had a democratic government but we in this room in the past ten weeks have only begun to understand that the true meaning of democracy is a way to live with all other human beings." He went on to say, "Since democratic leadership rests so heavily upon education, German teachers must first learn the true meaning of democracy and then exemplify it with each lesson."

It may seem strange that we in this country with a heritage of 186 years under a democratic form of government should continue to search for new meaning in the role of instructional leadership. This fact casts no unfavorable reflection upon our way of life, nor upon that of our progenitors. Instead, it serves to define the role of leadership as a function within the continuing process of maturing values and vision in a free

democratic society where present goals emerge from the achievement of new meaning.

Leadership as Function

Present concepts concerning the role of leadership rest upon a volume of speculation, experimentation and research undertaken increasingly during the past fifty years. A preponderance of recent research clearly supports the functional role of leadership emerging within the framework of democratic processes. The earlier studies identifying and listing behavior characteristics, as well as traits and types of leader persons, have led to what might be called a mechanistic view of leadership, fostering control and management of group behavior by a superior authority. This is inconsistent with the ideals of a democratic society.

A functional view of the leadership role has some refreshing and encouraging aspects. For example, when leadership is seen as a function, almost anyone can assume the role, provided he is willing and able to participate. It is possible, as well, for people to prepare for leadership by becoming informed about problems and concerns of the

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group. Then too, there is less likelihood that serious errors in judgment can occur when leadership is a function of group process. It is quite evident that nothing new has been added in this view of the leadership role; it is only a closer approach to the values of a democracy which have existed but have lacked significant meaning. The real change comes when people begin to relate to each other as though these values had personal meaning for them, as was the case with the Berlin school administrators.

There is little doubt that many professional educators today know in substance and theory the advantages of democratic leadership who still do not behave as though they believed it. From our definition of the role of leadership, we might hypothesize that the disparity existing between this knowing and behaving may be viewed as a degree of deficiency in the process of leadership maturation.

Continuing this thought, we avoid the "common sense" view of democratic versus authoritarian leadership which places them at opposite poles and consider leadership as possessing varying amounts of qualities belonging to each. Depending upon the leader's stage of democratic maturation, he will successfully promote growth in maturity within the leader-group relationship consistent with the presence of democratic qualities in that relationship. As Dean George Bartke of Stanford once observed, "A successful school administrator is one who keeps his job." Some are successful through largely democratic practices which facilitate growth in those about them; others, through largely authoritarian practices which limit growth.

It is conceivable that even a fairly rigid and domineering teacher may

achieve some success as measured in pupil growth which cannot be attributed alone to thorough preparation in the subject field. The changes may be due to certain qualities underlying the teacher's behavior. These qualities, which maturing leaders use in relating to other human beings, are: valuing, cooperation, interdependence, acceptance and objectivity.

Valuing implies the seeking to place oneself in the role of another and seeing the other's meaning to himself. This involves a willingness to trust the other's judgment concerning what is good or bad for him. The valuing person may differ considerably from the other person's point of view; yet he may strive to learn the significance which that person's point of view has for him. In general, it can be stated that a person who knows he is valued by others tends to become more accepting of his own deficiencies, more aware of his productive capacities, and better able to receive and profit from help tendered by those who value him.

Cooperation implies one's willingness to enter the whole way into a helping relationship without forcing his definition of the whole way upon the other person. The cooperating person permits others to receive his help without having to take all or nothing at all. He accepts the possibility of having to modify his goal in the interest of what others may consider paramount. It may be said that as cooperation increases, friction and tension tend to diminish.

Interdependent individuals accept their lack of separateness and their need for others in order to be complete. The interdependent person accepts the dependent state of others relating to himself and realizes how his own dependencies are distributed. In this sense, he recognizes the sources of influences to which he most

profoundly responds. It seems to follow that people in possession of this kind of reality do not fall prey to the fallacy of rugged individualism or the myth of the self-made man.

Acceptance of others is closely associated with recognition and tolerance of one's own differences and acceptance of self. The person who is accepting of another recognizes the other's right to be what he is, regardless of conventional standards usually applied in judging him. The accepting person withholds judgment and denies himself the right to change the behavior of another. This, of course, does not imply the condoning of disruptive and unsocial kinds of behavior. It presupposes, rather, a separation of the actor from the act and a seeking to provide positive meaning to foster a self concept capable of desirable behavior which is currently inconsistent with his private picture of himself. The rationale of a bad self image might follow that "bad people do bad things."

Objectivity denotes the separation of one's own feelings, ideas, attitudes, values and goals from data verified by repetition or scientific means. A quality of objectivity exists in human relationships when one can accept the behavior of another as the best that person can muster under the circumstances. The objectively oriented person seeks to understand the circumstances by looking beyond behavior to its probable causes while remaining fully aware that he can know only a few of the causes. Consistent with this thought, it may be stated that objectivity facilitates the communication of new meaning.

When a considerable deficiency in leadership maturation exists with respect to the qualities mentioned here, the leader tends to maintain group control in order to assure progress toward his

predetermined goals. To allow the group to become involved with needs other than those which he has identified is to risk failure—his failure—since he alone is responsible. Even under favorable conditions, the leader maintaining control may be seen to move his group from crisis to crisis until his goal is reached. The progress of a skillfully controlled group usually comes to rest at the level approved by the leader. Here the effectiveness of leadership also ends.

When leadership maturation is more consistent with the above democratic qualities, the product of such leadership tends to be consistent with need of significant importance to the group. Two steps seen as highly essential to successful democratic leadership are these: (a) The leader initiates group processes by drawing and pooling pertinent information from the group concerning its needs. Step one is completed when pertinent facts about existing needs have been identified and members of the group achieve *awareness* of the significance of the facts. (b) The leader facilitates change by further clarifying the meaning of needs through group discussion. The second step is accomplished when the individual perception of meaning includes comprehension of group *involvement*. When this occurs the group interchange moves from "my," "your" and "their" to an "our" relationship. At this time the leader may relinquish the leadership role and become a participating member.

As other participants assume leadership by contributing to group needs, the mature leader is not threatened by status loss or possible failure since the entire group becomes responsible for its own learning. The mature leader is inquiring without evaluating, selecting without excluding, inspiring and stimulating with-

out manipulating. His purpose is to serve as an aid in process without coercion or repression. Tolerant of deficiencies and confident of end results, he is patient with progress. The dimensions of change through this kind of leadership are difficult to measure since they extend beyond the situation. Arising from a mutual awareness of need, expanding through involvement, cooperation and purpose, the learning assumes personal meaning beyond the factual knowledge gained which commits the participant to practice what he has learned.

Participation in the interpersonal problem-solving exchange described here is, of necessity, a learning experience for both group member and leader. Each learns in reference to the role he is taking at the moment. As the group progresses, it provides each participant validation of, inquiry into, and/or rejection of the meaning he seeks to communicate. The leader functions to alert group awareness to new reality while maintaining all possible forms of communication through group interaction.

During the Berlin seminar, another spokesman put a vital question, "How will teachers learn the true meaning of democracy?"

Questions like this have been raised through the years here in America, yet have been asked with increasing concern during recent months. The growing intensity of the world struggle for the minds of men has accelerated our peacetime trends in education. The results are being felt from kindergarten through graduate school in every state. Fortunately, those most keenly aware of the attending problems are the educational leaders who, in large degree, hold within their grasp the solutions as well.

Unlike the plight of educators in some European countries where traditionally

in-service professional growth is left entirely to chance, our classroom teachers and administrators are continually engaged in programs designed to upgrade their professional competencies. In-service education programs numbering in the hundreds represent the range of subject fields and levels of instruction. Equally critical to the enduring success of our way of life are in-service programs which foster higher levels of democratic maturity for instructional leadership.

Focus on Child Study

One such program has been developed during the past fifteen years at the University of Maryland Institute for Child Study. The following brief description is offered here as a model utilizing the functional concept of leadership in a democratic setting. Although this field program in Human Development has achieved success in Riverside County, California, and in many other school systems throughout the country, it makes no claim as a surefire method.

With a major focus on understanding children and youth, the Maryland program incorporates two main methods or approaches to facilitate professional growth. One of these aims at enlarging the participant's knowledge of human development by studying current information from the behavioral sciences and investigating ways of relating this to behavior in the classroom. The second incorporates the democratic processes within group relationship in addition to case study procedures to help mobilize participants' attitudes regarding the behavior of youngsters for greater alignment with professional knowledge.

Central, also, to the purpose of this program is the development of instructional leadership at increasingly higher

levels. The program normally comprises three years of study procedures, each involving concepts necessitating greater maturity and insight. Although group members are not committed to complete even one year, in many places they continue to study together after five or more years.

The concept of leadership, a functional aspect of the program, fosters the emerging role rather than assigned duty or position in the group. In fact, an observer during a Child Study group meeting might be impressed by the apparent absence of a status leader. As the group convenes and discussion is initiated, the designated leader becomes a participant like any other group member. He assumes the leader role relating to questions about how to proceed rather than questions on the action to be taken. In view of special preparation, his behavior may become a norm of what the group is and can become. Each participant assumes the role of leadership as he contributes to group progress toward the resolution of a problem or achievement of a task.

During the course of a given year in the program there are several sequential steps or phases through which the group will pass, stressing skills of group problem solving at ever increasing levels of complexity. Although the leader may identify ways of taking these steps, he does not designate a "right" way.

Movement of the group in the problem-solving process is not altogether problem oriented since, in part, it represents a coordinated effort of individuals to satisfy related needs of all participants in the group. Dominant among these seems to be the need to draw increased meaning from the group relationship itself. This phenomenon is not affected by reaching a primary goal of problem reso-

lution. It continues to develop new dimensions at different levels of significance in member relationships. It is on-going and is renewed as the group continues to function. Anticipated gains from these emergent products become the motivating force or cohesion within the group, while the role of leader becomes one in the process of change. The definition of leadership in the helping relationship does not change. Essentially, it is the function of relating the group to a new reality.

Workshops

In order to facilitate the general objectives of the Child Study Program, summer leadership workshops are conducted by members of the Institute staff in various places. All kinds of people become leaders, although most of them are teachers planning to lead study groups in their own schools. Administrators, nurses, librarians, psychologists, and child welfare workers also become group leaders.

Essentially, the thing which distinguishes them from other study group participants is "know-how" which they learn at the leadership workshop. In a carefully permissive environment, often in a mountain retreat, effort is made to reveal the action sequence evolving within democratic group relationship.

The basic goals of the workshop are to develop a keener awareness of individual needs in group process, to create a deepening understanding of scientific factors influencing growth and learning among children and youth, and to identify implications present in all human behavior.

The role of leadership defined as a function in the processes of human becoming tends to move the emphasis away

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Role of Leadership

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from technique in the mechanistic sense toward increasing recognition and value of human worth. It recognizes man's individual right to self determination within the framework of a democratic society. From this point of view, leadership does not assist in a search for homeostasis but rather serves as a catalyst in the process of change from the present of what man is now toward the future of what he can become.

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