

## Knowledge and Competence for the Instructional Leader

INSTRUCTIONAL leaders are caught up in the current wave of effort to improve education in the United States. As the teaching profession at large marshals its forces toward greater professionalization, leaders within this group find that new demands for higher levels of performance are placed upon them. Continued public concern for better education also adds to the pressure for re-evaluation of the adequacy of the leadership in the schools.

Just how instructional leaders improve their effectiveness is a major concern to persons holding such positions, to preparing institutions, licensing agencies, and professional associations. Identifying areas of knowledge and competence which instructional leaders should develop is not a simple task. The number of different leadership positions in a single school system and other situational factors, which vary from district to district, place different competency demands on the individuals involved.

In this paper, it is assumed that instructional leadership is offered by many

persons in a school system—superintendent, principals, teachers, supervisors, and curriculum workers—and that variations in specific knowledge and competence needed will exist among the positions. However, because all persons are working toward common goals in the improvement of instruction, some *common needs* will be held by all. Likewise, it is assumed that instructional leadership is situational and that factors inherent in specific situations will require specific competencies from instructional leaders.

### A Dynamic Concept

The writer believes, however, that there are certain identifiable common elements of leadership behavior in all instructional improvement situations. Proof of this is the commonality of expectations to be found in the job descriptions that are written for the various leadership positions in widely different school systems. Furthermore, the proposal presented here is based upon a dynamic concept of competence.

<sup>1</sup> The writer wishes to recognize the following colleagues who contributed significantly to her thinking in this area: J. B. Burr, Alexander Frazier, C. B. Mendenhall, Paul Klohr and John Ramseyer.

---

Martha L. King is Associate Professor of Education, The Ohio State University, Columbus.

Competent leadership is viewed, not as a static trait or quality, but as the demonstration of growth and power of an individual. It is a quality of behavior which results from the interaction of many forces within the individual, such as his experiences, knowledge and understandings, specific skills and attitudes. The manifested behavior is further stimulated or limited by the many forces of the environment or *situation*. Each instructional leader may be expected to seek growth and development in areas of knowledge and competence in terms of his own unique potentialities and the requirements of his environment.

### Areas of Knowledge and Competence

Common to all definitions of the function of instructional leadership is the provision for the "improvement of teaching." This means that successful experience as a teacher is basic to effective instructional leadership. Adequacy in teaching involves: (a) being liberally educated in the context of today's world; (b) knowing subject matter, both as fact and as discipline, with particular emphasis upon one's specific teaching position; and (c) possessing professional knowledge and skills, such as knowing the learner and the learning process, being skillful in teaching methodology, understanding the potentialities of educational programs and innovations, being able to use research findings and techniques in solving instructional problems, and demonstrating continued growth in working with parents and interpreting the school to the community.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> For elaboration see: Margaret Lindsey, editor. *New Horizons for the Teaching Profession*. Washington, D.C.: National Commission on Teacher Education and Professional Standards, NEA, 1961. Chapter 4.

Instructional leaders who counsel with teachers should have quality of teaching experience which is derived from several kinds of teaching situations. Preferably, a person in a leadership role should have taught at more than one level of the school and in several communities. An elementary school consultant, for example, should have taught at both the primary grade and intermediate grade levels. The K-12 curriculum coordinator, or director of instruction, should have had teaching experience at the elementary, or junior high school level, as well as at the high school level. If competence is viewed as continuing growth and power, leaders may continue to grow in teaching competence through short-term teaching assignments on-the-job.

When a person shifts the focus of his major responsibilities from a specific classroom to a wider realm of endeavor, additional and different expectations are held for him. He is expected to maintain and further develop his competence as a teacher, particularly as a teacher of adults. In addition, he is expected to have the technical know-how, the human relations skills, and the conceptual abilities to enable him to act effectively in improving educational programs. This means offering leadership to others, acting as an agent of change, and being a resource person in numerous areas of education. In this larger professional role, the instructional leader should pursue growth in the following areas: (a) human development and learning, (b) the role of school in society, (c) scholarship in subject matter, (d) the process of curriculum change and supervision, (e) the organizational structure of the school, and (f) educational research and methodology.

*Human growth and development and learning.* The instructional leader should

seek increased breadth and depth in understanding how children, youth and adults grow, develop and learn. Such knowledge is basic to all instructional decisions, whether they concern long-range plans or incidental matters. Clues to solutions to curricular problems in the realm of reading readiness, teaching reading to five-year-olds, foreign language in the elementary school, extending the school year, or establishing special classes for the able student, are to be found in the domain of human development and learning theory.

An instructional leader in the schools should have sufficient sophistication in this area to enable him to identify rather quickly the fallacies underlying such plans and proposals for educational improvement as are to be found in *The Amidon School, Tomorrow's Illiterates*, and the like. Inasmuch as serious discipline problems, underachievement, and high drop-out rates are major concerns of the schools, particularly the high schools, it is imperative that instructional leaders seek to understand the developing body of learning theory and research in such areas as motivation, perception, and the role of the self concept. Knowing the learner and how he learns will help the educator to maintain "an even keel" when facing pressures to try *specific* programs and methods to alleviate problems.

As the instructional leader grows in understanding the development and learning of others, he should seek to gain increasing insight into *self*. He should develop an awareness of his own growth and learning, his motivations, his perceptions of teaching, and his own limitations. Knowing self and understanding one's own learning will aid in the understanding of the learning of others.

*The role of the school in society.* While the instructional leader studies the

learner for direction in curricular planning, he must be able to assess also the social order in which the school exists. Certainly, some of the most troublesome problems confronting education today arise from the social matrix. Many of the problems are linked to the changing economic conditions and rapidly growing and shifting populations. Other problems stem from changing human values, fear of war, and a general concern for security.

Schools in one region are facing the difficult problems of desegregation. At the same time, schools in other parts of the nation should be scrutinizing their efforts in intercultural education, in teaching accurate understandings about races and ethnic groups, and in improving the human relationships that exist among the various cultural groups in the school and community.

On what basis does the school make decisions about initiating special programs for the culturally disadvantaged child or about instituting new content in curricular areas? Surely, the beliefs and expectations of the community must influence these. Leadership in such decision making can be effective to the degree that it is bolstered by insight into the social and cultural structure of the school, the nation and the world. The implication is that instructional leaders should seek greater understandings in the social and political sciences. As the school is increasingly pressured to expand its functions and to meet needs arising from present social conditions, perhaps one of the greatest tasks confronting educational leaders is the clarification of the role of the school in modern democratic society.

*Scholarship in subject matter.* Expectations which are now held for classroom teachers on "the new horizon" include a

commitment to scholarship in at least one area of knowledge.<sup>3</sup> If one associates with this the current proposals to organize school curricula in terms of "the structure of the disciplines," it is readily apparent that the leader in today's school must be a well informed person, who is continuing to grow in several of the teaching fields. It is unrealistic to assume that such a person can know well all, or even several, of the content areas in the school curriculum. He can, however, demonstrate his own learning ability through developing competency in at least one field. Knowing the structure and a mode of inquiry in one content field will facilitate his understanding and appreciation of the structure and modes of inquiry of other fields. For many instructional leaders, the field of concentration may be one of the foundations of education—psychology, philosophy, sociology; for others, it might be a teaching field, such as mathematics, art, literature, life sciences, or music. Important here, is the fact that the leader must continue to develop the habit of learning and seeking meaning in new areas as well as in his major field of interest.

*Curriculum change and supervision.* The processes of curriculum change and supervision involve working *with people in effecting social change*. They include, also, the *organization of the learning experiences* into some logical and usable form. Competence in this area demands: (a) understanding about and skill in group processes; (b) increasing awareness of the principles basic to social change; (c) insight into the psychological factors involved in changing human behavior; and (d) skill in communication.

The competent instructional leader should be improving also his knowledge and the technical skills required in pro-

gram development. Undoubtedly the extent to which he has achieved an understanding of one or more of the disciplines will influence his effectiveness in this regard. Being informed about the structure of a field of study should expand the leader's ability to visualize a K through 12 developmental program in a given area. As the instructional leader continues to develop power in supervision and curriculum development, the theory and research from such related fields as anthropology and social psychology should be available to him. For example, being informed about *role theory* and *leadership theory*, as proposed by social psychologists, and about the *principles of social change* that have been identified and tested by anthropologists will cultivate insight into productive ways of working with people.

Competence in communication requires more than simply the ability to use the language effectively. Necessary, also, is the skill of listening to that which is said and to that which remains unsaid. An understanding of the structure and the force of the communication process will enable the leader to stimulate the flow of communication among all members of the educational organization.

*The organizational structure of the school.* Closely related to the preceding area of competence is knowing about the organization of the school, within which teaching and learning occur. The organizational structure establishes the framework for interaction of all of the individuals involved; it prescribes the *role* which each person is expected to perform and it provides the avenues for getting the jobs done. The instructional leader should seek increasingly to understand the unique roles of individuals

(Continued on page 477)

<sup>3</sup> Margaret Lindsey, editor, *op. cit.*, p. 44-48.

Iowa." *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, November 1958. p. 199-206.

5. Ralph H. Ojemann and Bill C. Snider. "The Effect of a Teaching Program in Behavioral Science on Changes in Causal Behavior Scores." (In press.)

6. Jean Piaget. *The Child's Conception of Physical Causality*. New York: The Humanities Press, Inc., 1961. Chapter VI. p. 135-63.

7. J. Smedslund. "Transitivity of Preference Patterns as Shown by Preschool Children." *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, Vol. 1; 1960. p. 49-54.

8. F. S. Stiles. "Developing an Understanding of Human Behavior at the Elementary School Level." *Journal of Educational Research*, Vol. 43; No. 7; 1950. p. 516-24.

9. J. R. Suchman. "Inquiry Training in the Elementary School." *Science Teacher* 27: 42-47; 1960.

—RALPH H. OJEMANN, *Director, Preventive Psychiatry Research Program, State University of Iowa, Iowa City.*

---

#### Knowledge and Competence

(Continued from page 452)

in the organization. He should be able to see clearly his role in relation to those of other persons and to understand that the role he is expected to perform changes as the roles of others change. Leaders should develop insight into the *informal*, as well as the *formal* structure of the organization. Both kinds of organization influence communication and decision making in the institutions.

*Knowledge of educational research and research methodology.* It is implied in the other areas of knowledge and competence that the instructional leader should be well informed about research in education and related fields and its application to the problems and needs of his job situation.

However, expression of more than "knowledge about" research is required from the competent leader. He must in-

creasingly demonstrate that he values research as a means of improving instruction, that he is able to identify areas in which research is needed, that he can and does use research in studying problems confronting the school and community, and that he is able to help others use research techniques. Inasmuch as classroom teachers are increasingly seeking research techniques for studying and improving their teaching, it becomes more and more important that leaders in the school increase competence in this area.

*Leaders develop areas of competence unevenly.* The five areas of competence described are deemed significant because many of the causes of problems confronting instructional leaders are imbedded in them.

The areas are not considered to be exclusive; in fact, overlapping and interrelatedness characterize the group. The achievement of growth and development in one area will enhance development in other areas. The same levels of maturity in all areas, by all leaders, would not be expected, either. Both situational factors and personal factors will regulate the extent of growth in each. Certain areas of growth gain importance in specific situations; therefore, individuals will develop competencies unevenly, depending upon their abilities and the demands of the situation.

One factor governing the level of competence needed in a given area, for example, will be the level of competence of *other* people in the situation. While the degree of breadth and depth of knowledge and competence in each area will be differentiated for each person, by job, situation and personality, a minimum command of all fields is essential and is directly related to job effectiveness.

Copyright © 1963 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.