

ROLE AND FUNCTION OF SUPERVISORS AND CURRICULUM WORKERS

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THE current period of sweeping changes in education is bringing about corresponding changes in the role of the supervisor and curriculum worker. This role, which at one time seemed clear-cut, is becoming more complex and could become more significant. The role is more complex because of the many persons at local, state and national levels who are actively demonstrating an interest in public education; it is potentially more significant because of the state of flux which currently characterizes curriculum development.

No longer is curriculum development a simple matter; this, too, is becoming more involved and often places the supervisor and curriculum worker in the position of either standing between the school system and the general public or serving as the agent of the school system to encourage public involvement and support. Inherent in the current situation is an urgent need for competent, courageous, professional leadership.

In the face of this challenge to educators to contribute vital leadership, there is an obvious lack of professional unity. In fact, there is apparent confusion among supervisors and curriculum workers, as well as administrators, as to (a) the accepted purpose of supervision; (b) who is qualified to perform this function; and (c) how supervision shall be accomplished.

Need for Clarification

School systems differ, it is true, but with all of their differences, there is usually a singleness of purpose, namely: to provide the best possible education for children, youth, and adults served by the system. There is no single set of curriculum guides that can be used to prescribe a dynamic, changing program, nor can there be, if education is to keep abreast of the times. The urgent need of school systems throughout the country, therefore, is for an adequate number of professionally trained supervisors and curriculum workers who are prepared to assume leadership in continuing curriculum revision.

Supervisors and curriculum workers have been added to the administrative staffs of school systems purportedly to facilitate the development of and the implementation of improved educational programs. For example, as early as 1922-23, the State of Maryland, by act of the legislature, authorized the local units to employ "supervising teachers or helping teachers"¹ as professional appointees to the staff of the county superintendent of schools to assist him with the prescribed responsibilities of his office as expressed in the law: "The county superintendent shall visit the schools, observe the management and instruction and give suggestions for the improvement of the same."²

As public school systems recently have been confronted with the problems of providing for rapid increases in enrollment and adjusting to the mobility which has accompanied this growth, many new job titles have appeared on the staff roster. Frequently existing personnel have been asked to assume new or additional responsibilities. In assuming the various titles assigned to them, and consequently performing the functions associated with the titles, the role of the supervisor and curriculum worker has often become ambiguous.

In material recently prepared by Gordon N. Mackenzie on "Roles of Supervisors and Curriculum Workers" there is confirmation of this:

There is wide range in both the titles used and in the assignment of responsibilities to supervisors and curriculum workers. The diverse origins in the positions, some being in administration and others being in teaching, curriculum, and the improvement of instruction, cause initial difficulty. A strong supervisory or administrative lineage is apt to result in a stress on such functions as quality control, the provision of needed information for administrators, and the management and coordination of various kinds of organizational activities. The teaching, curricular, and instructional improvement lineage suggests a possible emphasis on direct assistance to teachers, curricular planning, and in-service education. The local variations in skills and interests of holders of various positions, and the differing patterns of organization further cloud the picture as to what any specific individuals do and how the supervisory and curriculum improvement functions are performed. In fact, to diagnose the manner in which supervisory and curriculum improvement functions are performed, it may be necessary in specific school systems to analyze the functioning of such diverse but related performers as the chief school administrator for instruction, directors, coordinators, general and special subject supervisors, principals, building curriculum coordinators, and department heads.³

Compounding the problem of identifying and clarifying the role of supervisors and curriculum workers, according to Mackenzie, are "the underdeveloped state of the theory of the fields of supervision and of curriculum as well as the low levels of preparation of some supervisors and curriculum workers. Certainly if there were well developed descriptive theories as to the nature of curriculum and of supervision, as areas of knowledge, there would be more clarity and understanding

¹ The Public School Laws of Maryland. Volume XXXIV, p. 137, January 1955.

² *Ibid.*, p. 135.

³ Gordon N. Mackenzie, "Roles of Supervisors and Curriculum Workers." Statement prepared by Mackenzie as a former member of the ASCD Committee on Professionalization of Supervisors and Curriculum Workers for discussion by State ASCD groups.

as to the functions which the workers in these areas could perform to maximize the output of the educational program. However, the present absence of this knowledge does not excuse the tendency on the part of many to oversimplify the nature of supervisory and curricular work and to assume that any good teacher, or any good administrator with sound professional intentions can perform the implied functions effectively."⁴

A little over a decade ago the purposes of supervision, as represented by a review of the titles listed in *Education Index* (June 1950-May 1955) and stated in general terms, were counseling teachers, helping beginning teachers, inspiring professional growth, improving instruction, and providing educational leadership. Ten years later the titles listed seem to indicate more purposes, more persons involved, more ways of getting supervision done and more inherent problems.

Emerging from the writings on supervision of this period are the questions: Whose responsibility is the improvement of instruction and the development of curriculum? Does this responsibility rest with the superintendent? the principal? the department head? the generalist? or the specialist?

Analysis and Description

In the recent literature there is a recognizable trend toward making curriculum development a cooperative undertaking and toward using a team approach to supervision. Each of these trends reinforces the urgent need for trained professional leadership to give direction and guidance to the group effort.

Some of the problems reflected in the titles appearing between 1950 and 1955 sound strangely familiar today. Mentioned among them were such problems as resolving conflicts in supervision, changing the attitude of teachers toward supervision, discovering an effective approach to supervision, agreement on basic principles of supervision, training for supervision, delineation of responsibilities, certification requirements, and group-centered supervision.

Newly stated, the concerns of a decade ago are still with us. Among them are the following: determining what techniques are worth while, effecting a wholesome balance in supervision, meeting the needs of experienced teachers as well as those of beginning teachers, up-dating the theory of supervision, human relations in supervision, clarifying the purpose of supervision and the roles of persons involved, how supervision is perceived, the "guese" of supervision, and the need for cooperation in supervision.

From a cursory review of the titles of articles on supervision, it is evident that there is growing interest in the topic, that supervision is being presented from many differing points of view, that the volume of writing on supervision is increasing, and that most of the current writers are new to the field.

Obviously the literature deals more with an analysis and description of supervision as it exists rather than of supervision as it ought to be. Constantly recurring is an expression of the need for clarification of role.

This is further substantiated by Roy Wahle's review of titles of dissertations

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

listed in *Research Studies in Education* for the period 1957 through 1962. While serving as a member of the ASCD Committee on Professionalization of Supervisors and Curriculum Workers, Wahle prepared a report which reveals a total of eighty-four dissertation titles dealing with varied aspects of supervision and curriculum development. Of this total nearly a third deal with role, status, and duties of the different persons performing the supervisory function. These include the principal, the general supervisor, the instructional vice-principal, the superintendent, and, in the case of student teachers, the supervising teacher. Nineteen titles relate to techniques, activities, services, and practices of instructional supervisors. A third major group of titles centers around studies of supervisory relationships, perceptions, and attitudes.

Implicit in these titles is the continuing need for clarifying the role of the supervisor and curriculum worker. The local variations in assignment of supervisory functions mentioned by Mackenzie are evident here, and while not mentioned specifically as problems, there is the recurrence of such key words and phrases as attitudinal perceptions, administrative organization, leadership, cooperative programs, critical competencies, principles and basic assumptions, personal characteristics, competency patterns, and in-service education.

Out of this situation what can and should arise?

In a previous article in *Educational Leadership*, Harold Shafer called the attention of supervisors and curriculum workers to the Flexner report, suggesting that the experience of the medical profession in achieving professionalization may offer a perspective to engage educators in active pursuit of comparable standards as a professional group.

Professionalization implies the possession of a certain and particular know-how which can be brought to bear on problems. It implies concerted action to raise the level of practice within the profession and to maintain a mutually acceptable level of performance through policies enforced by the professional group. It implies selective admissions, specialized training in duly accredited institutions, and certification procedures approximating licensing.

As we realize the urgency of the need for trained professional leadership in education and as we become more keenly aware of the unanswered problems which could be resolved if we, as a profession, took action, is it too much to hope that we may strengthen our efforts in that direction now?

Succeeding articles by members of the ASCD Committee on Professionalization of Supervisors and Curriculum Workers will alert readers to existing conditions and will suggest some reasonable possibilities for concerted action.

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