

Editorials

Changing Styles of Leadership for Curriculum and Supervisory Workers

Delmo Della-Dora

Change in styles of leadership in our profession and change in styles of clothing have much in common in our country. In the period up through World War II, there were many changes in styles of clothing, but usually there was one "in" style established by clothes designers and other fashion leaders. Since World War II there have been many changes in styles but with greater acceptance of a variety of styles than ever in our history. Now, in some locations, we can find virtually every style, going back to the 1920's (and even earlier). This is true both for educational leadership and for wearing apparel—perhaps for similar, if not identical, reasons. There is still a question of what is the most acceptable and appropriate style for a given locale that concerns many ASCD members.

Most members of ASCD have what once were status leadership titles such as principal, curriculum supervisor, assistant superintendent, or professor. Today, though, they and others with similar titles often feel themselves to be less honored, less accepted, and less supported as leaders compared with earlier years. Perhaps even worse, many so-called "leaders" find themselves viewed with a degree of suspicion, distrust, or outright hostility *because* of their job titles. The current suspicion of authority and of authority figures is not unique to educational leaders by any means. As we all know, various public opinion polls during the past several years have shown a marked lack of confidence not only in educators, but in the media, in people in government posts, and in other (formerly) high-status professions as well.

How do these attitudes affect the performance of educational leaders? Even more important, what are the implications for effective curriculum development processes and for meaningful supervision of instruction? How can middle management people do their jobs properly under such adverse circumstances? These are definitely not

vintage years for the typical ASCD member who would like to be assured of a modicum of power, influence, respect, and trust in his/her job.

The Traditional Style

Somewhere almost every leadership style is honored in this country. The traditional, "I am the boss" leader can find a happy home in many locations. This style comes with matching accessories such as an adversary labor-management relationship, a line-staff chart of organization, and a belief that leadership consists of closely-held power for decision making. That style was more popular in U.S. education in the 1930's than it is today, but enjoys a resurgence of popularity whenever a given locale, or the country as a whole, is undergoing a period of uncertainty and anxiety. When doubt and fear abound, it is sometimes comforting to hear an authoritative voice speaking out with certainty. Of course, there are many places in the country where that style of leadership has been essentially the *only* one in existence for the past 30 to 50 years.

The traditional style is essentially authoritarian in character. It comes in various shades like dark despotic at one extreme and lightly benevolent at the other. Whatever the shade, the style is based on a belief that "leadership" *is* what particular people in specified jobs do for a living.

The Newer ASCD Style

Another major style of leadership is one that was espoused by ASCD leaders from the time of its founding in 1946 through the next 10 to 15 years, perhaps up to the advent of Sputnik. The late Kimball Wiles was one of the most eloquent champions of this newer style. He, and many other ASCD leaders, spoke of educational leadership as a set of *services* designed to facilitate

teaching. People with status leadership titles were to be people who could assist individuals and groups in making wise decisions for themselves.

This style of leadership has appeared with greatest frequency in college courses, in text books, in periodicals, and in speeches at ASCD conferences. It has not appeared as often in practice in school districts, colleges, and universities. The style is still popular and can be observed in a number of locations—but not in as many as the traditional style.

The Survivor Style

A third style of long standing is that in which one blends into the background or changes to fit the surroundings. This is the "survivors suit." It is designed to fit any occasion in any locale. This is the educational leader who "leads" by checking carefully to see what style will be accepted and acts accordingly.

Leadership as a Set of Functions

The final, perhaps most recent, style to be noted is based on the concept that leadership is a *set of functions* needed for effective operation and improvement rather than just *what people with status leadership titles do* for a living. In this framework, a variety of styles can be exhibited by any of the people caught up in the process. In a particular school or a planning group, some leadership functions may be carried out by teachers, others by parents, still others by students, as well as by supervisors and administrators.

Who does what is determined by *what* needs to be done and by *who* has the skills and time to carry out each task. The group decides *together* how to identify and use the leadership potential of each of its members. These concepts are familiar to the students of group dynamics and

have been in the literature for more than 30 years, but are even less frequently found in practice than the notion of administration and supervision as facilitating services.

Matching Styles to Settings

If the criterion for behavior is to act in ways that please associates, it can be met rather easily. Determine what your most effective and natural style is and then locate a school, school district, or university that finds that style desirable. An alternative is to choose the work location and then to develop a style that works best there.

If the criterion for behavior is to achieve certain personal/professional goals *and* to do so in a given place, then the person doing so must come to terms with all the varying viewpoints about appropriate style that may exist there. Some new styles may not only emerge, but styles change regularly if everyone in a school who wants to exert leadership is willing to deal with everyone else's view of what "leadership" means.

Leadership and Sharing Power

In an earlier article, I described what I consider to be the necessity for learning to share power in curriculum decision making.¹ This was espoused primarily on the basis of being consistent with democratic ideals. If we think that set of reasons is not sufficiently compelling, let us look at the pragmatic test of "what works."

When we learn to share power with skill and enthusiasm, everyone *gains* power. No one loses. The group dynamics movement coined the term "synergy" to describe this phenomenon of synthe-

¹ Delmo Della-Dora. "Democracy and Education: Who Owns the Curriculum?" *Educational Leadership* 34(1): 51-59; October 1976.

sizing available group energy. In its simplest terms, when a group of people really works together for common goals in ways sanctioned by the group *each* one takes responsibility for *everything* that is decided. The group does not expect *only* the administrator or supervisor to follow up and "monitor" or "enforce" decisions. If truly made by the group, the decisions "belong" to the group. Every person is simultaneously "leader" and "follower."

We all know that in the real world, most of us commit ourselves to doing what each believes in and not to do what we are told by others is right for us to do or to believe. We have spent too many years in our profession pretending that leadership is what goes automatically with a job title. *Every* job can involve leadership qualities. "Leadership" is made up of a wide array of skills, attitudes, behaviors, and knowledge. Different combinations of these qualities are needed for particular tasks related to supervision of instruction and curriculum improvement, and many different people are capable of exhibiting the needed combinations.

A common misconception for many fulltime curriculum and supervisory workers today is to assume that there is an invisible "emperor's mantle" of leadership that appointment to the job

bestows upon the wearer. Those who make that error will soon find that the expected admiration and respect are not automatically forthcoming. They are not only likely to hear people shouting "The emperor is wearing no clothes," but "There is no emperor" and "I wish the emperor would wear something appropriate."

Each person in any given enterprise has leadership qualities appropriate to a given task. The trick is to find out what styles are needed, what "fits" whom, and then to "suit up" to do the jobs required. Individual choices *and* group decisions both play a part in determining how leadership functions. Properly done everyone who wants to be in on the act gets a speaking part, and the costumes fit both the actors and the scene. It may never get to Broadway, but this will do well in the provinces and elsewhere. [E]



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Future ASCD Annual Conferences

1978	March 4-8	San Francisco	Civic Center
1979	March 3-7	Detroit	Cobo Hall
1980	March 29-April 2	Atlanta	Georgia World Congress Center
1981	March 7-11	St. Louis	Congress Center

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