

IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL LEADERS FOR SUPERVISION AND CURRICULUM WORK

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ONE of the most serious problems facing the education profession is that of finding persons with leadership ability. Ryder predicts that although the general population of the United States will increase by one-third during the next two decades, the age group from which leaders emerge will remain constant.¹ This means the competition for these leaders will become keener than it is at the present time. The demand will be greater not only by different groups within the education profession but by private enterprise and by governmental agencies.

A second serious problem is that of finding people within the leadership pool who have the personal attributes, intellectual abilities, and professional commitment to fulfill the roles of supervisors and curriculum workers. The profession can no longer afford the luxury of hoping that enough persons with promise will decide to prepare to be supervisors or curriculum workers but must take decisive steps to identify persons with the potential talent and to encourage them to consider the opportunities in the field of supervision and curriculum.

Selection Is Critical

The problem of selection is a troublesome one. At present there is no specific criterion supported by research which can be used to predict in advance whether or not a person will be an effective supervisor. William Bagley's statement is even more appropriate today than in 1939 when he said that "if three-fourths of the time, energy, and money spent . . . in carrying through elaborate programs of curriculum-revision had been spent in a determined effort to raise the standards of selecting and training teachers . . ." education would have been more effectively improved.²

Although little has been written on the problem of selecting qualified persons and less research has been done in this area, this is not to say that writers have

¹ N. B. Ryder, "Demography and Education," *Phi Delta Kappan* 41:379; June 1960.

² William C. Bagley, "An Essentialist Looks at the Foreign Languages," *Educational Administration and Supervision* 25:250; April 1939.

failed to describe the qualities they believe supervisors should possess. Any text on supervision includes lists. And according to these lists a supervisor should among other things love children, be student-centered, group-centered, have the courage to take a stand, have teaching experience, listen to opinions of others, and be guided at all times, not by opinion, but by research findings. Any person attempting to develop these, and the many other characteristics listed by writers, would soon be a paragon of virtue.

The reality of the matter is that little has been done to determine the areas in which a person must have knowledge, skills and insights in order to be an effective supervisor or curriculum worker. Only until these areas are thought through can steps be taken to set up any kind of selective admission to programs of preparation.

As a result, it appears that currently there are only two kinds of selection procedures being carried on in most of the preparing institutions. One is self-selection. The decision is left to the individual to decide whether or not he has the background, talent or commitment to become a supervisor or curriculum worker. If he decides he does have such qualities, the second step of the screening procedure is employed. He needs only to meet the general requirements for admission to graduate study, which are basically the same for English, supervision, or any other field.

Careful consideration should be given to the roles supervisors and curriculum workers must play and to the program of preparation needed to carry out these

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roles. Are there any personal characteristics which would enable a person to be more effective in his work? Are there academic and professional abilities the person should have? What skills are needed? What professional qualities and capabilities are necessary for these positions? Which of these should a person have prior to entering a program? Which can be sharpened during preparation? Which can be developed as a result of preparation?

These are questions the profession, and specifically the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, should be concerned with. These questions are not purely academic. The quality of the educational program of the decades ahead will depend greatly on the answers given to them.

The responsibility for searching for the answers does not lie only with preparing institutions. Granted in the final analysis these institutions must determine who will enter and complete the programs. Nevertheless, people in local school systems have an important stake in the quality of these persons. These school people can contribute much to the selection process by working with selection committees of colleges and universities, by serving on graduate committees, by observing and evaluating the prospective supervisors in field situations, and by assisting in research projects designed to study the characteristics of identified effective and noneffective supervisors.

Recruiting Potential Leaders

Related to the problem of selection is that of recruitment. The establishment of high standards does little good unless there is a reservoir of talented prospects from which to choose.

As already stated, the decision to prepare to be a supervisor has been left largely to the individual. Although little research has been done in the area of why people choose to become supervisors, it appears that many drift into the position rather than entering on purpose. A study of supervisors in Kentucky reports that only 11% of the participants entered a graduate program for the purpose of specializing in supervision.³ The writer surveyed a group of male undergraduate prospective secondary teachers, asking what they hoped to be doing in ten years if not teaching. Most of them said they wanted to be a principal or a superintendent. Upon further questioning, it became evident they either were not aware of opportunities in the areas of supervision and curriculum or they did not know what a person did in these jobs, thus were not interested.

Self-selection will doubtless continue to be an important means by which people will decide to become supervisors or curriculum workers. It cannot, however, be the only means. There needs to be an organized program designed to identify persons with promise.

As in the selection process, both the personnel in local school systems and those in teacher-preparation institutions should work together in identifying these

³ Ray Alexander and others. *Educational Supervision in Kentucky, 1961-62*. Bulletin of the Bureau of School Services. College of Education, University of Kentucky, Lexington. 35:1; September 1962. p. 42.

persons. Together they can establish machinery which allows talented people to be identified. Such prospective leaders may be in the preservice program preparing to teach, they may be teachers or administrators, or they may be in related areas such as guidance. The important feature is that people *consciously* will be looking for individuals who have promise. They must also consider that group that is so frequently overlooked—women.

Identifying persons with promise is just part of the task. They must be made aware of the opportunities in supervision and curriculum work. This calls for the development of a wide variety of materials—brochures, pamphlets, films, filmstrips, and perhaps advertisements for use in mass media. These should describe the functions and responsibilities of supervisors and curriculum workers, the nature of the preparation required, and the job possibilities.

Expense doubtless has been an important factor in keeping some very promising men and women from pursuing advanced study in these two areas. Although the individual may continue to bear a large share of the financial cost involved, it seems clear that more assistance will have to be provided from other sources. Currently, preparing institutions are providing the bulk of financial assistance to such students in the form of scholarships, fellowships and assistantships. Other sources must be found, however. As in other aspects of selection and recruitment, the local school system can play an important role. For example, the system can provide leaves of absence with partial pay for individuals who will move into these leadership positions.

Providing Leadership

In such a quest for talent, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development can provide much leadership at the national level. Through the Committee on Professionalization of Supervisors and Curriculum Workers, it can continue to work with state units. In addition, the Association can develop materials to be used for recruitment which would be too expensive for a state unit to prepare. For example, it might produce a film which presents the many roles a supervisor plays. It can encourage and support studies which might give some direction in the selection process.

An ASCD affiliated unit can also provide much leadership within the state. It can make annual studies of the supply and demand of supervisors and curriculum workers; it can encourage preparing institutions and school systems to cooperate in identifying, recruiting and screening men and women for these positions; it can assist in the development of materials which describe opportunities in these fields; and it can help develop ways of providing financial assistance to those who need it.

Now is a time to re-file the old saw so that it goes "Those who can, do. And those who do with unusual ability and insight become leaders in supervision and curriculum work." 

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