Wise and prudent use can lead to a better development program

Effective use of consultants

By J. Harvey Littrell

If the role of the outside consultant is defined and perceived properly by instructional leaders and teachers in a school system, then this person can be an effective addition to a staff development program. To insure that such a condition exists, the administrator has several important tasks to accomplish. The administrator needs to know when to use outside consultants, how to select them, and how to work with them.

The thesis stated above is not new. A review of texts[1] on instructional supervision published more than 10 years ago revealed that most texts discussed the outside consultant's role in facilitating instructional improvement. There was general consensus that the outside consultant's role was to help the school community make decisions. For a staff development program these decisions would be concerned with goals for the program, feasible means for accomplishing these goals, ways of evaluating both the processes used and the products accomplished; and finally, ways for revising programs, if needed, to better reach the goals.

More recent texts[2] on instructional improvement make little or no mention of the outside consultant. Therefore, recent graduates in school administration, curriculum, or supervision may not be aware of the functions of the outside consultant, nor of the proper use of these individuals. Lack of such knowledge can lead to frustrated program participants, waste of school district funds, and unsatisfactory staff development procedures.

The steps administrators should follow in selecting and utilizing outside consultants in a staff development program are outlined in Figure 1. For each step, the major tasks to be performed by the administrator have been delineated. Clarification of these steps and tasks follows:

Step 1. Determination of Need.

Every staff development program requires that the school community involved in the program be aware of the philosophical and psychological implications of such a program. Participants also need to benefit from the knowledge gained from the latest research on instructional improvement. Teachers and administrators should be aware of the current trends and techniques in instructional improvement and the ramifications of these trends. The administrator must decide whether or not the expertise to provide such information is available in the local school community.

If such assistance locally is nonexistent, then an outside consultant will be needed. However, if there are individuals on the local staff who have the needed knowledge, then the administrator must decide whether these staff members can communicate effectively with other staff members. The desire to utilize local staff members as program leaders to save money or to hurry the process, may lead to ineffectiveness or collapse of the program. Local staff members may consider the leadership of a staff development program as "extra work" and therefore not plan adequately the necessary processes. They may allow their regular duties to have first priority, and the staff development program suffers.

It is unfortunate, but probably true, that, "A prophet is without honor in his own country." In other words, it is possible that an outside consultant will receive more attention and respect than a local person. Other considerations which must be made by the administrator are: Do we need the objective viewpoints of an outside consultant? Will such a person have the organizational experiences we will need? Is there a motivational problem which can be better resolved by an outsider? Will we need more than one consultant to meet our needs adequately?

Step 2. Interview and Select the Prospective Consultant.

The usual sources for outside consultants employed to assist in staff development programs are state departments of education, national subject area organizations and faculties of colleges of education. Administrators should not overlook two other sources for consultants for staff development programs:

(1) Classroom teachers who have established reputations as excellent instructional leaders; and (2) employees of industry, particularly personnel officials. Teachers who have successfully employed various staff development techniques in their own classrooms have a credibility which is convincing to teachers. Industry employees have valuable motivational schemes or ideas for organization which can be adapted for use in schools. Their ideas may create enthusiasm and/or orderly manner of procedure in the program.

Before selecting outside consultants, the administrator should ascertain answers to the following questions:

1. Does the person consider the consultant's role to be that in which the consultant identifies problems and gives solutions, or one in which the consultant helps others to identify and arrive at solutions? If the latter role does not seem to be the consultant's perception, then look elsewhere for help.

2. Is this person familiar with the local school community, or willing to become familiar with it prior to the service? If the prospective consultant fails to ask for information about the community or does not suggest meetings or correspondence for the purpose of becoming familiar with the situation, then proceed with caution. Such an individual probably is not interested in the specific situation and probably has a "canned" program used in all situations.

3. Has this person demonstrated a knowledge of staff development procedures through publication and/or successfully conducted workshops? Ask for such evidence. If none is available, then try to determine whether the prospective consultant has developed unpublished materials which have been carefully devised and are worthy of a trial.

Step 3. Initial Meeting of the Instructional Leaders with the Consultant.

A major task of the administrator is to hold a conference with the outside consultant(s) chosen to help with the staff development program for the purpose of defining exactly what role each one is to have in the program. Research findings indicate that when administrators and consultants agree on the preferred role of each, the consultant was rated high; when there was disagreement, the consultant was rated low. In other words, if there is a complete understanding of roles, the chances for a better program will be enhanced.[3]

Prior to the start of the development program, the administrator should also arrange for the consultant to meet with all of the instructional leaders who will be involved in the program. In addition to the superintendent, these leaders are usually principals, curriculum coordinators, special supervisors and head teachers. If the school has a faculty committee working on program plans, then the consultant should also have an opportunity to meet with them. During these meetings, plans for the procedures to be followed should be discussed. These plans should include activities used to motivate, instruct, and evaluate. Roles should be assigned. The instructional leaders and the consultant should know their exact responsibilities and the responsibilities of others.

During these meetings the consultant's role must be carefully explained. It must be understood that it is not the consultant's role **to tell** people, but **to help** people. Misunderstanding of the consultant's role is not unusual. If the consultant is perceived as giving too much information or advice, then the consultant is rejected by the participants. If the participants perceive the consultant as not making much input, then they feel the individual has not earned his pay. Unhappiness with "highly paid" consultants is not unusual. All of the instructional leaders can help such a situation from occurring by understanding the role of the consultant and helping teachers to understand the consultant's role also.

A decision must be made and agreed upon by the administrator and consultant concerning the length of time needed for planning the staff development program. The administrator knows the financial support which can be given, and the consultant should be knowledgeable about the length of time needed for accomplishing certain planning tasks. At this time it may be necessary to modify the program to stay within the funds allocated for the project. It is better to make modifications in the project at this time rather than have to terminate the program before completing tasks which have been started.

The administrator should also have the consultant assist the instructional leaders in making decisions about the types of subcommittee chairpersons.[4] The roles of members of the various faculty subcommittees should be specified prior to the selection of the members.

The tasks in Step 3 are vital to the success of the staff development program. Time and effort spent in making wise decisions in Step 3 will make the tasks in the remaining steps much easier to accomplish.

Step 4. Meetings of Consultant and Staff.

The administrator and the instructional leaders of the school must demonstrate to the faculty members that they believe staff development is important. There are two ways they can accomplish this task:

(1) By positive comments to faculty members concerning the processes and products of the work sessions; and (2) through their attendance at the work sessions. If the administrators and instructional leaders show evidence of negative attitudes, then teachers will tend to be negative. Not all aspects of the program will be equally pleasing to all participants. Leaders, therefore, must accent the positive aspects and try to get changes made to eliminate the negative aspects during the planning sessions. If administrators and other instructional leaders do not attend meetings, they are communicating to the faculty that the program is not as important to them as other tasks which await in their offices.

In Step 3, the consultant should plan with the administrator and instructional leaders for the first meeting of all participants. A similar meeting attended by the consultant, administrator, instructional leaders and faculty committee members **should be held prior to each meeting or work session** of the faculty. Items of business similar to those in Step 3 will comprise the agenda for these subsequent meetings.

Step 5. Evaluation of the Process and Products of the Work Sessions.

Evaluation of the processes should be an on-going activity. If Step 4 is followed, then an opportunity is afforded not only to plan meetings, but to discuss revisions which need to be made and to review the extent to which all participants are fulfilling their roles. During these sessions both positive and negative criticisms of the process and products should be considered carefully. Decisions should be made which will lead to improvement or to continued success in the processes. Instructional leaders and faculty committee members should be attuned to comments from faculty members. Evaluation forms can also be devised and given to faculty members to complete. If these are anonymous, then a more valid assessment may be made of faculty attitudes than if the forms are signed.

The products of the staff development program must be evaluated also. However, the evaluation of a product should not take place immediately after a work session. When participants have worked for a long period of time on a product, it is difficult to be objective in viewing the product. A "cooling off" period after a work session would be preferable before faculty are asked to evaluate a product.

Step 6. Operation of the Staff Development Program.

Failure to make operational the plans which teachers develop is the one factor most frustrating to teachers. It discourages them from future participation in programs for curriculum development, instructional improvement or staff development. It is imperative that administrators

54

STEPS	ADMINISTRATIVE TASKS
STEP 1: Determination of Need	a. Determine, if possible, the background information needed for the program. b. Assess available local talent for planning and directing the program. c. Decide whether or not an outside consultant will bring more objective viewpoints than local personnel. d. Decide whether or not an outside consultant will be better able to motivate the participants than would a local person.
STEP 2: Interview and Select the Prospective Consultant	a. Determine the best source for obtaining outside consultants. b. Through correspondence or telephone conversations assess the prospective consultant's (a) interest in the program and (b) view of the consultant's role. c. Ask for evidence of the prospective consultant's expertise. d. Have complete understanding concerning the payment of fees and expenses. e. Based on information obtained, select the consultant.
STEP 3: Initial Meeting of Instructional Leaders with the Consultant	a. Arange a meeting of the local instructional leaders and the selected consultant. b. Clarify the roles of all participants in the program. c. Ask the consultant to outline the proposed procedures to follow in developing the program. d. Negotiate procedures, frequency of meetings with the staff, time span for development, selection of subcommittee chairpersons. e. Prior to the first meeting of consultants and staff, the administrator should make certain that all participants understand the roles played by all participants.
STEP 4: Meetings, or Work Sessions, of Consultant and Staff	a. Local instructional leaders and administrators show interest in the program by attending all work sessions of the staff and consultants. b. Prior to each meeting or work session, the administrator and instructional leaders should plan with the consultant the procedures which will be followed during the sessions.
STEP 5: Evaluation of Process and Products of the Work Sessions	a. All participants should have input into the evaluation procedures, either individually or through representatives. b. The work of the consultant should be evaluated periodically by instructional leaders and staff members. c. Instructional leaders and staff members should have periodic self-evaluations. d. The instructional leaders and consultants should use the periodic evaluations as means for improving procedures. e. Faculty and instructional leaders should evaluate the final product (the staff development program) after it has been operative for a period of time.
STEP 6: Operation of the Staff Development Program	a. Local administrators and instructional leaders must be certain that the staff development program is used by the staff members. b. Keep consultants informed of the successes and/or failures of various aspects of the program.

assure teachers that the programs they have produced will be used. He must make certain that he and other instructional leaders have developed organizational plans, secured the finances and selected the personnel necessary to make the staff development program operational.

The consultant should not be neglected. The consultant who has performed his role in a professional manner has a vested interest in the program's operation. Therefore, administrators should keep the consultant informed of the progress being made by the participants as

the staff development program is implemented.

Conclusion.

Administrators and other instructional leaders have very specific steps to follow and tasks to perform in using a consultant for staff development programs. Consultants can be helpful and extremely valuable, but only if the administrator knows when to use them, how to select them and how to work with them. The success or failure of the program which is developed will probably depend upon the extent to which the steps and tasks for using consultants are followed.

FOOTNOTES

1. Texts authored by Douglas, Bent, Boardman; Harrison; Harris; Gwynn
2. Texts authored by Lucio and McNeill; Wiles and Bon; Oliva; Alfonso
3. Harris, Ben M., **Supervisory Behavior in Education**, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliff, N.J., 1963, p. 433.
4. Littrell, J. Harvey, "A Research-based Technique for Selecting Chairpersons," **NASSP Bulletin,** April, 1978, pp. 24-28.