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The Principal's Role as a Curriculum Leader

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THE PRINCIPAL'S ROLE AS A CURRICULUM
LEADER

A Research Paper
Presented to
the Graduate Faculty
Central Washington College of Education

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Education

by
Richard Allan Cash
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THIS PAPER IS APPROVED AS MEETING THE PLAN 2
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PAPER.

M. Curtis Howd FOR THE GRADUATE FACULTY

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM AND DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

At the turn of the century education began to define and evaluate different roles of educational leaders, including that of the principal. In the last few decades the principal's position has been most adequately defined. However, his role will continue to change as does the culture of which it is a part.

I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. This paper will attempt to (1) explore the principal's emerging role as a leader in curriculum development, (2) report ways the principal may bring about desired changes in the curriculum, and (3) identify problems having to do with the effect of social influences and cultural patterns upon curriculum improvement.

Importance of the study. The growth of any institution is usually accompanied by the development of increasingly complex problems of organization and administration. Since the principal has been placed in the key position within the school, it is of significance that a study be made of his role as a curriculum leader. As nominal head of the school, the principal creates an atmosphere that influences the people with whom he comes in contact. Therefore, his

philosophy should be one that encourages and promotes research and experimentation furthering curriculum development.

II. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

Curriculum. This refers to all planned learning situations under the guidance of the school.

Leader. He is the person within a group that expresses an idea or ideas the group will respond to and move toward.

CHAPTER II

THE CURRICULUM ROLE EMERGES

Historically, the position of principal has run the gamut from main teacher, part-time janitor, public relations man, administrator-clerk, to supervisory and management responsibilities.

During the last quarter of the Nineteenth Century the principal's position as a leader and supervisory head in a school became well established in larger cities. This position was recognized and respected by both teachers and supervisors from the central office. Although in these cities the principal had the opportunity to exert creative leadership, evidence indicates few did so. In general, it is fair to characterize his supervision before 1900 as inspection and his leadership as authoritarian. As a rule, the principal visited classes, quizzed the pupils, and paid careful attention to the physical conditions in the classroom (9:298).

There has been a gradual transition in the school over the years. Now the principal is held responsible for the improvement of instruction as well as for management in the local school. Hicks and Jameson state:

Persons now in the principalship and those who aspire to the position must have certain personal characteristics and training adequate to qualify them to work effectively in these challenging and essential areas:

1. Guidance and supervision of curriculum.
2. Utilization of human and natural resources to enrich experiences of children.
3. Understanding of cultural and societal values.
4. Deep insight into how children grow and develop.
5. Functional knowledge of human behavior.
6. Techniques of working with adults in the community.
7. Understanding of group dynamics and human relationships (10:302-3).

These guidelines relate directly to improving the curriculum. The principal must have a basic background in these areas as he seeks to improve the curriculum. He must further have a definite knowledge of what the curriculum entails.

Willard S. Elsbree and Harold J. McNally relate the following:

The curriculum should be interpreted to mean all the experiences that the children have under the direct jurisdiction of the school. Under this definition there can be no such thing as an "extracurricular" or "co-curricular" experience in school. All experiences are curricular, and should be part of the school's program of observing and guiding the learning and growth of the children toward the goals deemed desirable (8:116).

In consequence, the principal's role with respect to curriculum improvement takes on added significance. The current interpretation of the curriculum as consisting of all planned experiences under the guidance of the school places tremendous importance upon the principal and teacher as curriculum builders.

The principal's role in curriculum improvement has expanded in the past, and evidence points the way to broader concepts of the instructional program. This places a great responsibility upon the principal. He must read and keep abreast of current issues as well as further his formal education.

CHAPTER III

THE PRINCIPAL DIRECTS DESIRED CHANGES IN THE CURRICULUM

The principal, by virtue of his position, can do most about providing the conditions for encouraging and arranging processes for cooperative action. It is therefore imperative that he be a leader in the field of curriculum development. This function of curriculum improvement overlaps with his responsibilities for personnel leadership. Planning is basically a group process, and its success rests upon the participation of the many individuals responsible for the program.

Unless the principal has well defined educational goals, there is no basis for giving direction in the leadership role. Before a change can be brought about in the curriculum, someone must be aware that a change is needed. The principal should be among the first to be aware of the need for change or to recognize others who are cognizant of needed change. As he is able to express ideas, they give him, at least in the beginning, the status of leader.

The principal, as an instructional leader, needs to know the science of human relationships. He must be skilled in guiding groups and helping them find solutions to their problems. Maurice Krout offers this idea:

It is just as important to understand why a follower becomes a follower as it is to understand why a leader

becomes a leader. Psychologists have reported many cases of individuals who could not lead because they were too superior.

Followers tend to seek similarity of traits between themselves and their leaders. People admire most those they think they understand. There is a definite emotional relationship between the follower and the leader. Leaders can lead because followers identify themselves with them, play their social roles through them and solve problems with them (11:678).

The principal should utilize the special talents of each member of the staff so that teachers learn from and assist one another. Thus the curriculum is improved and children may benefit from the unique talents of each teacher (2:148). As curriculum change occurs it is essentially brought about by changes in teachers through extending and enriching resources and by leadership provided by the principal (4:142).

In the class the teacher makes hundreds of decisions daily with respect to the learning situation, each of which determines the effective curriculum, the organized learning experiences provided by the school for the child's education. The principal is responsible to carry out those functions which insure the education of children according to democratic principles. With this in mind, it is vital that he involve the teacher in the curriculum improvement process. The individual teacher is the key to instruction. It is only logical to solicit his aid and experience in any curriculum changes. The American Association of School Administrators relates this idea in the following manner, "Not only is the

curriculum affected by the teacher but, in all probability, the classroom teacher is the most important person in the total curriculum" (1:219).

As the principal selects a group to work on curriculum improvement, he should select those who are interested and express a desire to be placed in the group. The A.A.S.A. also states, "Whenever individuals and groups work on problems of their own choice, the results are usually enduring and profitable" (1:62).

The principal's success in improving instruction will be in direct relationship to his ability to get people concerned with the problem to contribute to its solution. As a member of the group, he has every right to hold firm opinions of his own as long as he does not attempt to force them on the group. The leader has a responsibility to place his opinion, along with those of others, in the discussion for the consideration of the group.

There have been changes in the concept of leadership because of changes in earlier accepted concepts of authority. In earlier concepts the authority rested in the leadership position; the king had authority because he was king. He was ordained king by a power greater than man. Authority was looked upon as power over people (8:63).

Today, leadership theory places the authority in man. The statement in the Declaration of Independence that "Governments derive their just powers from the consent of

the governed" shows the newer concept of authority as being invested in a leader by the group. In Supervision a Social Process, Burton and Brueckner advance the following idea, "The democratic philosophy will supply principles for supervision in the United States. A democratic philosophy will be a statement of those values, aims, and policies deemed valuable in the furtherance of democracy" (3:74). The principal's philosophy as he administers the school or works within a group for curriculum improvement must be democratic. This type of leadership is based on the idea that every member has something of worth to add to the group. Kimball Wiles states:

An official leader may take at least three approaches to his work. He may believe it is his function to dominate, control, and operate the group. He may conceive of himself as "working on" a group. Or the official leader may believe it is his function to help the group carry out its purposes. He may conceive of his role as "working for" a group. Or third, the official leader may believe it is his job to help a group to form and execute purposes. He may conceive of his role as "working within" a group (16:24).

The third way leaves an open-end situation, room for growth of the individual group. The principal's role, here is to guide, not dominate.

In the curriculum improvement process, the behavior of the individual teacher must change. Changes in the individual teacher can come about only as the teacher is involved in the process of solving the problem. Melchior, in defining curriculum change with respect to people, related the following: "Curriculum revision is concerned with desirable changes in people

and changes in those factors that influence the learner's experiences so that those values which are generally considered of paramount importance, may more certainly be realized" (12:228).

The principal who has insight into human relations seeks out, helps build, and employs leadership as it is recognized in his staff and facilitates the expression of that leadership in a contribution to the school. The Department of Supervisors and Directors of Instruction of the N.E.A. state:

Under the old authoritarian conception, the teacher was expected to take direction from the supervisor. Under the democratic conception the teacher is one who does his own thinking; he is expected to grow and develop, to have a purpose and a vision; he is the one who has a contribution to make (6:29).

Hollis Caswell relates, "One of the obstacles to curriculum improvement is the fear of the unknown. Teachers fearing failure or possible censure from superiors, are hesitant to experiment with new methods of work" (5:69). The principal must give encouragement to the individual teacher to adapt the curriculum to the needs of the children. The achievement of this goal requires a permissive environment for teacher participation with curriculum changes. A pamphlet published by the Educational Policies Commission advanced this theory, "Working with his staff, the principal takes active responsibility for achieving this flexibility and seeing to it that each child's program is planned and replanned in the light of new information about him" (7:21).

As one views the program of education, the major effort

seems to be that of going through subject matter to actual changes in behavior of pupils. The California Elementary School Principals' Association states:

The most effective way to improve the curriculum is to improve teaching. Courses of study, learning aids, in-service education and the like are but means to the end of helping teachers learn to guide the living and learning of pupils more effectively. It is imperative that we follow sound principles of learning in all efforts to improve the curriculum (4:19).

In any specific activity or process, it is necessary to use facts and ideas that established researchers have brought to light. The principal, of necessity, must be a learned man of human relations, group processes, and a master of organization to form an effective curriculum.

CHAPTER IV

THE PRINCIPAL REALIZES THE EFFECT OF SOCIAL INFLUENCES AND CULTURAL PATTERNS UPON CURRICULUM IMPROVEMENT

Our culture is changing; what was true of the curriculum in the past isn't necessarily appropriate today.

The Educational Policies Commission reports:

The American society has changed vastly in this century in respect to population, technology, forms of power, and social organization. This has meant changes in the life of the family, the community, and the nation. It has meant a striking expansion in the citizen's need for knowledge of his world and of himself. Matters which were once the concern of a few or irrelevant to practical affairs have acquired unexpected universality and immediacy. For example, a knowledge of living conditions in other lands is now directly relevant to the decisions faced by each American voter. Even the moon, once the province of the astronomer or poet, has become a subject of national and international policy. The dimensions of relevance have expanded, and with them the demands on the school (7 :2).

If our American way is to exist, citizens must be educated. It requires more time to educate people as the problems of society become more difficult. The people of America have invested their earnings in education in the hope that more benefits may accrue to all as a nation. It is the belief in America that by helping people to use intelligence for the general welfare, the destiny of the country will be fulfilled (1:9).

As a nation we are founded on progress, and this is essentially change. The school is part of society, and as the society changes the school must also move forward. To

improve education demands constant changing of goals in order that the curriculum will keep abreast with the developments of our times. Harold Hand states:

The curriculum must be changed continually if it is to help promote the advancement of our civilization. Superintendents and principals of good schools know this, and they value the teacher who realizes that he should contribute willingly and systematically to the month-by-month and year-by-year development of the curriculum (9:9).

The principal must have the goals of the school well defined and must point teachers and students toward the desired end. He must constantly re-evaluate the curriculum in the light of policies set down by the board of education and other responsible persons.

The board of education is responsible to the community for determining general policies which govern school operation. The board delegates to the superintendent (and thus to the principal) the responsibility of carrying out these policies. Some policies may be suggested by the teaching staff, and, in general, in good schools the suggestions of the teachers significantly influence the decisions of the board members and administrative officers. But board members must approve all policies, regardless of their origin, before they are put into action. For this reason, these officials are necessarily involved in the work of curriculum development. Generally they are happy to find teachers who want to improve the curriculum (9:8).

The curriculum ultimately involves the teacher. The

American School Administrators advance the following philosophy:

Within the frame work of the stated philosophy and policies of the school system, the teacher strives to relate forces and factors both without and within his classroom. He tries to bring something to his pupils and to get something from them. He goes into his room with some plans. In accordance with major educational objectives he seeks to guide his pupils within the process of further planning . . . thus, within the frame work of a planned curriculum, the classroom group evolves a curriculum that cannot be foreseen in detail by curriculum committees, school administrators, or authors of textbooks. It is the classroom teacher who reconciles many conditions and develops the actual curriculum (1:222).

The American school is in part a result of this century's freedom of experimentation and exploration. The variety of curricular patterns shows this freedom, and the tendency of some lay organizations to force the school to return to the traditional subject-centered curriculum is cause for deep concern. In terms of the best interests of children, schools should be encouraged to try different patterns of curriculum organization (1:78).

At times when education and society experience unrest, the principals position in the school may become more difficult. An example of this is the recent surge to science and mathematics instruction in response to pressures from various groups after the first satellite was orbited.

Improving schools depends on the type of community and their acceptance of educational programs having various levels of quality. Hicks and Jameson point this out:

We have said that the people in the community will support our schools more vigorously and constantly when they work closely with the school in the promotion and maintenance of a worth-while, productive school program of education (10:286).

Another factor the principal must consider in developing the instructional program is created by the mobility of people (13:97). The Americans are a mobile people; about one-fifth move each year. Some make local moves, but about one-third of the movers cross county lines and one-sixth are interstate migrants. These facts have particular importance for those engaged in education. Such shifts change the population composition of local communities and sub-areas within each community. In turn, the composition of the student body of the school may shift, requiring constant review and frequent modification of the curriculum. Population moves within a community may require other curriculum modifications.

The change in culture is another problem faced by the school. Smith, Stanley, and Shores report:

The dissolution of the old-fashioned community, the decline in influence of the family unit, the reduced influence of face-to-face relationships, the rise of huge social organizations, and the increasing instability of occupations and employment are some of the more important consequences of the scientific and technological revolution (14:52).

Mass communication has become so pervasive that today's child enters school with a variety of experiences and information unimagined by beginning pupils a generation ago. This change, too, presents the school with important problems and opportunities. The child brings to school many of the beliefs, attitudes, and types of behavior he has learned from not only his family and friends but also from mass media sources (7:2).

There has been considerable study given to developing curricula based on indicated problems and concerns of the learner. Current practice indicates that some schools still believe only facts should be taught. Research, however, shows that most educators would agree that the major purpose of education is to develop the American concept of democracy as a way of life. Since democracy is a way of behaving, it follows that the function of schools is to help boys and girls develop democratic ways of behaving, including attitudes, habits, social skills, ideals, interests, and appreciations (2:41).

In carrying out these learning functions, curriculum improvement is sometimes slighted by the principal because of administrative "red tape." Trump adds an encouraging light on the future:

Today's principals spend a large part of their time and energy on the mechanics of administration. There are the mechanics of school schedule, the basketball team, the junior prom, the cafeteria, the bus system, the PTA, and many more. Mechanics press in on all sides, and mechanical chores demand immediate attention. They present weekly, sometimes daily, deadlines. Curriculum, on the other hand, seldom presents any such demands, so curriculum changes often wait.

Principals of the future will assume enhances educational leadership. They will not act on the fringes of education; they will be at the heart of it. What they do will be critically important.

Basic changes will be made in the way they spend their time and energy. They will spend considerable time, for instance, in working with teaching teams on the organization of instruction in tomorrows's schools (15:65-6).

Dr. Trump explains this enhanced role of leadership by assuming that funds will be available for other personnel to assume some of the mechanics of administration. Principals of the future will plan with their staff an organization of the curriculum to help students gain skills, basic knowledge, and creativity (15:66).

The A.A.S.A. points out, "As has often been said, social change does not occur on a broad, even front; this is particularly true of change in the schools. On the contrary it moves ahead in one area or community, and lags behind in another" (1:258).

The principal is responsible for carrying out the educational goals of the schools according to board policy. The final authority in all matters of policy rests in the judgment of the people.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

This research has attempted to (1) explore the principal's emerging role as a leader in curriculum development, (2) report ways the principal may bring about desired changes in the curriculum, and (3) identify the effect of social influences and cultural patterns upon curriculum improvement. The literature was confined to publications of the last two decades.

The principal now has the responsibility of carrying out general policies established by the board of education. The function of carrying out the school's goals may become increasingly difficult in times of unrest; different pressure groups want emphasis on certain phases of the school program. Mobility, cultural change, mass communication, and problems of administration are some aspects the principal has to consider in directing curriculum changes.

The principal must also work with groups in the school to accomplish curriculum improvement. The principal who is aware of the continuous need of curriculum change will be more likely to lead toward desired changes.

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