

Leadership in Core Program Development

A status report—with implications.

WHY have not core programs been as widely accepted as theoretical considerations seem to merit? Although successful core programs date back more than 20 years, and even though the incidence of some form of "block-time"¹ doubled between 1949 and 1956, such programs still are found in only about one-fifth of today's secondary schools.² The shortage of qualified teachers is frequently cited, but this is not the whole story. Examination of state surveys of block-time programs in Alabama,³ Illi-

¹ Block-time is here defined as a program in which a class meets with one teacher for a block of time embracing two or more regular class periods, combining or replacing two or more subjects that are required of all pupils and ordinarily taught separately. More properly called unified studies are those block-time classes in which subject matter is unified or fused around a theme, unit or topic drawn from one of the absorbed subject areas. Core is a block-time class in which content is organized around problems of significance to adolescents, with subject matter from the conventional disciplines brought in as needed.

² U. S. Office of Education. *Block-Time Classes and the Core Program in the Junior High School*. Grace S. Wright, Bulletin 1958, No. 6. Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1958. p. 1.

³ Otto Holloway. "Scope, Trends and Problems of Core Curriculum Work in Alabama." *Educational Administration and Supervision*, Vol. XLV, No. 3; May 1959. p. 153-61.

nois,⁴ Michigan,⁵ Minnesota,⁶ New Jersey,⁷ and Pennsylvania,⁸ reveals the key role of educational leadership, especially that provided by the administrator.⁹

Leadership in Core

The leadership factor is spotlighted by asking such questions as these: How often are block-time, unified studies, or core programs introduced "from the top down," by administrators and others in leadership positions? To what extent are school staff members, students, parents, and the general public involved in orien-

⁴ Illinois Department of Public Instruction. *Block-of-Time Scheduling Practices in Illinois Junior High Schools*. Springfield: The Department, 1960. 35 p.

⁵ Michigan Department of Public Instruction. "The Status of Block-Time Programs in Michigan Secondary Schools." Bulletin No. 426. Lansing: The Department, 1960. 36 p. (Mimeographed.)

⁶ Nelson L. Bossing and John F. Kaufman. "Block-Time or Core Practices in Minnesota Secondary Schools." *The Clearing House*, Vol. XXXII, No. 9; May 1958. p. 532-37.

⁷ William H. Warner. "Block-of-Time Programs in Junior High Schools and Six-Year High Schools in New Jersey." *Secondary School Bulletin*, No. 2. Trenton: New Jersey State Department of Education. March 1960. p. 1-4.

⁸ Pennsylvania Department of Public Instruction. "Report on the 1955-56 Survey of Common Learnings." Harrisburg: The Department, 1958. 16 p. (Mimeographed.)

⁹ For pertinent statistics from the studies listed in footnotes 2-8, see: Gordon F. Vars. "Administrative Leadership—Key to Core Program Development." *Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary-School Principals*, Vol. XLVI, No. 271, February 1962. p. 91-103.

tation to the new program? How much time do schools spend in planning and orientation before initiating a program? What obstacles or difficulties in carrying out the program are identified by administrators? Where core has been tried and dropped, what seem to be the chief reasons for its discontinuance?

1. *Who provides the initiative?*

As might be expected, administrators, especially school principals, are credited with initiating most block-time programs, although a sizeable number of respondents indicated that both administrators and teachers were involved. For example, in the Michigan study, 37 percent of the schools reported that administrators initiated the program, 7 percent credited teachers, and 50 percent reported that initiative was shared by administrators and teachers. Only in the Alabama survey do instances of teacher initiative exceed administrator initiative, and here the large number of schools that made no response casts doubt upon the validity of the statistics.

2. *How much orientation and planning prior to starting a block-time program?*

Some idea of the quality of leadership provided may be inferred from the amount of time devoted to planning and orientation and from the extent to which the total staff, students, parents, and the general public were involved. It is a truism of educational leadership that any important change in program should be preceded by careful preplanning and orientation of all those who will be affected by the change. Less extensive preparation may be necessary before in-

stituting a block-time program which merely represents a rescheduling of classes so that a teacher has the same pupils for two subjects. The closer a program approximates core, however, the more thorough must be the preparation, since content, method and even the name of the course are apt to be quite different from the usual program.

State surveys that investigated this question revealed far too little attention to orientation and preplanning. For example, in the Pennsylvania study only 51 percent of the schools reported that the entire faculty was oriented to the program, and a mere 18 percent reported orienting the parents. The amount of time spent in preparation for the program also appeared to be inadequate in far too many cases. While 41 percent of the Pennsylvania schools spent approximately one year in preparation, 12 percent reported one week or less. In Michigan, 2 percent of the schools candidly reported that *no* time was spent in preparation!

3. *How much in-service assistance for block-time teachers?*

Even when the core program is properly launched, block-time teachers require constant in-service education and leadership. Difficulties caused by normal teacher turnover are aggravated by the fact that few teachers are prepared specifically for work in block-time programs. The further the program deviates from the conventional, the greater the need. Yet fewer than half the schools in any of the state surveys reported any workshops, study groups, or similar in-service activities for block-time teachers.

Time during the school day for block-time teachers to plan together and share ideas, a need often expressed, is provided in only about one-third of the schools.

In fact, on a questionnaire returned by 75 of the 145 Pennsylvania schools having block-time in 1957-58, 33 schools (44 percent) reported they had no regular in-service programs for these teachers.¹⁰

The earlier Pennsylvania survey went a step further, to sample the kinds of moral support provided by school principals. Allowance must be made for the possibility that in some schools direct support of the program may have been delegated to an assistant principal, supervisor or coordinator. On the other hand, the principal himself completed most of the questionnaires, so one might expect him to put his best foot forward. Even so, it is significant to note the number of respondents who, by implication, indicated that they did not provide the indicated support. For example, only 64 percent said they encouraged experimentation by teachers, 55 percent encouraged pupil participation in learning experiences outside the school (community projects, field trips, etc.), and 55 percent stated that they considered the teacher a "guide" rather than a "fountain of knowledge" or a "lesson hearer."

When Michigan teachers were asked what factors in their present situations were most helpful in teaching block-time classes, 29 percent mentioned personal qualities of their administrators, such as "helpful," "supportive," "sympathetic." Most often cited was the freedom to try out new ideas.¹¹

4. What obstacles to block-time programs were identified?

As might be expected, difficulty in obtaining adequately prepared teachers

¹⁰ Information supplied by Richard A. Gibboney, Director, Bureau of Curriculum Development, Pennsylvania Department of Public Instruction, Harrisburg.

¹¹ Information supplied by Morrel J. Clute, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.

ranked first on every list (Table 1). Administrators and other educational leaders frequently complain that colleges and universities fail to offer programs and courses for prospective block-time teachers. Yet, some colleges that did offer such programs have been forced to discontinue them for lack of enrollment. Prospective teachers are reluctant to prepare themselves to teach a kind of course which is not yet widely adopted. Thus we have a vicious circle in which administrators are reluctant to initiate block-time programs for lack of teachers, and teachers are reluctant to prepare for this kind of work for lack of assurance that they can get jobs.

It is the writer's opinion that this vicious circle will be broken only as more and more educators provide the creative leadership necessary to establish successful block-time programs with the teachers available. Only when a sizeable proportion of the secondary schools have some kind of block-time programs will large numbers of college students be interested in preparing for this kind of teaching.

Other obstacles cited by principals also point to the key role of professional leadership: "Necessity for constant in-service training of teachers," "Teacher reaction against change," "Gaining cooperation of other members of the faculty," "Difficulty in gaining public support," and "Certification difficulties." Although the problem may be more acute with one of the newer programs, it is a prime responsibility of all educational leaders to provide continuous in-service training to increase teacher competence. Dealing with "Teacher reaction against change" and "Gaining cooperation of other faculty members" are both common aspects of the administrator's role as a change agent regardless of the

kind of improvement being contemplated.

Failure to gain public support is a problem mainly when educational leaders do not keep the public informed or do not involve broad segments of the community in planning and evaluating the educational program. Even a matter such as certification is not completely out of the hands of the local school leader. Too frequently educators assume a fatalistic attitude toward regulations emanating from a state education department. They ought to be exerting their influence, both individually and through their professional associations, to bring about the regulations they think best promote the educational welfare of students.

A number of obstacles to the development of block-time programs are clearly matters of administrative mechanics:

"Scheduling problems," "Insufficient time for planning," "Lack of adequate instructional materials," and "Lack of proper furniture and equipment." One can have nothing but sympathy for an administrator who must make a finite budget and an all-too-limited supply of manpower and facilities cover the almost infinite demands placed upon the schools today. Yet it is to accomplish just such a task that leadership positions have been created. Administrators are supposed to be especially selected and trained to wrestle with schedules, and to provide teachers with equipment, materials, and special services they need. Where classes are too large, schedules too crowded, and facilities limited, it is the responsibility of the educational leadership to take the case to the ultimate source of authority in the public schools—the citizens of the community. When the gen-

Table 1. Obstacles to block-time program development reported by principals

OBSTACLES	RANK ORDER				
	Alabama	Illinois	Michigan	New Jersey	Pennsylvania
<i>Professional Leadership</i>					
Obtaining adequately prepared teachers	1	1	1	1	1*
Necessity for constant in-service training of teachers	4	7	6	3	
Teacher reaction against change	6	3	5	5	2
Gaining cooperation of other members of the faculty	6	6	8	6	
Inability of principal to give sufficient guidance and leadership to the program					8
<i>Public Relations</i>					
Failure to gain public support		8	9	8	10
Certification difficulties					7
<i>Administrative Mechanics</i>					
Scheduling problems	6	2	2	2	6
Classes too large		5			3
Insufficient teacher time for planning	2		4	4	4
Lack of adequate instructional materials	3	4	3	7	
Lack of suitable furniture and equipment		9	7		
Lack of proper facilities and instructional materials					5
Lack of help given to teachers, such as assistance in mimeographing and typing, assistance from the librarian, the audio-visual aids person, and others					9

* Responses which elaborated on the inadequacies of teachers have been deleted.

eral public sees the value of what is asked, needed funds and facilities nearly always are forthcoming.

5. Why were block-time programs dropped?

The Minnesota survey identified 29 schools that had tried block-time but had abandoned it. Seventeen respondents cited inability to secure qualified teachers, seven listed scheduling difficulties, and others listed such factors as changes in administration, crowded schools, teacher objections, and lowered scholastic achievement. Only one mentioned community dissatisfaction. Lack of qualified personnel also was the major cause of abandonment in Illinois.

The Alabama survey located 25 schools which had dropped their program. Reasons given, in order of frequency, were:

Inability to get teachers who are willing and able to carry out this program

Lack of interest due to teachers' not being trained for core work

It was scheduled for several years and teachers did not know what to do with it

Teachers continued to teach subjects separately rather than problems, or with no consciously correlation

Teachers decided that they could do a more effective job with regular classes

Difficulty of making a schedule and providing time for planning

Teachers are subject matter specialists.

These reports further highlight the essential role of the educational leader, especially the need for continuous moral support and in-service education for block-time teachers.

Values of Core

In view of all the other demands upon the time and energy of educational leaders today, one well may ask, "Why bother with a block-time program?" It

would be difficult to find a better statement of the values of block-time programs than the principals' comments:

Advantages of block-time classes reported by New Jersey principals:

1. *Teachers have fewer pupils for a longer period of time.*

Teachers can get to know individual pupils better—their abilities, needs, interests, strengths and weaknesses, talents.

The guidance function is more readily achieved.

Teachers have a greater opportunity to individualize education to provide for the individual differences among their pupils.

There are greater opportunities for consistent attention to academic, personal and social development and the development of habits, attitudes and values.

There are better opportunities for the early identification of pupils with exceptional aptitudes and abilities and the development of individual talent.

There is more constant and sympathetic attention given to continuous growth of the total individual pupil.

2. *Pupils meet fewer teachers.*

A gradual transition from the self-contained elementary school to the departmentalized high school is possible.

There is more effective orientation and adjustment of the pupil to the new junior high school environment.

Greater security for the pupil accrues by having one or a few teachers know him well.

Better pupil-teacher relations result.

3. *The same teacher teaches one group of pupils two or more subject areas.*

There is more effective correlation and integration of subject matter areas by teachers and pupils.

Greater opportunities exist for application of knowledge and skills—such as language arts skills in social studies learning.

More efficient use of pupil and teacher time is possible by eliminating instructional duplication and concentrating on educational needs.

4. *Pupils and teachers are together for continuous periods of time greater than a single period.*

More uninterrupted time allows for greater flexibility and variety in learning activities.

Greater continuity in learning experiences is possible since units or topics may be explored with less regard to fixed time allotments and period changes.

Better opportunities are available for pupil-teacher planning and evaluation.

There is easier scheduling of field trips and the use of resources outside the classroom.

Flexibility in program permits teachers to choose educational topics of value to early adolescents whether or not they "fit" the particular "subject area."

In summary, the evidence here presented places responsibility for a suc-

cessful block-time, unified studies or core program squarely upon the shoulders of educational leaders, especially the local school administrator.

The many benefits of block-time and core are realized only when administrators and other leaders practice sound principles of democratic leadership in initiating, developing and sustaining the program. Preservice and in-service courses should give added stress to these essential skills. Greater attention to these qualifications should be given when administrators and other top staff personnel are selected. Numerous successful block-time and core programs attest to the fine leadership being provided in many school systems. However, survey results indicate that there is much room for improvement.

Afro-Asian

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being understood, remembered and applied in a meaningful way to different situations.

Naturally, we are not satisfied with all phases of the course as it stands. Course content and readings will be revised after classroom trial. Detail in some sections of the course has obscured rather than clarified major points. Objective tests, study aids, teacher aids, and an annotated bibliography of literature and audio-visual aids have yet to be completed.

Because the curriculum described here seems broadly applicable to secondary schools, our grant stipulates that we should produce materials available for other schools' experimental use. We anticipate sharing these materials with

others next year. The Afro-Asian Studies project will benefit from the resulting evaluation.

We believe that teachers with comprehensive social studies backgrounds can handle a course such as this with some special preparation and adequate teaching materials. Careful study of a good college text on each area, reading on general concepts, and/or a summer institute, will provide reasonable preparation. Carefully delineated unit outlines, as contrasted with all-inclusive "teaching units," can give teachers a needed sense of security. Challenging readings for students provide a basis for meaningful discussion which relieves the teacher from struggling to breathe life into a subject enervated by an insipid text. Similar objectives, however, are perhaps also obtainable through judicious use of carefully selected paperbacks, periodicals and other materials.

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