

BALANCE IN THE PROGRAM

NORMAN H. NAAS

Director, Secondary Curriculum, Mt. Diablo
Unified School District, Concord, California

AS I write, hundreds of teachers in the school system in which I work are preparing to attend the preschool institute. Next week, the doors of the schools throughout the district will open to thousands of pupils. The scene will be duplicated all over the country. What can the teachers and pupils expect with regard to a *balanced* program when school begins? What are the feelings and anticipations of the multitudes of children who will enter classrooms across the nation? What will school mean for them? What is the responsibility of the *administrator* in providing a balanced program for them?

An obvious answer to the last question is that the administrator's responsibilities in this area are multiple and complex. Basically, he must be *informed* and he must *ask questions*, but his obligations extend far beyond this.

Today's Influences

Consider the pressures on the administrator and the developments of which he must be aware and concerning which he must be thoughtful and carefully evaluative:

National curriculum projects: for example, the alphabet constellation in mathematics and science, plus the projects in the numerous social studies and English centers

Statewide curriculum projects—the development of frameworks in various subject areas

Legislation—the mandated aspects of the curriculum, including subject matter and testing requirements

New materials and teaching tools

Professional organizations with special orientations and special interests

Enthusiastic, vocal teachers with special projects and special interests

District office personnel with special interests

Proposals for revision in structure and organization

Enthusiastic publicity for special programs in newspapers and magazines.

Relative to all of these pressures, the principal must ask, "How do these proposals affect the students in my school? Where do they promote an overemphasis in a particular area which will throw the program out of balance?"

Programs for All

One of the greatest unsolved problems in American education, despite all our talk about the comprehensive high school and education for all the children of all the people, is that we simply have not developed programs which provide for all the children. If this were not true, the dropout rate would obviously be much lower than it is. The current federal programs basically are efforts to provide educational experiences which the schools have not provided. Many administrators and many communities still continue to assess the quality of their schools on the basis of the success of graduates in colleges and universities, even when the number of graduates who continue their academic training is low. Only in rare situations can most school systems provide accurate data on the post-school achievements (or failures) of terminal students.

The principal's question, then, "How will this innovation affect the total program for all the students?" is always legitimate and necessary. The principal hears that students must be trained to think like scientists, like historians, like mathematicians. *All* the students? In *all* these ways?

Academic Pressures

Current pressures to increase the academic loads of students should be subjected to careful scrutiny. Are advanced courses offered at lower academic levels the best answer to challenging the academically talented student? Is the proliferation of the curriculum with additional courses the best answer in any event? When students are urged to increase their academic loads, what learning opportunities are being replaced?

Is it unimportant for students to have time for music, for art, for typing, for homemaking, for industrial arts? Are we guilty of treating these programs with disrespect and contaminating students with our own attitudes? It is not unheard of for a counselor to ask a college-bound girl who wishes to enroll in a course in homemaking, "What do you want to take that for?" It is not unusual for a student, after he is programmed into all the courses "required" for college preparation, to discover that he has no room for courses in art, music, the industrial arts, or other areas labeled "nonacademic."

No competent administrator would discourage teachers from suggesting experimental programs or new ideas; nevertheless, he *must* look at the total program; he must decide on how funds will be spent; he must consider whether the proposal can be assimilated into the existing program; he must consider whether the number of students who will benefit justifies the staff time and expense of the program; and he must call these considerations to the attention of the teacher. The fact that a staff member has the competence to teach a particular course or *wants* to teach a particular course is not sufficient reason for adding the course to the program.

There are numerous current pressures on administrators to effect structural and organizational changes. Unfortunately, such changes are too often made on the basis of publicity and what others are doing. A neighboring school system intro-

duces team teaching. The innovation receives a big spread in the local press. Somebody decides, "We'd better do some team teaching, too. We have to be up-to-date."

Not enough people ask, "Will the students learn more under a team-teaching arrangement? Will the seminar situations which are supposed to be an essential element of team teaching *really* be seminars? Will the arrangement lead to a diversity of teaching methods, adapted to many ways of learning, or will it emphasize and give status to only one or two ways of teaching? Will the arrangement help teachers to know students better and to work with them as individuals, or will the emphasis on specialization lose the student and leave the teacher talking to himself? Will the arrangement contribute to the morale of the staff and to wholesome human relationships within the school? What have been the experiences of other schools with a similar program? Are the results worth changing the physical plant of the school for all time?"

Balance in Methods

The principal has a responsibility for maintaining balance in methods of instruction. High schools which have lecterns in every classroom tell a story. With all we know about teaching *not* being telling, we continue to tell and tell and tell. What provision is there for children to work in small groups? (One principal escorted a visitor into a classroom; observed that the students were working in small groups, with the teacher moving from group to group serving as a resource; and commented to the visitor, "There's nothing going on here. Let's come back when the teacher is teaching." Another principal, with another guest, visited a classroom where the students were reading independently, with the teacher working with individual students, and made a similar comment.)

How observant is the administrator concerning the kind of questions teachers ask, the opportunities for independent, creative thinking, the interaction which takes place in the classroom? How effectively are teaching tools used: texts, audio-visual materials, community resources, human resources? How much are students involved in planning and implementing the learning activities?

One of the principal's most challenging responsibilities concerns evaluation. Anyone who has attempted to obtain a careful, valid evaluation of an innovation knows how difficult this is. Often the evaluation consists of comments like, "The kids liked it" or "The teacher thought it was great." Rarely are evaluative considerations built into an innovation at its inception. The principal has to be the watchdog on evaluation and he must be sure that plans for careful evaluation are incorporated into any proposal.

Everyone knows that, in the final analysis, it is the administrator who sets the tone of the school in all its aspects. If balance in the school program is to be maintained, it will be maintained under the principal's leadership. The responsibilities he faces are enormous, and he needs all the support and help he can get. And in doing his job of maintaining balance, the requirements are unchanged: he must be alert and informed, and he must face and raise questions honestly and openly. ❧

Copyright © 1966 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.