

Strategies for Instructional Leaders

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"STRATEGY" is a term that may be applied to a broad general approach designed to suggest specific techniques for expanding three basic areas: (a) involvement; (b) decision-making processes; and (c) political sophistication on the part of professional and lay communities.

"Instructional" is an elusive term applied broadly to the application of the findings of the social and behavioral sciences to changing behavior. Instruction of whom, why, and when suggests situational contexts for all who are involved. The contexts may be formal or informal.

"Leadership" is applied to the using of techniques in supporting a broad strategy. This strategy relates to purposeful involvement, to expanding a process whereby leadership is freed to be multi-dimensional as situational needs help determine, and to the bringing to a cognitive level of the political processes involved in who gets what, when, and where. In short, instructional leadership is simply a directed attempt to facilitate the broad strategy—a strategy which we feel to be basic to a cooperative community.

You will notice that neither the strategy nor the instructional leadership is confined to a formal classroom context; they are broadened to include the total system. The basic premise is that we must practice what we teach and this includes uncovering problems, encountering conflict, honoring the problems

that promote dissent, and most of all, practicing the skills of inquiry, creativity, and human interaction within task-oriented activities. This is not easy.

The broad strategy for instructional leadership does not seem too startling. If we read the reports from public administration, business, and the social and behavioral sciences, we are attempting little more than to apply the common sense of a practitioner.

What is startling (at least for me) is the frequency with which acquaintances from neighboring communities offer unsolicited sympathy about the headlines our system receives in the urban newspapers: "You must be having all kinds of trouble, Frank. Too bad!" or "It's a shame when an educator has to spend his time in crisis management."

I find myself making rejoinders that attempt to reverse the flow of condolence. I sometimes suggest that they might be wise to look for "trouble" or some impending "crisis" in their own community.

A quick reference to some of our headlines might help:

NINTH-GRADE COURSES CAUSE HEIGHTS STIR

BREAK IS SEEN IN HEIGHTS SCHOOL CURRICULUM

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HUMAN RELATIONS MEETINGS END IN SHOUT DOWN

TWO HUNDRED ATTEND DEBATE ON SCHOOL CURRICULUM

TEACHERS AND PARENTS HELP SELECT SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

TEACHERS TAKE "PROFESSIONAL STUDY DAY"—INSUFFICIENT LEVY

STUDENTS HELP IN ORIENTATION OF NEW TEACHERS

TEACHERS RECRUIT TEACHERS

FORTY-FOUR CURRICULUM TASK FORCE COMMITTEES FORMED BY TEACHERS

The headlines seem isolated from one another. Yet, as one local reporter perceptively wrote: "A quiet revolution is taking place in the Cleveland Heights-University Heights System." We would like to think that this quiet revolution is designed to move from a verbal allegiance to democratic processes to the *practice* of such processes in a public institution.

A Practical Revolution

The revolution is not one of ideas. Just practices. It is simply an attempt functionally to relate philosophy, policy, and practice—something which the school people say they have been trying for centuries to do in the classroom.

We have been verbally admonishing people (especially our students) to practice democracy. We urge such practice by insisting upon various kinds of incantations. Yet, when have we honestly encouraged teachers, parents, administrators, citizens, and students to get involved in influencing many of the decisions that affect their daily lives? For all our democratic ritual and rites, in most cases the public school has remained a bastion of autocratic practice.

It is not surprising that we have found that it is easier to preach than to practice. Not everyone is willing to make the transition. Not everyone is willing to relinquish a corporative posture for a cooperative one.

We have been fortunate in having at least a precedence for initiating this transition. Former Superintendent O. E. Hill received national recognition over a decade ago

for establishing lay committees to study areas of school and community concerns and to make recommendations to the board of education. During the past few years lay committees have been influential in helping the school personnel address such things as: Data Processing, Outdoor Education, Educational TV, Foreign Language Teaching in Elementary Schools, Philosophy of Education, Public and Nonpublic School Relations, Technology Education, Buildings and Grounds, and Human Relations.

In a real sense, a lay committee is a study group. The group is comprised of citizens, teachers, students, and administrators. The citizens may or may not be "experts" in a particular area. The important aspect of these committees is not *only* the study and report made to the board of education. It is also an awareness of the complexities of working with publics and the interacting variables at work in board and administrative decisions. This awareness brings to committee members a greater sophistication as to what it means to be involved.

Reorganizing Leadership

Three years ago our staff raised some serious questions about the organization patterns used to bring about curriculum change. At this time the system had subject matter specialists (K-12) who assumed the responsibility for "leading" in curriculum development. Recognizing a greater extent of teacher competency than is commonly believed, the staff discussed type, kind, and direction of leadership.

How could the system organize in order to allow leadership to emerge from the teachers? How could the system organize in a way which honored the classroom teachers' responsibility *and* ability for instructional improvement? These questions were thrown open to the total faculty and from this came a staff-planned Instructional Leadership Program which brought focus to the processes of change rather than to set ends.

The teachers have been involved. Comparing the two instructional programs we find:

Under the Coordinator Program, the sys-

tem had 12 steering committees involving 130 teachers—most of whom were appointed by the administration.

Under the Instructional Leadership Program, we had over 400 staff members *volunteering* to work on 44 Task Forces. The Task Force addresses a problem area defined by the staff.

We are not so naive as to assume that quantity implies quality. Yet, Task Force recommendations to the superintendent have indicated more depth and more positive alternatives than have previous attempts at change.

The community is involved through lay committees. The staff is involved through the Instructional Leadership Plan. What mechanics are provided for student involvement? At this point in our development we are still shaping an organization to include such activity. Last year we established a special committee of secondary students, administrators, parents, and teachers to explore this topic in depth. This exploration is not easy. As administrators and supervisors we know the suspicion by members of the teaching staff; the student's suspicion is even more intense.

After the third meeting of the committee, a ninth-grader asserted that his peers had warned him that the superintendent was "up to no good. . . . after all, superintendents are not interested in kids." After the fifth meeting, I was told that students had no need to meet with the superintendent periodically to influence decisions; but, if I had a need to meet with them, "they would be happy to come." Students serve on our Curriculum Advisory Council, several lay committees, and in the past supported a staff Philosophy of Guidance Committee.

Role of the Board

Many elements must be present to make a transition from a traditional school organization climate to one in which all persons associated with the school have opportunities to influence its goals and activities.

An enlightened board of education is essential. The board members must recog-

nize that the democratic experiment and the experiment called "public education" require a sophistication about the processes involved. Board members, along with staff and the public, need to be reminded that, as a public institution becomes responsive to local desires and to the larger social issues, they, as public servants, can, and should, expect a number of complex and difficult issues to emerge for shared consideration by all groups concerned. Each member of these groups is tested as he creates his own views through confronting honest differences in an open and responsible way.

The board, through its superintendent, must assure the appointment of leaders comfortable in the use of the democratic processes. These individuals must be content to see their successes and accomplishments reflected in the successes of teachers and students. This attitude requires a new breed of supervisor or administrator who does not strike a win-or-lose position when he serves as a learning facilitator for all groups in the school community. He must be willing to risk, to confront, and to trust.

In our district, a special training program has developed from isolated efforts we have made in social inquiry, creative behavior, and human interaction. The effort we made for our youngsters had significant implications for determining the strategy and techniques for encouraging and refining instructional leadership.

The implications became formalized within an adult training program called "Process Training."

Process Training assumes that leadership involves the interaction of: (a) the rational processes of inquiry; (b) the divergence and convergence of creative behavior; and (c) the host of human factors at work in any task-oriented group effort. With intensive, small-group sessions designed to bring to the cognitive level the skills and feelings involved in human effort—individual and collective—a greater sophistication is reached.

This greater sophistication is needed if the broad strategy is to become more effective. It is also needed if the system is consciously to strive toward creating a climate

conducive to effective extensions of involvement in all types of decision making.

In recent years new curriculum programs and individuals associated with them (particularly administrators) have been attacked publicly by individual citizens. Such attacks, when combined with positive examples by individuals and groups in education, often are perceived as a form of "interference" with "professional" decisions.

There have been times when supervisors, administrators, and teachers have demanded a professional "shield" from the board of education and from community groups—a shield which denies the need to share in the public arena. This demand sometimes takes the form of a bifurcation between that which is "political" and that which is "educational."

Politics of Education

A substantial part of our broad strategy is to break down the myth that public education is apolitical. This is perhaps one of the most difficult problems we face. Political processes are often perceived as negative patterns of human behavior and the term "political" carries negative connotations.

Combine this denial of the politics of education with the mystical missionary zeal which some educators assume in a "win-lose"

position in supporting the "rightness" of their cause and one can readily see the difficulties inherent in trying to evolve a democratic strategy that can prove effective.

Perhaps one of the most difficult tasks for the superintendent is to encourage his staff to "keep the faith" in our effort. There is far less insecurity when position and power are welded into an authoritative structure. A good number of personal needs are met through being an "expert." There is far less ambiguity, far less need to be willing to risk. The lack of political sophistication—on all of our parts—can be disheartening.

Yet, we must (and do) constantly ask ourselves: What is the alternative? As yet we have not found one that allows personal integrity, social ethics, and democratic processes to function in a public school. So, as Dewey suggested, we "do not shoot because targets exist, but set up targets in order that throwing and shooting may be more effective."

Ends and means constantly modify each other. As we sharpen our ways of addressing and hitting the targets, we may find the need for different kinds, types, and placements of targets.

Our strategy should allow for both ends and means in a process of change. If it does not, we are still hung up at the verbal level. And this is not enough. . . .

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