

PPBS: Status and Implications

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PPBS is like a play of many scenes. Ranging from performance objectives and pupil evaluation to cost accounting and data processing, each of the scenes can be grouped into one of two distinct acts: *program planning* (curriculum analysis and evaluation) and *program budgeting* (expenditure analysis and accounting). In the brief span of five years, PPBS has become one of the most talked about and perhaps least understood management science concepts in education. The major source of confusion is the tendency of many to equate *program budgeting* and PPBS. The two are *not* the same, although a myth repeated often enough can become accepted truth. A program budget is simply one component of a much more comprehensive PPB System.

Current Status

As of 1972, more than 1,000 local school districts in 30 states have achieved uneven rates of success with program budgeting. However, as far as their achieving a complete PPBS is concerned, the jury is still out. As one could have easily predicted, local officials are discovering that it is much easier to accomplish program budgeting than program planning. It is far simpler to recast school budgets in new ways than to develop and agree upon educational goals, learner skills,

instructional objectives, criterion-referenced evaluation, and teaching strategies for each of the programs contained in a school district's program structure. Traditionally, educational goals have been stated with such monumental vagueness that they are of little current value to PPBS designers. New work is needed, particularly in the integration of curriculum development with PPBS.

Problems exist simply because PPBS has *not* been portrayed adequately in terms of its instructional implications. In most schools, the emphasis with PPBS is clearly on fiscal matters, with almost no involvement by curriculum specialists. Quite often, the prime mover of PPBS is the district's business manager. This misplaced emphasis on fiscal management leads some to conclude that curriculum and PPBS represent opposing forces. The best way to correct this notion is for curriculum specialists to become familiar with PPBS and actively use it to their own advantage in instructional planning. PPBS is simply a rational mode of thinking that has proven itself equally useful in organizations as diverse as the United Fund, YMCA, industry, Department of Defense, universities, and local schools.

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Advantages

The professional literature contains many definitions and conceptualizations of PPBS, but basically it is a term applied to a set of interrelated organizational activities. PPB Systems are intended to aid educators in the following ways:

1. Formulate goals, objectives, and learner skills
2. Design curricular programs to achieve stated objectives
3. Analyze more systematically the feasible alternatives
4. Provide staff with better planning information and resources
5. Compare costs with accomplishments of programs
6. Increase teacher involvement in planning and decision making
7. Identify direct instructional costs in a program budget
8. Specify program priorities and educational values
9. Promote innovative programs, teaching, and evaluation criteria
10. Increase public understanding of, and support for, the schools.¹

Schools generally have been provided with ineffectual devices for planning their activities and reporting to an "accountability-conscious" public their program accomplishments. The problem has been compounded by the lack of consensus as to what constitutes desired educational "output." With uncertainty and controversy surrounding the notion of educational productivity, the schools have suffered hardships in designing programs, assessing performance, and developing suitable budgeting procedures.

What was lacking before the advent of PPBS was a district-wide model for participative planning that related desired outcomes and scarce resources. By portraying specific school activities as part of an overall organic system, PPBS serves to integrate the formerly autonomous elements of curriculum development and financial administration. For too

¹ Harry J. Hartley. *Educational Planning-Programming-Budgeting: A Systems Approach*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968. 290 pp.

long, the tail (budget) has been wagging the dog (curriculum).

It is interesting to note that even a best-seller like *Future Shock* contains a layman's praise for PPBS. Toffler states that a

... significant effort to tidy up governmental priorities was initiated by President Johnson with his attempt to apply PPBS throughout the federal government. . . . PPBS is a method for tying programs much more closely to organizational goals. . . . The introduction of PPBS and the systems approach is a major governmental achievement.²

Implementation Strategy

Personal visits to schools in 30 states in the past three years have convinced me that *there is no single "best way" to "do" PPBS*. Rather, the implementation process must be adapted to the unique strengths and needs of each school. My suggestion to educators wishing to pursue PPBS is that they concentrate initially on the following three steps:

1. Develop a district-wide *program structure*. This identifies and categorizes into programs all organizational activities, both instructional and supportive. The hierarchical arrangement of programs and subprograms identifies the level of specificity for subsequent goals, objectives, and evaluation. It provides the basic framework for all planning and reporting within the district.

End Product: A chart listing programs in descending order of detail.

Coordinator: Superintendent.

2. Select target curricular area(s) for *program analysis*. This enables teachers and administrators to focus attention on specific programs, such as reading, in order to develop a procedural model to guide subsequent analyses of other programs. The format includes program goals, learner skills, instructional objectives, evaluation criteria, alternative methods, predicted effectiveness, program constraints, major accomplishments, future plans, and direct budget costs.

End Product: A concise program memorandum (20 pages) for each subject.

Coordinator: Curriculum administrator and/or principals.

² Alvin Toffler. *Future Shock*. New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1970. p. 472.

3. Identify all direct costs in a *program budget*. This classifies each program as a "cost center" and is based on cost accounting procedures. The school district's overall budget could be displayed in terms of *Function* (i.e., Instruction), *Object* (Teacher's Salary), *Program* (Social Studies), *Location* (Jones Elementary School), or *Level* (Primary Education). The program budget includes the direct costs (teacher's salaries, benefits, supplies, textbooks, etc.) for each instructional and supportive program.

End Product: A budget containing both programs and function-objects.

Coordinator: Business administrator.

Constraints

Admittedly, this is a pragmatic, opportunistic approach to PPBS. Yet it takes into account the operational constraints confronting local school officials, such as: (a) *lack of funds*; (b) *lack of time* (when can teachers be spared to prepare objectives and analyze programs?); (c) *understaffing* (administrators cannot devote full attention to PPBS); (d) *resistance to change* (in addition to a small minority who cannot be bothered, some of the more conscientious staff may, for the sake of pride, be fearful of failing at something that appears new and uncertain); (e) *short attention span* (educators seldom stay with one innovation for longer than two years; interest wanes and attention shifts to a new panacea); and (f) *day-to-day crises* (trying to install PPBS into the earthy reality of many local schools is a bit like trying to change a flat tire on a moving car; the school must keep moving).

Pitfalls To Avoid

Any new planning technology has its limitations, but the key to judging the worth of a concept such as PPBS lies in an objective comparison of the potential opportunities and benefits to be gained against the possible risks and misuses. The evidence, which thus far is limited mostly to testimonials by local practitioners, indicates that PPBS is clearly worth the effort.

What follows is a brief illustration of

some potential misuses that planners should avoid. The list is indicative rather than complete, and does *not* include the predictable charges made by some who misunderstand PPBS, that is, PPBS is (a) dehumanizing; (b) decision making by computer; (c) limited to quantified outputs; (d) anti-curriculum; and (e) too sophisticated for educators.

1. *People problems.* The anxiety level of a staff rises very quickly if PPBS is not introduced in a way that indicates sensitivity to the personal needs of teachers. Reassurance as to how PPBS will make life simpler and better should be given regularly.

2. *Excessive paperwork.* Most schools already have more than enough forms, paperwork, and bureaucratic procedures. PPBS can compound this problem if not properly supervised.

3. *Use of jargon.* Students should never be called outputs, teachers are not inputs, and the curriculum is not a throughput. The new "systems" terminology should be minimized during in-service training sessions.

4. *Cult of testing.* Tests are important, but they should *not* be overemphasized. Testing that is based on poor instruments, disputable assumptions, incorrectly interpreted data, and purposely manipulated data can offset the advantages afforded by PPBS.

5. *Centralizing bias.* Care must be taken to see that PPBS does not overcentralize decision making within a tightly defined chain of command. Actually, it can be used to help decentralize budget and instructional decisions if that is the goal.

6. *Curricular rigidity.* Once a program analysis has been performed and documented, there is a danger that the program will become "frozen." Systems renewal can be achieved only by constant review and revision of objectives, scope and sequence, evaluation, and methods.

7. *Paralysis by analysis.* With new analytical tools, there is a tendency for some to overformalize, overritualize, and overdocument. The result is that excessive formal analysis itself can prevent school officials from making decisions in a reasonable, intuitive, commonsense manner.³

³ A more detailed description of political barriers to PPBS in local schools is provided in: Harry J. Hartley, "Planning and Politics." *The School Administrator*, April 1971. pp. 7-10.

8. Instant cost reduction. Many boards of education have adopted PPBS because they thought it was a Mathematical Messiah that would automatically reduce costs. In practice, PPBS is neutral on the issue of cost reduction. It will promote efficiency, but even so, the overall budget for next year is likely to increase because of personnel costs.

9. Inadequate time. The major unanticipated cost of phasing-in PPBS is staff time. It is difficult to place an accurate dollar value on this item, but it is clear that schools must allocate staff time to PPBS activities.⁴ Otherwise, PPBS is done in sporadic spurts of activity, and the result is frustration and uneven progress.

10. Unrealistic expectations. PPBS cannot be accomplished in one year, nor perhaps even two or three. By its very nature, PPBS is a developmental process that cuts across all activities of the organization. To prevent disappointments over time delays, I suggest that a time-phased schedule of PPBS implementation be developed to show *who* is to do *what* and *when* over perhaps a three-year period.

Implications for Teachers

Why should classroom teachers become actively involved in the development of PPBS? Perhaps the best answers are being provided by teachers themselves. The quotation that follows was prepared by the California Teachers Association for its huge membership. California is one of approximately 20 states that have now mandated PPBS procedures in one form or another.

Classroom teachers can reject teacher planning implications inherent in the PPBS system.

⁴ Robert F. Alioto and J. A. Jungherr. *Operational PPBS for Education*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1971. p. 23.

If rejection occurs, then someone else will operate the planning and others removed from the classroom scene will continue to make teacher decisions about children and the program. Our literature is filled with generalities about teachers being placed in a decision-making capacity. Teachers can rise to new heights of professional competence and performance if they seize the opportunity afforded by PPBS. The business office will keep track of costs, but who will do the program planning? Local teacher associations, especially Curriculum and Instruction committees, can struggle with two realities under PPBS. Namely, what new or modified decision-making structure do we want in our school district? Secondly, how do we wish to expand the role of the classroom teacher? If associations and their committees think through those two critical questions, they are on their way to making PPBS *the servant*, not the master.⁵

The greatest disservice that can be provided a concept such as PPBS is to create a mythology of systems procedures. Such a myth would hold that educational salvation lies in applying to schools any technique that is assumed to have been successful in private industry, defense, or aerospace settings. On the other hand, not to believe in the usefulness of PPBS and the systems approach is to deny the value of reason, common sense, and the scientific method. Success with this innovation and any other depends ultimately on the artistry of the user. Although PPBS is like a well-conceived play, it cannot guarantee that each actor's performance will be a success. □

⁵ California Teachers Association. "The Challenge of PPBS." CTA Research Department. Supplementary Research Report No. 104, August 1969. pp. 13-14.

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