

# Leadership Compatible Multicultural Community

**F**OR a long period many poor urban and rural schools seemed to experience inadequate teaching. These schools, coincidentally, were attended by a large concentration of culturally different children. This condition, which still exists, though perhaps in fewer schools, was altered dramatically beginning in 1960 with the advent of the civil rights movement and the influx of federal funds. For 16 years, inner-city schools located within multicultural communities have been expanding their educational programs. These programs, supported at least in part by federal dollars, span the spectrum of curricular offerings—from the numerous reading, math, and science programs to individualized instruction, value clarification, and the magic circle.

Concurrently, attached to federal program funds has been mandatory community involvement via advisory councils. As is typical with most educational developments, there has been a concomitant lag in redirecting the leadership practice required to implement such a sudden and prolific burst of program diversity and community involvement. Because of this increasing array of new instructional programs and special problems associated with the culturally different, serious attention to the question of leadership practice in these instructionally active multicultural community schools is called for.

The intent here is to begin delineating leadership practices that will help give compensatory assistance to staff, beneficial in-

struction to students, and satisfaction to the various subgroups in a multicultural community. Leadership practices needed for the three sectors (community, staff, and students) are clearly numerous and complex. Concentration, therefore, will be placed on identifying and describing just one leadership practice that, in the writer's opinion, is compatible with a multicultural community school environment. Elaboration will be on a leadership practice that enhances community interaction within the school program. It is hoped that other school people will be stimulated to examine additional categories of leadership behavior.

## Assumptions and Proposition

Before specifying the particular leadership practice, some underlying assumptions should be made explicit for clarifying the writer's position. First, it is assumed that administrative and supervisory personnel need fundamental skills for operating any educational organization. However, also being offered is the proposition that in addition to these generic skills certain leadership practices are highly suited for a majority of culturally different groups, while still other behavior is appropriate only for a given cultural group.

Therefore, the proposition here is that individuals in multicultural community schools must not only be skilled in instruc-

# with Schools

**LEONARD A. VALVERDE\***

*Described here is a leadership practice that may be well suited to the purpose and goals of a multicultural school setting.*

tion, but they must also perform in ways that are compatible with attributes of the various ethnic groups. In short, a compatible instructional leadership style is being strongly suggested.

Compatible instructional leadership refers to practices that promote the maximizing of instruction so that value-laden curricula contradictory to ethnic values are avoided, along with counter-productive activities which may regard cultural heritage to be irrelevant. The underlying premise for this accommodating leadership type is that knowledge of the ethnic mannerisms, cultural habits, and community customs is necessary if school staff members are to establish a lasting commitment to various community groups and constructive relationships with the polyglot student body. This description should not be taken as a definition, but is offered only as a directional signal pointing to the type of leadership behavior believed to be most appropriate for culturally different clients.

In support of the assumption that some leadership behavior is best suited for a majority of culturally different groups, the following illustration is provided.

\*Leonard A. Valverde, Professor of Education, University of Texas, Austin

## From Community Exclusion to Meaningful Involvement

A universal relationship of schools in multicultural communities has been that the courtship between school and community has rarely been consummated into a loving state of marriage. Failure of a favorable union to occur has resulted partly because of an ethnic community's perspective of the school's function which many school personnel have erroneously interpreted as incompatible with theirs. This difference in perspective is best captured by selecting as an example just one ethnic minority's perspective toward schooling and citing the school's typical response.

In general, many Chicanos hold the position that schools are places where their children are instructed over a period of time in the technical skills essential to successful functioning in society. However, personality development and character building are regarded to be the province of, and are believed to be best provided by, the family unit.

In contrast, the Anglo American attitude toward schooling is more comprehensive, including not only the technical domain but also the philosophical and attitudinal domains. This latter relationship is reflected in legal principle, which designates the school staff as surrogate parents while the child is in school.<sup>1</sup>

Because these two perspectives differ, school personnel have often misinterpreted an ethnic community's perspective, which in turn has caused school staff to respond in either of two typical ways. First, since many Chicano parents fail to see the many extra-curricular activities directed toward character building as part of the school's function, they have not encouraged their children to participate in such events. Accordingly, the school leaders, feeling ignored and rejected, often falsely conclude that Mexican American parents have no interest in their children's education. The school people may exert very little effort to include parents in

<sup>1</sup> Luis F. Hernandez. *A Forgotten American*. Third edition. New York: Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, 1971. p. 25.



**The Middle School  
We Need**

Stock No. 611-75060 32pp. \$2.50

Orders under \$10.00 must be prepaid.

Orders from institutions and businesses must be on an official purchase order.

Order from:

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development  
1701 K St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006

activities that deal with substantive educational issues (technical domain) and also may exert very little effort to inform them of other school affairs.<sup>2</sup>

Second, when individuals from the Spanish-speaking community express interest in participating with issues in the technical domain, school personnel react as landowners would against poachers. What results in multicultural schools is an adversary status where school staff oppose community people. Witness a statement extracted from the report of the Select Committee on Equal Educational Opportunity to the United States Senate:

The Spanish speaking in the country often see themselves as the powerless victims of an educational system—run by a professional and political establishment which systematically excludes them from the process by which schools

<sup>2</sup> United States Commission on Civil Rights. *The Excluded Student*. Report III. Washington, D.C.: Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, May 1972. pp. 37-48.

are governed, and from the decisions made about the education of their children.<sup>3</sup>

The implications of this difference for leaders in multicultural schools are many. Unable to elaborate on all, discussion will center on leadership behavior having potentially sizable impact. First, a more favorable leadership philosophy must be adopted by staff members in multicultural community schools. The core attitude of this philosophy must be that community individuals, wherever feasible, shall be received as full partners in the educational process. The key element of this attitude is the phrase "wherever feasible." This should be extended beyond superficial use of volunteers.

Second, any educator who has worked in multicultural community schools for two or three years comes to realize that while there is diversification of instructional programs being implemented, numerous goals remain that channel children into low-status occupations, curricula that conflict with ethnic value systems, and instruction that is incompatible with minority children's learning characteristics. Instructional programs must be more inclusive and meaningful, community-wise, and substantial school program alteration must occur. It would appear that leaders in multicultural community schools need to *lead* groups of parents, community people, specialized personnel, teachers, and pupils through a series of discussions, presentations, training sessions, and other experiences. Such an approach should produce a revised organizational structure and allow for assimilation of programs and monitoring of school activities.

A word of caution to the skeptical reader may be in order. If this undertaking seems too ambitious, you are reminded that all of the above are responsibilities historically and universally assigned to the school leadership sector.<sup>4</sup> To avoid confusion, we do not sug-

<sup>3</sup> Select Committee on Equal Educational Opportunity of the U.S. Senate. *Towards Equal Educational Opportunity*. Washington, D.C.: the Committee, December 31, 1972. pp. 13-14.

<sup>4</sup> Ben M. Harris. *Professional Supervisory Competencies*. Austin: University of Texas, July 1975.

gest that the leadership take on the full task of designing instructional units, developing or adopting curricula, and evaluating and selecting learning materials. Again, what is essentially being recommended is that leaders place priority on these essential changes by providing guidance and *wider* participation for accomplishment of such changes by others.

This prime target of revamping multicultural community schools may be reached if school leaders approach it in the following manner. They should organize representative committees, supply members with pertinent information, provide suggestions whereby the group can attain agreement, see that the committee progresses, and offer practical alternatives when asked or to assure actualization of the product. This leadership behavior is in concert with the inclusion philosophy and in direct opposition to the prevalent practice of one person's relying primarily on his or her superior for interpretation of goals and passing them on to staff and community members.

The *inclusionary* format and *sharing*

**“Many Chicanos hold the position that . . . personality development and character building are regarded to be the province of, and are believed to be best provided by, the family unit.”**

leadership practice advocated here can reduce a major dilemma that may emerge in multicultural community schools. The traditional teachers vs. administrators condition has been escalating across the United States. To date, schools have been able to survive the conflict. However, in multicultural communities people are uniting on common interests, compounding this teacher vs. administrator stalemate. Presently, educational leaders aligned with teachers or community

on any one issue are suspect as to their intentions and trustworthiness.

Some ethnic minority educational leaders (predominantly placed in multicultural community schools) who have promoted issues that coincide with community concerns have been accused of group and district disloyalty. Educational leaders will have to acquire competency in paralleling seemingly collision course concerns. In concept, the leadership practice of wider inclusion and meaningful participation by others provides a viable means of combining teacher, community, and administrative interests into a workable effort.

## A Start

This discussion has presented a leadership practice that is compatible with the needs of multicultural community schools. The emphasis here has been on isolating one high priority target area, community involvement, and sketching a leadership approach that would reverse previous exclusion, expand present involvement, and address the neglected but vital renewal aspect of school program goals.

Because there is a lack of thorough research concerned with finding leadership modes successful in multicultural community schools, assumptions and untested premises are guiding practitioners in schools today. What has been recommended here points toward the development of leadership that will accommodate previously ignored cultural and community characteristics into suitable instructional methods, curricula, learning materials, and program designs. If still other conducive leadership practices are to be identified, then remaining for deliberate consideration are ways of producing instructional evaluation schemes that yield descriptive information about program and staff, practices in providing professional development to staff while in service, better means of utilizing district and community service to support the school program, and drafting a staffing plan that strengthens the instructional offerings and promotes leadership development. □

Copyright © 1976 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.