

# Stalking Curriculum: or Where Do Elementary Principals Learn About New Programs?

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*Are textbook salespersons still the primary source of information about elementary social studies for Washington elementary principals? Reported here are results of a study as to the effectiveness of the principal as "instructional leader."*

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ONE of the most frequently written phrases used to describe elementary school principals is "instructional leader"—a projected role intended to replace whatever it is principals are now doing. "Instructional leadership" was a major theme of a series of articles on the principalship published under the general title, "Chautauqua '74: The Remaking of the Principalship" (3).

Inherent in the role of instructional leader are administrative descriptors that the principal is "manager of change" or "promoter of innovation." That such descriptors are important is supported by Anderson and Horn (1) who in 1972 concluded that one of the shortcomings of the Colorado Elementary Science Project was the failure to include principals in the implementation scheme.

Based on the works of Richard O. Carlson and others (2) and Ronald Havelock (5)

a team composed of Orlich, Ruff, and others (6, 7) attempted to use elementary school change agents to alter teacher styles in social studies and discovered that support by the principal was imperative for the project to succeed. Further, a group of science educators at Washington State University aided in preparing five major Washington school districts to adopt innovative elementary science curricula between 1970 and 1976. In all cases the elementary school principals participated in the intensive in-service experiences (8); and in all cases the program implementations were successful.

*Obtaining information.* If principals are to be leaders who help incorporate curricular innovations, they must first have information about such innovations. While it may be relatively easy to speculate on where principals *should* get information about innovations, a review of recent literature (1972-75) provided only partial answers to the question of where principals *do* get such information. Of the hundreds of articles published since 1972 which concern educa-

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tional change and innovations, few were empirically-based studies, and fewer still dealt peripherally with the principal's source of information. Most published articles reviewed by us may be placed in one of three categories:

1. *The non-empirical article* ("Wouldn't it be nice if . . ."; "I think the principal should . . ."; "I offer the following model based on what I think . . .").

2. *The quasi-empirical case history* ("In the spring of 1973 we began doing . . .; we like it; we think everyone should try it.").

3. *The almost-empirical study* ("The Innovative Curriculum Project developed 15 . . . Evaluation revealed that 7 of the 8 teachers did not use . . .").

Although the evaluations in the articles categorized under the third group were often informative, the major development of these articles seemed to be descriptive, not empirical.

The empirical studies which have been reported about principals' sources of information have yielded somewhat surprising results. When several educators were asked by Wolf and Fiorino to name their sources of information about innovations in elementary school mathematics, 9 out of 10 failed to mention national workshops, institutes, and special publications concerning the topic, even though all had been recently exposed to one or more of these sources (11). Although further analysis revealed some differences in effectiveness among the various sources, the researchers could not account for the fact that educators apparently did not consider them significant sources. In another study Wolf and Fiorino concluded that the primary source of information leading to educational change must include personal, direct involvement—that is, educators are influenced by close personal contact over a period of time (12). This conclusion supports a similar result reported by Ruff and Orlich (10)—that in Washington, elementary principals' primary source of information on social studies innovations is the textbook company representative.

As a result of such research, the Bio-

logical Science Curriculum Study (BSCS) group incorporated the textbook representative into the dissemination system for the Human Sciences Program (4). Thus, sources which may be considered "external" to the schools are aiding in actual curriculum adoptions.

At least one recently disseminated summary by Ris (9) concluded that teachers, likewise, are affected by the information published by the private sector. Ris wrote that selected public school teachers from all grade levels, for example, 1-12, who attended workshops sponsored by state education agencies in Washington, Idaho, and Wyoming most frequently "turn to mass media and/or business sources for information and assistance concerning current events and contemporary problems, for example, energy, economics, and environment" (p. 1).

## Purpose for This Study

The present study was undertaken primarily to determine if the Ruff-Orlich conclusions which were published in the *Elementary School Journal* of April 1974 (10) would be substantiated through replication. In addition, this study sought information on several pertinent variables not available in the previous one, for example, size of school district and length of service as a principal.<sup>1</sup>

*Methodology.* In April 1975, a questionnaire was mailed to 301 elementary principals in the state of Washington. Thirty-two of these principals had attended National Science Foundation (NSF) sponsored conferences on innovations in elementary social studies and science in 1973 and 1974 at Washington State University. These 32 principals were to be used as a comparison group. The remaining 269 principals were selected randomly from a list provided by the Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction in Washington. The list was screened to include only those who could be identified as

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Size of School Districts by Number of Students

Sample Group	Under 500	501-1,000	1,001-4,000	4,001-10,000	10,000 and more	Totals
Non-NSF	15 10.5% *	15 10.5%	29 20%	36 25%	48 34%	143 100%
NSF	3 14%	2 9%	1 4%	5 23%	11 50%	22 100%
Totals	18 11%	17 10%	30 18%	41 25%	59 36%	165 100%

\* All percents rounded to nearest whole number.

Table 1. Respondents Grouped by Size of District

Sample Group	1-4 Years	5-9 Years	10-14 Years	15-19 Years	20+ Years	Totals
Non-NSF	2 1% *	11 8%	27 19%	33 23%	70 49%	143 100%
NSF	0 0%	1 4.5%	4 18%	1 4.5%	16 73%	22 100%
Totals	2 1%	12 7%	31 19%	34 21%	86 52%	165 100%

\* All percents rounded to nearest whole number.

Table 2. Respondents Grouped by Years in Education

Sample Group	First Year	1-4 Years	5-9 Years	10-14 Years	15-19 Years	20+ Years	Totals
Non-NSF	9 6% *	31 22%	33 23%	30 21%	22 15%	18 13%	143 100%
NSF	0 0%	4 18%	6 27%	5 23%	3 14%	4 18%	22 100%
Totals	9 6%	35 21%	39 24%	35 21%	25 15%	22 13%	165 100%

\* All percents rounded to nearest whole number.

Table 3. Respondents Grouped by Years of Service as an Elementary School Principal

Sample Group	Number of Trips					
	0	1	2	3	4	10+
Non-NSF	23 16% *	22 15%	22 15%	16 11%	13 9%	18 13%
NSF	7 32%	3 14%	2 9%	5 23%	2 9%	2 9%
Totals	30 18%	25 15%	24 14%	21 13%	15 9%	20 12%

\* All percents rounded to nearest whole number.

Table 4. Number of Trips Taken Outside District, 1974-75

elementary principals. A sample of approximately 29 percent was drawn randomly from the list.

A total of 165 usable questionnaires were returned for a response rate of 54.8 percent. This included 22 (64.7 percent) respondents who had attended the NSF conferences, and 143 (53.2 percent) respondents from the non-NSF group. Of the total sample, 7 (4.2 percent) had participated in the survey from which Ruff published previously (10).

Five potentially key variables were identified by the investigators in the survey instrument which might affect the respondent's choice of a "best source" of information:

1. The highest degree held by respondent
2. Size of school district
3. Number of years respondent had worked in education
4. Number of years respondent had been an elementary principal
5. Number of professional trips taken outside of the home school district during each of the four school years between 1971 and 1975.

Analyses of response frequencies were accomplished through the chi square technique in contingency tables. The .05 level of significance was chosen by the investigators as being necessary to indicate statistical significance.

## Results

*Degree status.* The results indicated that the variable of highest degree held by a respondent was not a significant factor in distinguishing among respondents. Of the total group, 148 (89.9 percent) held the M.A. or equivalent, 13 (7.9 percent) held the B.A. or equivalent, 3 (1.8 percent) held the doctorate, and 1 (0.6 percent) answered "Other."

*Size of district.* District size is significantly related to the number of professionally related trips. In general, the number of trips reported taken outside of the district for professional activities was inversely related

to the size of the districts, that is, the larger the district, the smaller the number of trips reported taken by the principal.

This can be explained by two facts: (a) many of the meetings to which trips were taken were held in larger districts, and (b) many of the principals in the smallest districts were also superintendents, and thus attended many meetings not normally attended by principals in larger districts.

A majority of the respondents (61 percent) were from districts having more than 4,000 students. This fact is consistent with the arrangement of school districts in the state of Washington, as well as nationally, that is, a small percentage of the districts educate a large percentage of the students (see Table 1).

*Number of years in education.* The vast majority of respondents had worked in the field of education for more than 20 years with 92 percent of the respondents working in the field for more than 10 years. The NSF group is heavily represented in the 20 years or more category—much more so than is the non-NSF group. But the differences were not statistically significant (see Table 2).

Respondents were nearly evenly divided between those who had served fewer than 10 years as elementary principals and those who had served more. The NSF group tended to have somewhat more years of service in the principalship, but the trend was not statistically significant. Table 3 summarizes the responses on this variable.

*Professional trips.* The data concerning the number of professional trips taken outside of the home school district were grouped in two ways. Table 4 shows a subdivision of 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, and 10 or more trips during 1974-75 only. Table 5 illustrates the data by response categories. The largest percentage of respondents (18 percent) took no trips outside their own districts to attend educationally related meetings. Nearly 30 percent of the respondents took from 1-2 trips, while 51 percent took 4 or fewer trips.

The data revealed that the NSF respondents tended to report a greater frequency of no trips out of the district than did the

other sub-group, but the trend was not statistically significant. One reason for this could be that a larger percentage of the NSF principals came from comparatively larger districts where the professional meetings are usually conducted.

Information was collected on the number of professional trips taken outside the home district for the past four years, but analysis of this variable was based solely on the number of trips reported during 1974-75. Many respondents omitted data for the three

previous years requested by the investigators or stated that they could not recall them with any accuracy. Those who provided data seemed to show only minor variations for the four-year period. A comparison of responses from the 1973 and 1974 NSF groups showed some variation but no statistically significant differences on any of the items analyzed. This led us to conclude that the principals attending the NSF conferences were probably much more similar to each other than to the non-NSF group.

Number of Trips

Sample Group	0	1-2	3-5	6-8	9-11	12+	Totals
Non-NSF	23 16% *	44 31%	38 26%	20 14%	10 7%	8 6%	143 100%
NSF	7 31%	5 23%	7 32%	1 5%	2 9%	0 0%	22 100%
Totals	30 18%	49 30%	45 27%	21 13%	12 7%	8 5%	165 100%

\* All percents rounded to nearest whole number.

Table 5. Number of Trips Taken Outside of District, 1974-75

Information Categories

Sample Group	Colleagues	Colleges	District	Conferences	Books and Journals	Publishers
Non-NSF	25 18% *	16 11%	64 45%	18 13%	46 32%	70 49%
NSF	3 14%	2 9%	7 32%	5 23%	9 41%	13 59%
Totals	28 17%	18 11%	71 43%	23 14%	55 33%	83 50%

\* Percent totals are percent of entire group per item and will not total to 100%.

Table 6. Number of Citations for Sources of Information on Innovations in Elementary School Social Studies

Information Categories

Sample Group	Colleagues	Colleges	District	Conferences	Books and Journals	Publishers
Non-NSF	24 17% *	17 12%	63 44%	19 13%	36 25%	64 45%
NSF	2 9%	3 14%	6 27%	15 68%	8 36%	8 36%
Totals	26 16%	20 12%	69 42%	34 21%	44 27%	72 44%

\* Percents are per item, thus will not total to 100%.

Table 7. Number of Citations for Sources of Information on Innovations in Elementary School Science

## Those Ubiquitous Sources of Information

The questionnaire asked the respondents to list the "best sources of information" concerning innovations in both elementary school social studies and science programs. Thirteen categories (including "none," or no response) were derived from the free-response answers. The six categories named by at least 10 percent of the respondents were selected for further analysis. These were:

1. Colleagues—other principals, staff members
2. Colleges and universities
3. District resources—curriculum coordinators, curriculum committees
4. Conferences, meetings, workshops, institutes
5. Books, journals, magazines, newspapers, films, and TV
6. Publishers—representatives, ads, displays.

More than 90 percent (151) of the respondents listed sources of information which could be placed in one or more of the preceding six categories. The number of citations of best sources of information is summarized in Table 6 for social studies and Table 7 for science.

*Social studies innovations.* One-half (83) of the respondents listed commercial publishers as a source of information for innovations in elementary school social studies programs. District resources (curriculum coordinators, for example) were cited by 43 percent of the respondents as a source of information. Books, journals, and the like were the third most frequently cited source of information (33 percent, see Table 6).

Both NSF and non-NSF groups cited publishers most frequently. Since the relationship between district size and response to this source of information in social studies was not statistically significant, it seemed unlikely that the difference between the two groups could be explained by the greater proportion of NSF principals from large districts.

The large percentage of respondents listing district resources as a source of information may be in part due to the fact that larger districts tend to have curriculum coordinators or curriculum committees which would not be available in smaller districts. The relationship between district size and this source of information for social studies was significant for the non-NSF group. This finding is relevant and shows a change from the Ruff-Orlich report of 1974 (10). In 1975 there was a greater reporting of reliance on district resources. The NSF group listed this source less often than did non-NSF principals (32 percent vs. 45 percent), but the difference cannot be explained by the data collected.

The data reveal two other noteworthy

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trends. The NSF group cited conferences and workshops more frequently than did the non-NSF group (23 percent vs. 13 percent). The NSF respondents tended to list journals and other publications more frequently than did non-NSF respondents (41 percent vs. 32 percent). However, the differences were not statistically significant.

One variable that tended to favor the NSF principals group was their selection to attend the NSF sponsored Administrators' Conferences in 1973 and 1974. Two basic criteria were used for participant selection: (a) evidence that the principal was an instructional leader as demonstrated by innovations in the respective schools, and (b) willingness to conduct an awareness conference "back home" after the NSF conference. Thus, the broad category of "instructional leader" could be claimed by the NSF conference attendees.

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*Science innovations.* The responses to the question concerning the best sources of information about elementary science innovations were similar to those for social studies for the non-NSF group (see Table 7). For the NSF group, however, the percentage of respondents listing conferences as a source of information rose from 23 percent to 68 percent, a statistically significant difference.

Of the 12 possible categories (six for social studies, six for sciences) only conferences for science showed a statistical difference between NSF and non-NSF groups. The rise in the number of citations of conferences for the NSF group can be explained by the fact that these respondents had indeed attended conferences and reported this attendance on an open-ended form. This result indicates, at least for these respondents, that the NSF-sponsored workshops were effective mechanisms in providing new information sources about innovations in science.

In addition to the change for conferences, the NSF group reported a large (but not quite statistically significant) change in the percentage of respondents who listed publishers as a best source of information. For social studies 59 percent of the NSF group listed publishers, but for science, this dropped to 36 percent. We would speculate that those attending NSF-sponsored conferences had gained additional new knowledge sources.

*Size of district vs. listing publishers as a source of information.* There was a significant relationship between district size and listing publishers as a source of information for science, but not for social studies. Those in medium-sized districts had a significant tendency to list publishers as a source of information for both science and the social studies. There was a slight tendency for those in larger districts (10,001 or more students) *not* to list publishers as a source of information for science but not social studies.

We cannot explain the difference between the listing of publishers as sources of information for science and for social studies.

One possible explanation is that principals are more comfortable with their own knowledge of social studies and are thus less likely to rely on outsiders (publishers) for their information.

The tendency for those in large districts not to list publishers may be attributable to the fact that those large districts usually have curriculum coordinators who give the information to the principals. There is no ready explanation for the tendency of those in medium-sized districts to list publishers as a source of information more frequently than, say, the smallest districts.

## Conclusions

From this study we make the following conclusions:

1. Publishers were still the single most frequently mentioned "best source" of information for the principals who responded to the survey. This tends to support the conclusions of Ruff and Orlich (10) and Wolf and Fiorino (12).

2. Curriculum coordinators and other district resources were important sources of

information especially for principals residing in comparatively larger districts.

3. Professional literature (books, journals, and magazines) was an important source of information for the respondents.

4. Conferences and workshops, especially those sponsored by NSF, were identified as important sources of information for those who participated in them.

It was the purpose of this study to identify what changes, if any, had occurred since the original survey on sources of information about curriculum innovation had been published in 1974 (10). As is noted from this replication not much change has occurred since the original questionnaire. Indeed, elementary school principals still list the publishing industry and their representatives as the *best source* for curriculum and instructional information about social studies and science. The only notable departure was from those individuals who had participated in NSF administrator conferences. This could be construed to mean that these kinds of workshops can serve as effective models for the dissemination of educational information.

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