

NEW ESSENTIALS FOR CURRICULUM LEADERSHIP

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Several concerns seem to shape the new requirements for curriculum leadership. What are some of the new essentials for instructional leaders?

IT IS highly evident that there are numerous problems besetting the schools today and, consequently, new demands on curriculum leadership. The popular press continues to feature articles on negative situations in the schools, ranging from violence and anarchy to "watered-down" content and illiteracy of the graduates. One well-known columnist has concluded that schools could teach the three R's if they would cut off all of the "noneducational" areas, in which he includes desegregation, sex education, drug abuse education, driver education, morals and ethics, feeding the poor, and keeping students happy and relevant.

"Back to the basics" is an interesting slogan as it permits each vested interest group to define "the basics." The slogan has applications outside of education as well, such as small car promotion, natural foods, blue denim apparel, and simpler living. In education, however, there is anything but consensus on what the basics should include. Are the arts to be included? What about studies of environmental problems? Is health

education a basic subject? Is development of students' self concepts important? Many persons seem to assume that the basics are the rote learnings of the curriculum and are calling for more attention to phonics, memorization of the rules of grammar, the multiplication tables, and similar exercises, to the exclusion of almost all other kinds of learning. At the curriculum leadership level, the back to basics movement has set off a widespread wave of anxiety over narrow interpretations of accountability and assessment based on standardized test scores.

But whatever the basics may be, efforts are being made to identify the causes for reemphasis on the basics. One is the rising cost of schools, and to this is tied the demand for outcomes. In other words, if the public is to pay the high cost of education, it tends to demand productivity, and the product of the schools is generally assumed to be well-behaved academically-achieving students who are highly motivated to improve the quality of services and material goods needed by society. Thus, further disillusionment with the schools results from reports of deteriorating discipline and low achievement scores which are related in many persons' minds with educational innovations such as open

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space, flexible scheduling, the new math.

Faced with these kinds of criticisms of the schools, what new essentials for curriculum leadership are demanded?

In the first place, we must remember that many of the concerns popularized by the press are merely symptoms of major complex problems and we, as curriculum leaders, must avoid the trap of relying on simplistic remedies. When their world seems to be falling apart, people sometimes focus on small entities or pieces of a problem and lead a battle cry for a small crusade in which they can relieve immediate anxieties and get their minds off of incomprehensible problems. Thus, we hear of "new" schools that concentrate on such attributes as corporal punishment, dress codes, or indoctrination.

How much better it would be if curriculum leaders could mount a crusade to use the collective insights of our profession and help the public give extended and serious thought to the philosophies and theories that underlie our best knowledge about education.

Where Have the Innovations Gone?

A broad comprehensive view of education is difficult to bring about, however. History shows that we have been swinging from one extreme to another in education over past years. We engage in either/or arguments; such as, student interest versus subject matter, method versus content, emotional development versus intellectual growth, basic skills versus the whole child, and so on. Back in the first half of this century, the rise and fall of the historic Progressive Education Association can be attributed to this very problem of polarized thinking about education. Progressive educators split into three conflicting points of view: those advocating scientism with the testing, sorting, and labeling movement; those advocating sentimentalism, which resulted in bizarre applications in some chaotic classrooms; and those advocating radicalism, such as George Counts, who hoped the schools could change the social order.

Without going back to the days of progressive education, we can find illustrations

within our own memories. To approach the problem of curriculum leadership, it may be useful to look at today's situation in reference to recent events.

What has become of the innovations of the 60's and early 70's? Are they making a difference in our schools? If they are not, why not? Frantic curriculum reform efforts began in the early 1960's. Because schools were somewhat slow to adopt the new curriculum programs in the early 1960's, there was a great deal of talk in the research and development centers on how to initiate change.

Gradually, however, the new curricula did affect our schools, and in many ways for the better. Stress on modes of inquiry, inductive thinking, and ways to lead students to discover for themselves were built into the new curriculum plans. The projects emphasized variety and alternatives in materials and procedures. A rich array of materials and media began to be available to curriculum developers. Pamphlets, source books, readings, and original documents began to compete with traditional textbooks. Multimedia kits, audiovisual resources, simulations, models, and nonverbal games became widely known. In the science laboratories, students approached unknowns through original experimentation rather than being confined to repetitious laboratory exercises although both had a rightful place in maintaining the balance between the known and the unknown. New types of media invaded the libraries and caused a welcome flurry in the role of the librarian.

However, several shortcomings can also be noted. Students, during the curriculum reform decade, seemed to be the participants who were least consulted in curriculum planning, and they reacted in many cases with either extreme apathy or extreme activism. In the inner-cities, a barren environment and human indifference had reduced schools to barely endurable custodial institutions. In the suburbs, more affluent students began to resent the adult pressures for college acceptance and social conformity and we experienced the hippie mode.

Preoccupation of the curriculum devel-

opers with curriculum structure and new teaching styles left them somewhat unprepared for the shock of the crisis that gained national attention in 1968, 1969, and 1970.

Belatedly, the special needs of large segments of the population attracted the attention of courts and legislators. The Civil Rights Movement forced public attention on the problems of blacks and other minority groups. The mass media of the nation now turned from demanding curriculum reform in the teaching of mathematics, science, and other subjects to a new focus on the plight of urban and rural disadvantaged children. Schools were forced to heed the urgent cry of minority citizens. Congress entered more heavily into the education arena and poured funds into early childhood, compensatory, and other programs designed to reach the handicapped and the disadvantaged.

In looking back over the curriculum reform movement of the early 1960's, Jerome Bruner concluded that the revisions of curriculum made then were insufficient to meet society's problems. Vietnam, urban ghettos, poverty, and racism had brought disillusion-

ment with the idealistic vision of the American way of life. Bruner found that American education had entered a state of crisis, and concluded that the educational system was, in effect, a way of maintaining a class system—a group at the bottom.

A Lack of Relevance?

That the curriculum lacked relevance for many students became a new watchword. Unresponsiveness of the schools to the changing culture, social issues, and the needs of youth were dramatized in the late 60's and early 70's by student disruptions in numerous high schools and universities.

Oppressive practices in the schools became a topic of much concern. Some teachers and principals seemed to be so fearful that they would appear autocratic that they abdicated their responsibility for leadership and in some cases established new student autocrats. Freedom for students became a new goal.

However, freedom in school settings is frequently misunderstood and misinterpreted, as John Dewey pointed out some years ago, when "progressive education" was shallowly interpreted by some. He warned that freedom is not something bred of planlessness—it is something to be achieved, to be systematically wrought by students in cooperation with experienced, knowledgeable teachers.

With freedom, of course, must come added responsibility for developing self-direction, for sharing obligations to the group, and for ensuring the quality of the learning environment. Planning for the freedom of individuals is a conscious, orderly commitment to human worth and individual dignity. Freedom implies that choices are available for individuals to develop but it implies that group rights as well as individual rights must be respected.

Freedom and open concepts in education have proved to be more difficult to install and maintain than might be anticipated, although the concept of choice for students has sparked unusually zealous efforts to turn on the turned-off student. Various options and forms of open education have gained



Curriculum concerns are aired on a St. Louis talk-show.



Curriculum matters are discussed at a "town meeting" school board session in University City, Missouri.

strength. Alternative schools or "free schools" that reject the lockstep, batch processing approach of some conventional schools have popped up in all parts of the country since 1970. Some are successful but many have failed because they seemed not to know what they were *for*, only what they were *against*.

But now, external conditions are again forcing us to take a new look at what we are doing in the schools. Consider the problem of economic nongrowth. The recent energy crisis sharpened our awareness to the cold facts of life that the world's natural resources are diminishing while the world's population is increasing and that an economic revolution may bring about a radical redistribution of the world's wealth and political power.

Growth has been a major purpose of our economic system and of American society. As corporations grew larger, new jobs were created by expansion and many more opportunities presented for advancement, for success, and for cooperative working relationships. Closely allied to the "growth is good" concept has been consumer management. We are flooded with great varieties of enticing advertisements on television, radio, billboards, magazines, and newspapers, all stressing that the consumption of goods is the foundation of human happiness. The popular view has been stimulated that a

newly invented product is better than something that was invented a year or ten years ago.

Unhappily, however, unrestricted growth and consumerism has required vast amounts of raw materials and natural resources, many of which cannot be replaced or substituted with another.

While we may be enjoying a temporary reprieve from gasoline scarcity, we must soon face the hard reality that oil resources as well as living space, fresh water, forest products, other industrial raw materials, and arable land are diminishing resources in a world of rapidly increasing population. These are problems that cannot be confined by national boundaries. No part of the earth is self-sufficient in all of its critical needs, worldwide problems demand a level of international cooperation never before achieved.

New Approaches to Complex Problems

Impact on the curriculum may be expressed in new approaches to global problems and new ways to interrelate the problems of industrialization with those of law and government, health and welfare, and aesthetics.

Reading and talking about these prob-

lems in school is not enough. Students may be helped to become aware of the problems but may be left not knowing what can be done, and with a feeling of hopelessness and inevitable disaster, if not for this generation, then for future generations. Action learning programs, however, can be designed to involve students outside of the school with the broader community in penetrating studies of common concerns. By searching out information, utilizing simulations, making face-to-face contacts with business people and city officials, analyzing television programs and commercials, studying the legislative process through a study of the local representative, students will be helped to gain practice in problem solving.

Vincent Rogers of the University of Connecticut sees the movement toward relating the school in much more honest and vivid ways to the daily lives of the community as one of the benefits of the open education movement that seems likely to persist. Although he reminds us that open education has barely touched American education, it has begun to bring about some closer relationships between communities and schools that can lead to several types of educational benefits. The school can provide substantive content and background knowledge, set the stage for developing the processes and skills of decision making, and the community can provide the arena for learning about people and about problems in our pluralistic society.

A testing period for pluralism in the schools promises to be more severe before our problems abate. Teaching school in a pluralistic society, such as ours in the United States, is difficult at best. Separate interests continually jockey for power and position. Cultural diversity and divergent points of view present a host of problems even in the best of times. Stresses on the schools produced by differing values and philosophies between races, classes, and sexes; the conservatives and the liberals; the old and the young; the rich and the poor; city dwellers, suburbanites, and rural interests; and among various occupations and professions will probably be complicated further by economic shortages and other societal problems.

Challenges are plentiful for curriculum leadership. Stupendous as some of these problems are, it is quite probable that the schools *will* be expected to solve them.

Presently, schools are being attacked for the problems of illiteracy in the country, for failing to develop the reading and writing ability of young people although they see little of it at home. Schools are blamed for failing to develop the work ethic among young people, for drug habits, immoral behavior, and numerous other problems. Solutions for problems of consumer education, moral development, governmental improvement, population control, international co-



The Board answers questions.



Citizen concerns are identified.

operation, and energy distribution will undoubtedly be referred to the schools.

The remarkable thing is that schools *can* make a difference in many problems. This has been demonstrated over and over again by American education. The immigrants who came to America—the poor, the sick, the tired—gained an education in America and, for the most part, found their way toward success both in material gains and in personal freedom.

The problems of discrimination against minorities and against women are being solved by the schools even though stress and strain go with any solutions. Sputnik's challenge was met and won. The schools of the United States have trained the leaders of not only this country, but leaders of many other countries of the world. The schools have faced the problems of depression and war, and thus far have proved their merit. The great scientists, the medical geniuses, the technological experts, the humanistic leaders of our country, all have been educated in American schools. We have proved in the past that schools can make a difference.

Can the schools make a difference faced with the problems of our present crisis society? This challenge depends on the quality of leadership in our schools.

Ability To Produce New Solutions

What is leadership and what is the quality of leadership that is needed by curriculum workers? Leadership means that curriculum workers are responsible for serving as strong and constructive influences on American education, for moving out, advocating reforms, for engaging others as participants in action toward positive change.

There could not be a more exciting time in the history of education to be in a leadership role in curriculum and instruction. Our leadership capacities will be tested to the utmost in the next few years. Whether we succeed in meeting the challenge of a crisis society will depend on our ability to develop the breadth of vision for curriculum development that is needed to be responsive to humanistic and democratic ideals, moral

values, changing knowledge, new skills, and the findings of future studies.

In our fast moving society, there are two major ways in which we as curriculum leaders can be irresponsible. Ignorance of critical issues in education and in society is one area of irresponsibility. Nonparticipation in problem solving processes when we *are* aware of critical issues is another area of irresponsibility. In other words, curriculum leadership demands of us that we become sensitive to issues and impending crises and that we do something about these.

In periods of stability, leadership can be defined merely by certification and training requirements and by traditional role expectations. Risk-taking is carefully restrained.

In times of crisis, leadership is defined in terms of ability to produce new solutions. Training and certification are not enough. In today's world, curriculum leaders must be able, outgoing, and adaptive. Several specific skills and attributes are necessary in addition to the conventional learnings about curriculum construction, implementation, and evaluation.

Curriculum leaders must be skilled in communications. The problems, restrictions, and difficulties of an educational system must be explained systematically and clearly, which requires great communication capability and the communications job is never completed. For example, what have we done in trying to influence the communications media of the United States to explore with the public in a sustained way the vital questions concerning the ways in which children learn? Instead, we have tended to take a reactive approach to the media and spend too much energy in defensiveness against lurid stories in the press concerning episodes in the schools.

Beyond the skill of communicating lies a higher order of management skill which is the capacity for relating to others and involving others so that they acquire new insights about the educational enterprise. This means that as curriculum leaders we must learn how to utilize the work of groups to advance the mission of education and to make education responsive to the problems of our day.

Otherwise, aggressive and vocal special interest groups will distort the curriculum through pressures that cannot be held back unless our leadership is sufficiently skilled in utilizing the power of all groups in keeping a comprehensive view of the educational program.

However, patience and persistence on the part of curriculum workers will be needed in involving persons at all levels in cooperative action. Many people have had little or no experience in direct involvement in cooperative decision making, particularly in relation to curriculum development. Most persons are accustomed to top-down decisions. The hopes of many participants are for a chance to complain. When invited to participate and become involved, many persons are skeptical and suspicious of the motives of those who are trying to get true cooperation going.

There is a reluctance on the part of both professional staff and the general public to put in the time needed for the processes of formal decision making. Long meetings in which nothing seems to happen or nothing is really decided are discouraging. Feelings are likely to erupt into heated accusations that the authority structure is deliberately blocking or delaying the outcome that was hoped for by one individual or another.

The present decision-making groups may be having their own internal problems and experiencing plenty of trouble just dealing with themselves. Naturally, a group would be very reluctant to attempt to cope with added issues and viewpoints brought in by someone else.

Therefore, prior to involvement in making major decisions, it is necessary to identify needs and concerns through some systematic way of involving a diverse constituency. Once the needs and concerns have been identified, listed, and sorted into personal concerns, institutional concerns, and societal concerns that affect the school, priorities can be assigned. This requires not only leadership action, but our own engagement in learning at the frontier of trends, new issues, and the sources of new knowledge.

Building a Network of Support

A third essential for curriculum leadership and one which is related to the others is sophistication in building a national network of support for the best that is known about educational philosophy and theory. Building a network of educational cooperation requires great effort and constant vigilance to protect against erosion. It calls for knowing the power structure of the educational community. It calls for crucial committee assignments and membership in prestigious groups and organizations, both nationally and locally, where contacts can be made and maintained. It calls for team work in establishing respect for the advancement of education.

Surely this task is not impossible. Look at the literacy problem, for example. Instead of being pushed around by the popular press and vested interests, let us put our collective intelligence to work on what we do know about children's learning: that children learn to read through several approaches, that concrete experience is of vital importance to young learners, that rote memorization of grammar rules must be related meaningfully to writing, that students are more likely to be motivated when they have some choice about what and how they learn, that success breeds success, and that repeated failure breeds further failure, that students differ in all sorts of ways from one another and each has unique talents and attributes.

Finally, responsiveness and adaptability are essential in curriculum leadership. We must be able to bring into play previously ignored resources, we must be able to work with all populations: persons from various racial and ethnic backgrounds, handicapped persons, bilingual children, the educationally disadvantaged, and the gifted. We must be able to deal with a constantly changing scene. We need a quality of moral authority in curriculum leaders. We need persons with energy and charisma. In such leaders are placed our hopes for a pluralistic society whose members are working for mutual and meaningful goals. □

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