

## Are Instructional Leaders Still Needed? Anne Campbell



*Skill, insight, understanding, and know-how are prized today as never before in school settings. This author suggests resources that will assist leaders as they try to enhance learning at various levels of schooling.*

The school constituency is better educated today than ever before. Consequently, leadership in instruction and planning takes on a broader base than perhaps the more traditional leadership concepts have been willing to acknowledge or perhaps even accept. However, there is and will be a greater need for instructional leadership in the schools as individualized student needs and the understanding and demand for the diversity of delivery arrangements to meet those needs are extended.

The broad based concept of educational leadership is being expressed in new lexicons but encompasses many currently used terms such as

curriculum development, interaction analysis, pupil grouping, and team teaching. The term presently seen in current literature is providing leadership for "learning environments," as indicated, for example, by Goodlad, Knezevich, and others.

The term is difficult to define, because it circumscribes with bulging parameters, a great number of variables that in and of themselves are not conclusive but must be converged in a way so that it all can come together—in the classroom. We have access to research findings in bits and pieces, but we lack the confluence of the bits and pieces "when we effect strategies designed to affect how others are to spend their valuable time and energy."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> John I. Goodlad, "Intervening in Learning Environments." In: Kenneth H. Hansen, editor. *Learning: An Overview and Update*. San Diego, California: Chief State School Officers, August 1976. p. 43.

When legislators and other public officials react to pressures from the frustrations of their constituents, both the legislators and public officials join the constituents in seeking simple solutions to complex problems.

Perhaps it is because educators have promised too much, and the politicians and public have expected too much, that groups have turned to first this and then that panacea; innovators to try single intervention techniques; and charlatans

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to get so much mileage out of subjectiveness and emotional gratification.<sup>2</sup>

### Putting It All Together

It is in the context of putting it all together at the classroom level that the theme of this article is developed. The theme is that instructional leadership is a plural term that embodies diverse, professionally trained persons involved in and responsible for the schooling and education process, and in addition, includes external groups and persons among whom are the supporters and owners of the schools.

Although principals, supervisors, department chairpersons, and others in middle management roles in schools experience problems of leadership more keenly than teachers or superintendents—because they are in the middle of the battles for and about leadership—the teachers and the students are in the classroom where learning actually takes place. The exercise of leadership must be in terms of affecting the learning environments that intimately involve the teacher.

So as those persons in middle management begin the leadership process of improving instruction, various actors on the stage and in the wings have to perceive their involvement in more than a passive way. Often it seems as though

many individuals in the employed force can become so involved in day-to-day activity that the vision of the whole enterprise can be lost—the putting of many parts together in order to assure meaningful learning experiences.

We now live in a culture that only partly shapes and molds through its established traditions and tested beliefs. The increase in mobility, the awareness of a more pluralistic population, and a greater population have forced concentrations of diverse, formerly accepted traditions and beliefs into conflicts. With the advent of communication, transportation, and technological advances, more and more external educational intervention comes into the picture. The point is that educational leaders and learning managers today have an incredibly difficult task to meld the competitive forces at work in the educational process.

Though the learning environments are local in nature, they are impacted by organization structures and infrastructures, one of which is the state department of education. Responsibility for the general supervision and administration of the schools is vested here. It is not an easy task, with the heterogeneity of population, demography, and topography, to obtain a consensus as to criteria and standards to be set for minimal assurance determinations for local learning environments. John I. Goodlad has said, "It is the task of the state departments of education to articulate directions for educational improvement and to help create mechanisms and support by means of which they can be achieved."<sup>3</sup>

Certainly, state departments of education are in prime positions to define problems emerging in school systems as related to learning. As each generation moves through the schooling process and even within each generation, the mix of social, political, and economic factors impinge upon educational decisions. At this point in time, a policy debate rages on whether elementary and secondary schools shall be viewed as learning institutions or as instruments for the fulfillment of the social, political, and economic policies of the nation. As Stephen J. Knezevich phrases it, "We must, whether we can indeed, finetune a

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

heterogeneous culture." More recently, a U.S. President spoke about a "Great Society" and supported programs in education to assist in developing such an ideal society.

### **An Awareness of Trends**

Leaders and managers in education need to be aware of statewide and nationwide trends in the social, political, and economic realms so that in their advocacy-for-children roles, they can aid students in the classroom to be operationally effective in the larger society.

As alluded to earlier in this article, the mobility of school clients requires instructional leadership commitment to pupil or student advocacy in a manner that assures continuity in learning experiences through curricular offerings. This says to the instructional leader that there is "A near look at a far vision." Peter A. Morrison phrased it as follows: "Changing patterns of settlement continually shift the burden of educational demand, and the resources available to meet it, among localities."<sup>4</sup>

State departments of education are a valuable resource to tap for educational trends whether nationwide or statewide. Technical assistance is available, hopefully in a helpful and practical rather than a directive way.

Universities, colleges, foundations, and private research consulting firms are also a resource of particular value. Here, in a detached manner, theories can be researched and reported. However, precise solutions may still evade the researchers. The weakness underlying development of strategies for improvement of learning environments as a result of much research is in practical application of a single factor to a multi-variable situation which learning certainly is. The state of the art in learning theory, learning research, and learning strategies is just beginning to "scratch the surface." We know comparatively little about the complex process of human learning, involving people with varying capabilities who are influenced by internal values and beliefs and are constantly being barraged by external educational forces.

The school is only one factor in this educational process. It is little wonder that confusion abounds, and yet, in spite of the confusion, col-

leagues in the educational enterprise have often been quite successful in the schooling of their clients. Perceptive educators have been able to use what they have gleaned and learned from research to implement successful programs in the learning environment. We have learned a great deal from research findings, and it is important that instructional leaders be aware of and know sources to call upon in the planning for learning procedures.

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Another source for help is that of colleagues in higher education, foundations, and private agencies. Demands of time, effort, and money often preclude the involvement of these people; however, dissemination networks are being created in a much more cooperative than competitive manner through the efforts of the National Institute of Education (N.I.E.)

Successful techniques and strategies developed at local school levels, in the universities, and so on, are being replicated in other settings over the country, often with practitioners as the instructors.

### **Leaders Translate Goals**

Closer to the learning environment, instructional leaders are the translators of districtwide goals as to the purpose of education in a given school system. Instructional activities are set to meet the districtwide goals from which learning environments are created to meet individual student needs. Therefore, the instructional leaders' task is to plan with all of the educational knowledge and expertise they possess and can enlist, with the involvement of the primary manager of

<sup>4</sup> Peter A. Morrison. "The Demographic Context of Educational Policy Planning." An Occasional Paper, Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies, 1976. p. 1.

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learning, the teacher, and with the participation of the immediate community of the school.

Individualization of instruction in a group setting requires an inordinate amount of energy, enthusiasm, knowledge, and understanding to implement. The teacher must have an in school climate conducive to learning that supports the learning process with materials and equipment, assistance, and appreciation.

In the final analysis, those who comprise the local school social system, the principal, teachers, students, and parents, must sense the important needs and come to grips with them to bring about a favorable learning environment in which there will be attainable results.

There is necessity for system and peer group reinforcement both for keeping things as they are and for moving out into the new and unexplored. Much of the initial work necessary to improve oneself or one's school is lonely; it is in this area that leadership can be effective. It is important that someone knows what you are doing, that you are trying, and that you make a difference.<sup>5</sup> There is a fundamental need for worth and dignity for a leader, even as there is for a student. An accept-

ance of a "learning community" concept for planning the learning environment for students is essential.

Projected demographic factors that anticipate some severe isolation in natural declining population areas support the need for instructional leaders. Distance, small classes, inability to attract well-qualified professional personnel, and concomitant economic restraints will place a strain on delivery of quality schooling. Such conditions may of necessity cause shrinkage in the number of persons needed for middle management positions to provide instructional leadership. Yet even in such conditions, new schemes and configurations must assure that there is instructional leadership available to assist in the assessment, planning, and imparting of quality up-to-date curriculum offerings.

There will also need to be encouragement and support for those who are expert in the learning process.

The teacher center or "pedagogical service station" seems to have evolved from the need to share successful experiences and to provide help where problems appear to defy resolution. Principals and other middle management personnel also need this so-called "switching station." The goal, of course, is to increase local school capacity for problem solving.<sup>6</sup>

The answer to the question, "Do we still need instructional leadership in school?" is Yes. The skill and competence with which components required for a quality learning environment are put together will be the standard by which the school is judged—a challenging task!

<sup>5</sup> Hansen, *et al.*, *op cit.*, p. 54

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56



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