

What Skills Are Needed by Today's School Leaders

Phil Clayton Robinson

Many time-honored skills and insights are needed by today's instructional leaders. Yet new demands require new dimensions of skills and new situations call for new strategies.

Today's educational leaders must be increasingly sensitive to the wide variety of interests, styles of learning, levels of motivation, and short/long term goals of students and teachers. This awareness demands of today's leaders a facilitating quality that was less common a decade ago. There is also a reflection of this awareness in the increasing number of specialists and resource persons who are being employed to provide technical services. New legislation also plays a significant role in widening the responsibilities of educators.

The primary objective of this observer is to focus on the building level educational leader and/or the central office curriculum leader. No attempt has been made to define educational leadership in this article. Leadership skills and administrative strategies in the literature, and in this observer's experience, are sometimes difficult to differentiate. Educational leaders, of course, are not automatically effective administrators. There seems to be some shift from the notion of the "divine right" based on position, to a more careful assessment of the person as a performer.

Some leadership positions may call for a strong individual leader. Effective educational leaders tend to be personalities who are, among other things, able to stimulate, challenge, and free the persons around them to perform at their highest level of competence. Only mutual respect between the educational leader and staff members can create such a productive performance climate and such good results.

Lazarsfeld has stated that all administrators are faced with the following four major tasks:

1. The administrator must fulfill the goals of the organization.
2. The administrator must make use of other people in fulfilling these goals, not as if they were machines, but rather in such a way as to release their initiative and creativity.
3. The administrator must face the humanitarian aspects of his job. He wants people who work for him to be happy. This is "morale"—the idea that under suitable conditions people will do better work than they will under unsuitable conditions.
4. The administrator must try to build into his organization provisions for innovations, for change, and for development. In a changing world, people and organizations must adjust to changing conditions. The conditions for change must be incorporated into the organization so that there can be a steady process of development rather than a series of sudden, disruptive innovations.¹

Task number four of the above series is especially critical today because of rapidly changing circumstances. There are many and diverse forces that influence the function of the school administrator. Some examples of the sources of these changing circumstances are: federal legislation like P.L. 94-142 (Special Education of the Handicapped, 0-25 years); P.A. 198 (Michigan Mandatory Special Education Act); ESEA Titles I, IV-B,

¹ Paul F. Lazarsfeld. "The Social Sciences and Administration: A Rationale." Lorne Downey and Frederick Enns, editors. In: *The Social Sciences and Educational Administration*. Edmonton: University of Alberta, 1963. pp. 3-4.

VII, and Title IX (Sex Discrimination); local school board behavior in response to volatile issues; dissipation of citizens' financial commitment to support the public schools; and, the constant test posed by the "new breed" of students and their demands.

The challenges and opportunities facing the instructional curriculum leader are expanding. Expanding is preferable to "changing" in this context. Many of the time-honored leadership

1. Define the objectives in specific terms.
2. Develop tests and performance standards to measure the attainment of the objectives.
3. Identify or develop the types of procedures which offer the most promise for the efficient achievement of the objectives.
4. Implement the system.
5. Evaluate the effectiveness of the system and revise it to improve the performance.
6. Continue the implementation, evaluation, and revision cycle.²

Several school districts, after having experimented with one of several highly structured, inflexible management systems, found them to be inappropriate responses to the human and educational process.

Sound Philosophy Is Needed

At the building level, the foundation for successful administrative leadership must be built on a sound philosophy. That operational philosophy must undergird all major decisions. It must have both qualitative and quantitative elements. Some of the early contributions of psychologists to the field of educational administration, and the persistent nature of many problems faced by practicing educators, suggest that knowledge and skills in applied psychology are needed. The practitioner does not enjoy the luxury of time and predictability in decision-making. He/she cannot afford to wait for research from the field in responding to crucial issues and demanding problems.

The school must have a built-in system for discovery and development. Disciplined inquiry, properly used, can be constructively teamed with administrative direction to provide support and reinforcement for a staff. It can also be utilized as the vehicle for abandoning unworkable and/or unproductive practices. This type of research within the building will provide a rationale for change that is "believable." The school administrator must be perceptive enough to know that:

1. He or she has sufficient *knowledge* to act.
2. There is a state of *readiness* in those who will be affected by the action.

² John C. Flanagan. "How Instructional Systems Will Manage Learning." *Nation's Schools* 86(4): 65; October 1970.



Participants in a staff resource workshop discuss the effective utilization of various support service personnel.

skills are still needed. New demands require new dimensions of skills, and new situations require new strategies.

There is much to be learned from business, industry, and teacher education institutions that emphasize the development of management and decision-making skills. Some understanding of "what not to do" is one of the important spin-offs from a careful analysis of any one of the typical management systems. The idea of equating the development of cognitive skills and the acquisition of social skills and other systematic information is not always compatible with good educational practice. Achievement is the goal of any good program. Most management systems do not allow for flexible individual development. Colleges and universities are excellent sources of theory, research information, and the exploration of management system designs.

According to Flanagan, the systems approach includes the following major steps:

3. *Timing* is important, that is, "when to act."

One fundamental merit of systematic building-level inquiry is that it protects the staff and administrator from self-delusion. The successful leader understands organizational procedures and the process of organizational analysis. The continuous application of these principles is essential. Self-assessment activities will often lead to innovations and modifications in services to children. If a sound philosophical position has been clearly established, resistance will be minimized, and support will be generated as a result of staff involvement. Implementation will be viewed as a logical extension of the major philosophical thrust of the building.

Schools are no longer able to function in isolation. The wide variety of external demands necessitates involvement in a complex network of services. Knowing how to utilize these resources is a necessary skill. The school administrator's role may be that of coordinator, moderator, synthesizer of information, student advocate, staff reinforcer, and prodder of parents. Some of the support services are represented by the school social worker, psychologist, learning specialist, speech and language therapist, and the special education teacher. Specific titles of various support service personnel may vary from district to district and from state to state. The key element, however, is the effective utilization of their individual expertise.

Faith and a Way of Working

The challenge of mainstreaming is a good example of the kinds of skills that an administrator must have to effectively initiate and implement program modifications. It is unimportant to debate the wisdom of *gradual mainstreaming* as opposed to *mainstreaming in one stroke*. The critical ingredient is the thoroughness of the preparatory steps with all affected parties. A typical working team might include parents, general and special education teachers, students, administrator, and other resource persons who work with the child. The intuitiveness of the administrator regarding the readiness of all major elements should determine the approach used in any given situation. There are far too many uncontrollable variables to prescribe a precise formula for action. However,

application of a careful, step-by-step change process will minimize mistakes.

Motivation is the responsibility of the educational leader. Higher teacher salaries and "better working conditions" have proven to be insufficient to keep staffs motivated and performing at optimal level. Gibson and Teasley did a critique of research based upon the "humanist model of organizational motivation." They concluded by saying:

In view of the lack of empirical evidence to support the humanistic model, one wonders how it maintains its support. There does indeed seem to be an almost metaphysical attraction to the Maslow hierarchy and to the various spin-off theories that comprise the humanistic model. The impact of the model is discernible in practically every form of organization from complex bureaucracies to small intimate groups such as the family. And those who support the thesis may well be right. But our view indicates that for now faith rather than empirical evidence must be used to support the concept.³



A working team, consisting of school staff personnel and a consultant, discuss the placement of an "exceptional" child into the appropriate instructional level.

Declining enrollment, tenure law provisions, seniority clauses in teachers' contracts, and annual layoffs (pink-slipping) are combining to give administrators new challenges with regard to the responsibility for motivation. If the present trend continues, the mean age of the average faculty will increase significantly in the next five years. It may well be more difficult to keep an older, "more seasoned" staff highly motivated and excited about the prospects of working with parents and stu-

³ Frank K. Gibson and Clyde E. Teasley. "The Humanistic Model of Organizational Motivation: A Review of Research Support." *Public Administration Review* 32: 89-96; January-February 1973.

National Curriculum Study Institutes

Fall 1977



Teaching Basic Skills: Analysis and Techniques

October 31-November 1, 1977, Boston, Massachusetts
(Boston Park Plaza)

Teaching Basic Skills: Analysis and Techniques

November 3-4, 1977, Montreal, Canada
(Le Régence Hyatt Montréal)

Improving student achievement in basic skills is a critical concern in most schools and communities. Teachers, curriculum leaders, and school administrators are concerned about how to teach basic skills more effectively and to assess student abilities in these areas. This institute will analyze and assess the effectiveness of a variety of strategies and techniques for improving student achievement in basic skills. It will examine and analyze research findings on student achievement in basic skills in the United States, and explore the educational implications of these research findings.

Consultants: Roger Farr, Indiana University, Bloomington; Vincent Glennon, University of Connecticut, Storrs; Gita Wilder, Educational Testing Service, Princeton, New Jersey; Thomas Clark, Middletown High School, Middletown, Connecticut; Beatrice Wood, Hartford (Connecticut) Public Schools; Lorin Anderson, University of South Carolina, Columbia; Claire Henry, Memphis State College, Memphis. Optional background material packet at special price—\$23

Registration must reach ASCD for Boston by October 10, and for Montreal by October 13.

In-service Education: Design and Evaluation for Professional Growth

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To accommodate relatively new or inexperienced supervisor participants, a series of "introductory" sessions will be planned. These sessions will deal with concepts and skills at a basic or introductory level. The emphasis will be on planning single sessions, using basic skills of role-playing, demonstrations, classroom observations, discussion groups, etc. Little attention will be given, in these sessions, to advanced design, innovative strategies, or evaluation techniques.

Consultants: Ben M. Harris, University of Texas at Austin; Bruce R. Joyce, Stanford University, Stanford, California; Jack Gant, Florida State University, Tallahassee.

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dents. On the other hand, a more evenly mixed staff of young, middle-aged, and older teachers is likely to provide greater mutual stimulation within the group.

Regardless of the circumstances in which educators work, they must have "faith" that they can be successful in their endeavors. It thus becomes the responsibility of the educational leader to engender faith. Some steps toward achieving that objective include:

1. Regular dissemination of research findings related to the building philosophy and the instructional delivery system
2. Regular feedback sessions to review data input
3. Sharing student attitudinal changes and other indicators of positive goal-setting and attainment
4. Parental involvement in the planning and review process.

One aspect of step number 4 is to directly involve the students in preparing regular reports to the parents. This practice lends credibility to the reporting process, enhances instructional goal-development, aids student self-direction and responsibility, and should reconcile the stated philosophy with the programmatic thrust.

In summary, today's educational leader must be a multi-faceted, charismatic, level-headed, and goal-directed person. He/she must have a strong grasp of the ever-expanding nature of leadership responsibilities. In addition, he/she must have a strong sense of self-direction and a personal commitment to boys and girls. Skills are needed in human relations, problem-solving, research and development, initiating and implementing change, coordinating resources, motivating and challenging faculty, and establishing and maintaining a learning climate that is both humanistic and productive. *FL*



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