

Creating a Climate of Rapid Response to Needs for Change

Lois Jerry Blanchard



Illustration: Randall Bulla, Graphic Artist, Waterford School District.

"The supervisor attempting to create a climate for change needs to assess the philosophy inherent in the model chosen for use." The author describes one process of keeping up with change here.

This morning, I stopped at Pete's Oven to buy doughnuts for the folks at work. A young mother came in with a little one-year-old boy. The boy promptly sat down beside an older man and looked at him expectantly. The mother smiled and said, "He's very friendly." The man chuckled and poking a finger at the little toes sticking out of the boy's sandals began, "This little piggie went to market, this little. . . ." The boy looked puzzled. His mother laughed and said, "He knows it differently. We say, 'This little piggie went to a rock concert, this little piggie went disco danc-

ing. . . .' We updated it. You know, you have to stay with the times with kids!"

Assessing the times and the needs of students is a major concern for the supervisor. The need to keep up with change in our world is a reality. How quickly events fade into history: Patty Hearst's kidnapping, the Mayaguez incident, the resignation of a president. Just as quickly, new issues consume our attention: the neutron bomb, proposition 13, the dollar plunge.

The same emergence and fading of issues is seen in the impact of change on our jobs. I remember hours spent in staff meetings in the early 1960s talking about ways to get students home should there be a nuclear attack. We also debated the merits of core, team teaching, and programmed instruction with professional intensity until a new issue arose. In some years, one issue consumed all our professional energy. The issue may or may not have come as a result of our own

initiation, but because of a social or economic change such as busing or declining enrollments. New issues surface continually: back to basics, voucher systems, tax limitations.

The Pressures of Change

Change is our reality. It can be challenging, exciting, refreshing. It can also be distressing, frightening, disorienting. As educators and people, we have coped in many ways. A common and natural reaction to the pressures for change is to oversimplify the issues or problems involved. At the ASCD conference on "Creating Curricula for Human Futures," Alvin Toffler commented that we tend to oversimplify situations as a response to complex decisions that we are required to make before we can gather sufficient information.¹ During this year's conference, a speaker commented, "For every educational problem, there is a solution that is simple, inexpensive, and wrong."

Certainly, the allure of ready-made, do-it-yourself, simple solutions is appealing, and we see examples all around us: teacher-proof programs; five-step models to the total curriculum design; follow the red word clues in the margin of the text, and your lesson plans are complete. There is merit, of course, to be found in many such packages, but we need to avoid the allure of panaceas that do not measure up to the complexity of educational planning.

A more traditional example of coping with change is to maintain the status quo. Again, there may be merit in continuing past purposes and practices, but to do so without evaluation in terms of changing needs is a less than adequate reaction.

At the opposite end of the continuum from the status quo response to change is bandwagonism. In fact, some can be seen running down the road as fast as possible in *front* of the bandwagon. Change for change's sake? The results can be additions to the curriculum that do not have the integrity of careful planning based on actual need.

Yet another common coping practice is to adopt answers from industry and other professions. In recent years, educators have been enamored of systems, models, processes, and acronyms borrowed from other fields. At times, we have spent countless hours adopting, adapting, or forcing an uncomfortable "fit" to our problems.

Much energy has been focused on going through planning systems to end up with a magnificent flow chart leading to the words "program implementation" and going no further. Again, there may be merit in these systems, but we must be cautious that we do not use them as a busywork escape from dealing with reality.

Dealing with change must be more than coping. How can the supervisor create a climate that encourages a timely response to changing needs while providing a purposive curriculum development framework that accommodates or gives direction to that change? Chandos Reid Rice said that the supervisor working with curriculum change needs to have a belief in the worth of each individual; a belief in the use of intelligence, problem solving, and decision making; a belief that every individual has the right to participate in decisions that affect her or him.²

The supervisor who holds these beliefs can facilitate change. The staff knows where the supervisor is "coming from." If he or she comes with the answers and the problem already defined, he or she will contribute to creating an atmosphere of resistance to change. If the supervisor comes with a commitment to participating *with* the staff in identifying and responding to a need, change will come more rapidly.

Alternative Programs

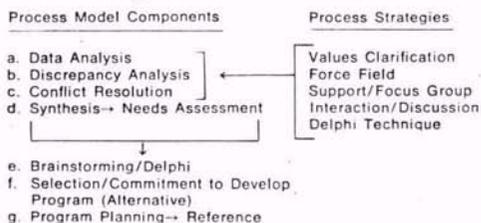
Recently, I worked with several secondary school staffs in planning alternative programs as a response to changing student needs. Together, we developed a "process model" that we found useful in program planning.

This process evolved as I worked as Director of Alternative Education with the district staff and, in particular, Jim Fry and a steering committee of his teachers at Waterford Kettering High School. The staff had already completed an

¹ Alvin Toffler. "The World Our Children May Inherit." Anaheim, California: Address presented to the Annual Conference of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, March 1974.

² Chandos Reid Rice. "Looking Into the Future Out of the Past." Anaheim, California: Address presented to the Annual Conference of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, March 1974.

Figure 1. A Process Model*



initial needs assessment and identified a need for curriculum change; in this case, alternative programs. The steering committee had begun to gather data relevant to the need and to plan a workshop. As we began this planning, the sequence of events or activities that became the process model started to evolve. These activities formed the agenda for the workshop.

I would like to share this process with you because it takes into account some of what has been discussed in this article. It should not be seen as inflexible, static, or it-must-be-done-this-way. In fact, I am somewhat hesitant to use the terminology "process model." The word model has too often come to mean *the way*. Rather, this was a helpful guide to change. The process model³ we used is as follows:

1. *Data analysis.* We had gathered data suggestive of student needs, present and future. We used (a) data comparing student and staff attitudes toward the school program, test results, and postgraduation and dropout studies to get at present needs.

To identify (b) future needs, we did an intensive session including simulations and media presentations on possible and probable futures in a number of fields including education. Staff members were asked to be experts, and through use of a Delphi, they selected preferable futures.

These data were analyzed as the staff members thought through what they said about program, needs, attitudes, and differences of opinion and perception. Areas of value conflict were identified from the attitudinal surveys. Information from futurists stretched thinking beyond the present.

Two other interesting means to identify present and future students' needs may be suggested. At Crescent Lake Elementary School, Pat Knudsen and her staff⁴ have developed a student goal setting project. Students write their goals for the year, how they will attain and evaluate them. The goals reflect their needs and are guides to possible program changes.

The other means to identify needs was used in an alternatives planning session. An instrument to assess the hidden curriculum⁵ had been administered to staff and students of a secondary school. The data revealed staff and student perceptions of the emphasis on stated and unstated goals of the school. It was a revealing and challenging need identifier.

2. *Discrepancy analysis.* The staff began to consider and identify discrepancies between present and future student needs and current educational practices as shown by the data. Analysis of these discrepancies suggested needed changes in program, methods, and attitude, and gave priority to areas of need. It also served to focus attention on differences of opinion and points of conflict between staff members that had to be addressed: (a) differences in student and staff attitudes about programs, needs, and (b) differences between what futurists saw and present direction.

3. *Conflict resolution.* There are going to be differences and conflicts in staff viewpoint that can hinder change. These had been identified in the first two phases of the process. There was some disbelief of data and unwillingness to accept student input or opinions of peers. By using values clarifying strategies, support groups focused on acceptant listening and questioning, and other interaction and discussion strategies, we

³"A Process Model for Alternative Education." Waterford, Michigan: Waterford School District, 1974. Document developed by Lois Jerry Blanchard for an ESEA, Title IV-C project.

⁴"Student Goals-Learning Options." Waterford, Michigan: Waterford School District, 1977. Document developed by the Crescent Lake Staff.

⁵Lois Jerry Blanchard. "The Values of the School: A Study of Student and Staff Perceptions of the Goals of the School and the Hidden Curriculum." Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University, 1977. Unpublished doctoral dissertation.

attempted to create a nonthreatening atmosphere for dealing with conflict. Not all conflict was resolved. However, our purpose was to deal openly with conflict in order to resolve as many differences as possible and to neutralize others so that they would not hinder working together toward change.

4. *Synthesis* → *Needs Assessment*. The staff members needed time at this point to synthesize what they had learned from the data and discrepancy analysis, and to think through and define what this information said in terms of the curriculum need. This resulted in adding to, changing, and modifying their initial needs assessment in terms of the knowledge and perceptions they had gained through their involvement in the first three phases of the process model.

5. *Brainstorming/Delphi*. The staff members knew the needs, had considered data, and had dealt with conflict. Now they were encouraged to dream and suggest "blue sky" program ideas that would get at the curriculum need and reference the information they had gained about student, self, others, and future.

We used brainstorming and force field. By using a Delphi, the staff selected and shared preferable educational futures. This was a challenging and exciting time and resulted in suggested alternatives to get at the curriculum need.

6. *Selection/Commitment to Program*. The staff was asked to select a program idea or ideas from the brainstorming session that they would commit themselves to developing. Groups were formed, most of them interdisciplinary.

7. *Planning* → *Reference*. At this stage of the process, reference documents, guidelines, or parameters to be used in continued planning were identified. For example, the staff members were asked to reference the Waterford Model for Instructional Planning in developing objectives, ways to get at those objectives, and evaluation systems.

It is at this point in planning that some guidelines may be suggested to give purpose and direction like the "timeless" principles ASCD has stood for over the years. At the annual conference, Elizabeth Randolph described these as: (a) a commitment to maximize human potential, (b)

humanness in the learning environment, and (c) a balanced curriculum.⁶

I have described just one process. It has worked for us. It must be remembered that models don't make curriculum; people do. What works for one group may not work for another. Changes will be the result of what each group puts in: data, perceptions, attitudes, knowledge.

The supervisor attempting to create a climate for change needs to assess the philosophy inherent in the model chosen for use. How does it provide for: (a) the way the supervisor works with people, (b) the way decisions are made, and (c) the way involvement ensures "buying in to decisions." Don't lock yourself into a model unless you can live with it. This one called for the supervisor to (a) trust other people's answers, and (b) shift in and out of many roles: participant, challenger, listener, leader, questioner, process, person, and recorder. It does not allow for over-supervision or answer giving.

Assess this model, your style, your staff, or students. Borrow and modify, or develop your own. James Macdonald has written that, "... staff developers are going to have to get their imagination going about what the present really is and to deal with it, not in terms of the past but with some hope for what kind of future they want. I think we must commit ourselves to a future."⁷ Then we may be ready for boys who live in a world where little piggies go disco dancing. [F]

⁶ Elizabeth Randolph. "Maximizing Human Potential." San Francisco, California: Address presented to the Annual Conference of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, March 1978.

⁷ James B. Macdonald. "Scene and Context: American Society Today." Charles W. Beegle and Roy A. Edelfelt, editors. *Staff Development: Staff Liberation*. Washington, D.C.: ASCD, 1977. p. 13.



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