Fenwick W. English

Management Practice as a Key to Curriculum Leadership

Management of the curriculum requires a clear statement of mission, control of resources, and feedback about results.

Management is the science of leadership. It refers to a set of concepts and methods that, when recognized and implemented, enable most leaders to increase their effectiveness. Without management, even great leadership is reduced in its magnitude, because elements of that leadership pattern are not replicable by subsequent organizational generations. Without the capacity of replicability, it is difficult to learn from mistakes. Educational leaders are therefore prone to make the same error each time a similar problem is encountered. While leadership may come and go, management practice remains stable. Long-range school system improvement is therefore a process of impacting its basic management practice.

The Curriculum Functions of Management

Management has three primary functions in school system curriculum development. The first is to establish the mission of the school system in terms that are assessable and replicable. The second is to effectively and efficiently configure

the resources of the system to accomplish the mission. The third is to use feedback obtained to make adjustments in order to keep the mission within agreed-upon costs.

The purpose of a school system's curriculum is to indicate what results (pupil learning) are desired, as well as what content will be taught. As such, curriculum deals with scarce resources in much the same manner as a budget. The curriculum is a response to the limited formal schooling *time* available for learning to occur, and the almost limitless supply of information or content that could be included in any school program. In addition, the curriculum is an *organizational response* to reduce the level of *variance* in both content and time, laterally (among the same grade levels) and horizontally (across grades). This has been the historic function of the curriculum guide.

The Manageable Elements of Curriculum

School curriculum contains at least three common and manageable elements. For something to be manageable it must be capable of being identified and isolated, and it must be responsive to directions. The first manageable element is a *curriculum boundary*, which serves as the criterion for making inclusion/exclusion content-related decisions. The second element is the planned level of *repetition*, or time allocation, of selected content. The third element is *sequence* of content.[1] A curriculum sequence is a statement of the manner in which *tasks* are to be introduced or arrayed within given time segments.

The curriculum is designed to improve upon randomness or chance that desired and/or required learning will occur. The curriculum is a causative agent. It is a purposive tool. It also is the school system's major vehicle to achieve some economy of scale in the acquisition and use of its resources. It is the linkage between teaching and learning from the system's perspective.

There are two kinds of curriculum in the schools—the one in the curriculum guide and the one in the classroom when the teacher shuts the door. They are not always the same. If the learner never encounters the curriculum in the guide, then all of its balance, logic, and sequence make little difference. For the learner, the real curriculum is the one in the classroom that is experienced via teaching. If the teacher ignores the curriculum guide, or if the guide is so vague as to permit many equally valid interpretations of the teaching that is desired, the curriculum may have both a high task or content variance, and a high time variance. *Time on task* represents the two most important variables with which a curriculum must deal. High levels of variance of task and/or time may mean the curriculum is not an effective organizational focusing tool for the work of those in the schools. The outcome may be high levels of content saturation accompanied by pupil boredom, and/or critical gaps in student learning because the curriculum is not being taught. It may also portend the mismanagement of the school system's scarce resources.

Barriers That Impede Effective Curriculum Management

There are in most school systems today a number of common traditions and assumptions that block effective management of the curriculum. I will review them according to how they influence the performance of the primary functions of curriculum management.

Mission

One factor preventing effective curriculum management is that schools do not state their missions in specific terms. The arguments or assumptions most commonly blocking mission specificity are those that center around measurement, consensus regarding the goals or ends of education, and those that pertain to the ideology of management being used in education.

The argument regarding measurement is that all of the aims of education cannot be measured, leaving educators and citizens only with those that are most easily measured, that is, concrete bits of information. Such an emphasis, it is argued, leads to rote memory and pupil regurgitation. The measurement debate is mostly an educator hangup. Once measurement is broadly defined as including all four scales of measurement,

[1] George J. Posner and Kenneth A. Strike. "A Categorization Scheme for Principles of Sequencing Content." *Review of Educational Research* 46(4):665-90; Fall 1976.

including the nominal, ordinal, ratio, and interval scales, all of the aims of schools can be measured.[2] While it is true that creativity, love, curiosity, and other "affective goals" cannot be measured on a ratio or interval scale, they can be assessed on a nominal or ordinal scale. Measurement is not an absolute process. It varies with the thing being measured.

The area of consensus regarding educational goals or outcomes is a second common problem. While a heterogeneous society does indeed possess conflicting goals for its institutions, there are also areas of broad agreement. Ten years of the Gallup Polls in education reveal a rather remarkable record of public consensus about what the schools should do and be. Educators tend to have more problems than citizens since they are personally linked to jobs that support such purposes or goals. In times of program and organizational retrenchment, job security and internal system politics have often clouded a rational discussion by educators about the outcomes of education.

There are those who find the language of management unduly restrictive, for they regard specificity as a kind of vice. They argue that if the outcomes of education become too specific, they are trivialized. What they apparently won't admit is that specificity may reveal that we have no means to fulfill the expectations of our publics for the students we must educate. In simple words, we do not know how we can do any better job than we are now doing.[3]

The continuing dodge into ambiguity by some educators merely exacerbates the problem public education is now encountering with maintaining a modicum of public confidence. Rather than face and resolve the problem of standards and testing, we are prone to attack the symbols of our discomfort. Fuzzy language based on romantic notions of organic child development requires no professionals. It certainly requires no curriculum. Effective results in a nonsystem are merely a combination of good fortune, genetic endowment, benevolent situations, and benign intervention.

Resources

A second barrier to curriculum management is failure to configure resources effectively and efficiently. Arguments used to defend current practice pertain to a school unit-based management model of curriculum development and coordination, and the lack of absolute verification of the relationship between teaching and learning.

School system curriculum management has proven to be difficult and illusive. Some critics and educators have all but given up on even trying to improve education by dealing with the system as a whole.[4] They apparently have accepted the myth that a nonsystem is preferable.

A school system is the sum total of its independent parts. The reason a system organization is created is to ensure a greater level of control over the separate and independent parts. By so doing, greater effectiveness and efficiency is achieved by combining resources. Random responses that do not lead to better results can be eliminated or reduced. A curriculum is an optimizing process in this respect.

Most school systems are not systems at all. They do not respond holistically. It is impossible to move them with directions that mean shifts in content or procedure very rapidly, if at all. Such systems are confederations of classrooms strung together like beads around graded schools held together very loosely by curriculum prescriptions, traditional nostrums and practice, word of mouth, vague board of education policy pronouncements, union contractual clauses, and systemwide tests.

For any organization to be classified as a system, it must have a clear unambiguous mission, a purposive design to attain the mission, and possess the ability to issue directions to change its sum aggregate behavior based upon feedback. Unless a school system, as a system, can change its aggregrate behavior, no improvement is possible overall. Sympathetic teaching is not enough. A system that cannot respond as a system cannot be controlled. It is out of control. Such systems are educationally bankrupt.

[2] See: Fenwick W. English and Roger Kaufman. *Needs Assessment: A Focus for Curriculum Development.* Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1975. p. 7.

[3] See: Nancy Hicks. "Public Education: What's Happening to the Children?" *Black Enterprise* 9(2):32; September 1978.

[4] William Raspberry. "What? Teaching Writing?" *Washington Post*, September 6, 1978.

The extreme decentralization of curricular practice in most school systems today stands as a major barrier to any improvement of system curriculum. A curriculum guide provides a set of references for the teacher. It establishes the basic parameters of the content. Yet the current range of content and time options open to teachers in such systems introduces the possibility of such extreme variances occurring as to negate potential instructional effectiveness, in addition to assuming significant resource *diseconomies*.[5] The current state of curriculum management is a kind of *tacit anarchy*. To defend such practice as the "best" of all possible alternatives is to abandon the purpose of a system and to excuse the current mode of management from a serious and sustained search for improvement. Schools are not school systems.

The curriculum assumes a viable and positive relationship between teaching and learning. While a "proven" relationship between the two has not yet been developed in the confines of a research model,[6] the pragmatic relationship in the schooling context is undeniable.

> Teaching is not an end in itself; the facilitation of learning is the only proper end of teaching. Even though the failure of pupils to learn does not necessarily indict the competence of the teacher, learning is still the only feasible measure of teaching merit.[7]

The analysis of the effective and efficient deployment of resources to attain a specific mission is always a relative one, never an absolute calculation. To require a "proven" relationship between the two before the management process can be applied is to jeopardize the existence of schools, public or private, since virtually all activities are riveted to this one. This would include collective bargaining agreements with teachers and their unions. Teacher salaries and fringe benefits are assumed to make a difference in the educational process. It seems reasonable that management would be able to make use of the same assumption.

Feedback

A third way schools fail to practice curriculum management is to neglect systematic use of feedback. The current dialogue and debate regarding the efficacy of testing within the educational profession has neither dimmed public endorsement of tests, nor put a stop to the larger minimum competency movement of some 35 states.[8] Tests can provide useful information about the extent to which some objectives of a school system have been attained by students. They can serve a management function without punitive or negative consequences occurring to students who do not perform well on them.[9] Without some indication of results in terms of student learning, school systems have precious little information upon which to correct their aggregate behavior as a system.

Mission statements and tests such as those found in minimum competency legislation will not by themselves raise learning in the schools. But standards in the form of objectives can bring about some improvement in the ways schools deliver their services as a system. Test results are useful only to the extent that they serve as indicators, but they can spur a school system to change direction and thereby accomplish an increasing array of purposes.

Opponents of the ideology of management usually cite Raymond Callahan's classic school administration exposé, *The Cult of Efficiency*,[10] as evidence against current efforts to utilize management thinking in education. Callahan's review of the slavish application of techniques concerned only with reducing costs in schools misses the boat with the accountability and minimum com-

[5] Fenwick W. English. *Quality Control in Curriculum Development*. Arlington, Virginia: American Association of School Administrators, 1978. 62 pp.

[6] David C. Berliner. "Impediments to the Study of Teacher Effectiveness." *Journal of Teacher Education* 27 (1):5-17; Spring 1976.

[7] David Ausubel. "A Cognitive-Structure Theory of School Learning." In: L. Siegel, editor. *Instruction: Some Contemporary Viewpoints*. San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company, 1967. p. 212.

[8] For a review of some states and city school systems using minimum competencies, see: William Grant. "Measuring How Much High School Students Know." *Detroit Free Press*, July 23, 1978.

[9] Frank L. Steeves and Fenwick W. English. *Secondary Curriculum for a Changing World*. Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill, 1978.

[10] Raymond E. Callahan. *Education and the Cult of Efficiency: A Study of the Social Forces That Have Shaped the Administration of the Public Schools*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962.

petency legislation.[11] Citizens and legislators today are concerned about results as well as costs. It is possible to construct cheap educational programs *without* being effective. This was Callahan's point, but it is often incorrectly applied to contemporary problems.

Management today is first concerned with results, and particularly those peculiar to the enterprise of education. Schools are not factories. A study of school management would reveal that many of the solutions educators have historically selected and implemented are those that have limited schools from becoming more humane places.[12] Effective application of management practice would be to identify poor practices and eliminate those that are contradictory to the results desired. If humane schools are a prerequisite then they are too important to be left to chance. The implementation of sound management practice ensures that schools improve considerably upon good fortune as the only agent of quality control.[13]

There can be no denying that leadership is required for management practice to be improved. Long-range effectiveness and efficiency of school systems must depend upon improvement of management to impact organizational behavior. While management may not be charismatic, it is within the process of institutionalization of better and more effective curriculum practice that any kind of sustained aggregate improvement or "deep change" will take place. The cornerstone of effective management moves beyond an acceptance of serendipity as a measure of adequacy.

[11] See: Leon Lessinger. "Wiles and Lessinger Clash on Effectiveness/Efficiency." *AASA Professor* 1(4):2-5; Fall 1978.

[12] Fenwick W. English. "Matrix Management in Education: Breaking Down School Bureaucracy." *Educational Technology* 17(1):19-26; January 1977.

[13] Fenwick W. English. "What's Ahead in Curriculum?" *AASA School Administrator* 35(11):18-19; December 1978.

Fenwick W. English is a Manager with Peat, Marwick, Mitchell and Co., Washington, D.C.

Staff Development: Staff Liberation

Charles W. Beegle and Roy A. Edelfelt, editors
$6.50 (611-77106)

This publication presents a variety of ways of conceptualizing and organizing the staff improvement function, emphasizing the "liberation" and self-growth of individuals.

The School's Role as Moral Authority

R. Freeman Butts, Donald Peckenpaugh, and Howard Kirschenbaum
$4.50 (611-77110)

Companion essays on moral education analyze a number of contradictory arguments regarding values education, contrast alternative teaching strategies, and review a number of ongoing programs.

Name_____

Street_____

City_____ State_____ Zip_____

No. of Copies

____ **Staff Development: Staff Liberation** (611-77106, $6.50, 124 pp., 1977)

____ **The School's Role as Moral Authority** (611-77110, $4.50, 80 pp., 1977)

Enclosed is my check payable to ASCD ☐
Please bill me ☐

Postage and handling extra on all billed orders. All orders totaling $10.00 or less must be prepaid by cash, check, or money order. Orders from institutions and businesses must be on an official purchase order form. Discounts on orders of the same title to a single address: 10-49 copies, 10%; 50 or more copies, 15%.

Return to:

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development—Box 342
1701 K St., N.W., Suite 1100
Washington, D.C. 20006

Copyright © 1979 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.