

# Three Principals Discuss the Principal's Leadership Role



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## Can Principals Lead in Curriculum Development?

Allan Vann

The fact that many principals neglect their responsibilities as leaders in curriculum development is well documented by virtually every major study of the elementary school principalship.<sup>1</sup> These same studies also report, however, that most principals would prefer to devote much more time to curriculum development. What prevents them from doing it?

A study I conducted<sup>2</sup> seems to refute reasons traditionally given by principals. They usually say their time is consumed by relatively unimportant administrative and clerical duties; that if only they had more help with these routine tasks, they would spend more time on curriculum development. I found, however, that the availability of administrative and clerical assistance, and even the availability of help for curriculum develop-

<sup>1</sup> See: Department of Elementary School Principals. *The Elementary School Principalship in 1968 . . . A Research Study*. Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1968; Neil Gross and Robert Herriot. *Staff Leadership in Public Schools: A Sociological Inquiry*. New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1965; John M. Foskett. *The Normative World of the Elementary School Principal*. Eugene, Oregon: Center for the Advanced Study of Educational Administration, University of Oregon, 1967; John I. Goodlad et al. *Behind the Classroom Door*. Worthington, Ohio: Charles A. Jones Publishing Co., 1970; Gerald Becker et al. *Elementary Principals and Their Schools: Beacons of Brilliance and Potholes of Pestilence*. Eugene, Oregon: Center for the Advanced Study of Educational Administration, University of Oregon, 1971.

<sup>2</sup> A. S. Vann. "Relationships Between Selected Variables and the Amount of Time Devoted to Curriculum Development by Elementary School Principals." Doctoral dissertation, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1978. This study had a sample of 50 principals, all located in one suburban county in New York.

ment, was not significantly related to the amount of time devoted to curriculum.

Another complaint frequently cited by principals is that they are not granted enough autonomy in their role as instructional leader. I found no significant relationships between the amount of time devoted to curriculum development and the principal's autonomy in staff selection, budget preparation, instructional material selection, and autonomy in curriculum development itself.

What about graduate preparation? It was not significantly related to the principal's time commitment to curriculum development either, but the study did reveal two strong associations. Of those eight principals "most committed" to curriculum development (spending an average of 16 percent or more of their time on this function in a workweek), 100 percent reported having at least six credit-hours of coursework in curriculum development; of those 15 principals "least committed" to curriculum development (spending 0-5 percent of their weekly time on this function), only 40 percent reported having had at least six credit-hours.

A similar contrast between most and least committed principals was found when principals were asked to report on how adequately their graduate coursework had prepared them to deal with their curriculum development function: 100 percent of those principals most committed, compared to 67 percent of those least committed, reported such coursework as having been at least adequate.

Only one variable tested in the study was found to be significantly related to the amount of time devoted to curriculum development by elementary school principals: the principal's perception of the importance of the function of curriculum development to central office superiors.

Principals' own views on the importance of curriculum development were *not* significantly related to the time factor; only their perceptions of their superiors' views were. Principals allocated their time to virtually all functions according to the priority of those functions they perceived to be held by their superiors. It can be suggested, therefore, that principals devote little time to curriculum development because they perceive curriculum development to be a relatively low priority of their superiors.

### What Should Be Done?

If these findings are generalizable on a wider scale, graduate schools of education and state departments of education should reexamine the preparation and certification requirements of would-be principals. Greater attention should be given to training future principals in the area of curriculum development.

The major implication of the study, however, is the need to focus greater attention on the relationship between the principal and his/her superiors in the central office. Principals see themselves in role-conflict situations; they wish to act as instructional leaders, but are evaluated by superiors who appear to set priorities on non-instructional tasks.



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## Principal as an Instructional Leader

Patricia B. Novotney

Principals who are instructional leaders have several things in common. First, they *believe* that instruction is important. Otherwise they would immerse themselves in administrative duties that could be capably performed by others.

Second, they *analyze* their own commitment, asking themselves: When did I last attend a cur-

riculum conference? How many curriculum journals do I read? How frequently do instructional items appear on staff meeting agendas?

Third, they *act*. Instructional leadership requires ideas, plans, techniques—that must be diverse enough to match the needs of teachers who differ in their backgrounds, abilities, and motives.

Fourth, they *persist*. Principals who are sharp instructional leaders stick to the task no matter what. That requires stamina and dedication. It also requires clarity. Setting realistic expectancies and communicating them clearly are essential.

It is no doubt obvious that I view instructional leadership as a top priority for principals. To me, leadership means setting the pace and moving forward. In some cases, it requires risk-taking. In all cases it requires appropriate timing and sensitivity.



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## Shared Decision Making—A Must!

**Robert E. Knaub**

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I have always felt that if teachers were given three key elements—time, information, and shared decision making—the cumulative effect of teachers and the principal working together would be a positive force. Power is not finite; if properly shared, it grows so that everyone has more.

According to Bachman and Tannenbaum<sup>1</sup> teacher job satisfaction is linked to teachers feeling good about their ability to control their working environment and to have input in building decisions. Morale and teaching performance drop when teachers feel unable to effect change.

The model of leadership that has worked for us is based on involvement of an Instructional Committee. The process we follow includes:

- Step 1. Parents, staff members, and students are surveyed about school goals (needs assessment).
- Step 2. A building committee analyzes data and develops tentative goals for the building.
- Step 3. Staff members and a committee of parents approve the building goals.
- Step 4. The Instructional Committee makes a plan to accomplish the goals and puts the plan into action.
- Step 5. Some type of evaluation is done each year to see if the goals have been met.

The Instructional Committee oversees the entire process. Composed of the principal, team leaders, and other elected or selected staff members recognized for their leadership, the committee has many responsibilities. Members examine the goals generated by the needs assessment and deter-

mine: (a) how the new goals relate to the present program; (b) how they relate to the instructional, equipment, and staff development budgets; (c) which goals have higher priority; (d) what program activities are needed; and (e) in what way the program will be evaluated.

If some goals have been mandated by the school district, they may have to be acted on first. With lid bills, reduced enrollments, and mandated programs, it might not be possible to implement some of the goals during the first year or two. The committee and the principal need to communicate these special problems to the entire staff.

The job of educating our young people is becoming more difficult. In order to create the best conditions for educating them, it is necessary for principals and teachers to exchange ideas, set priorities, and share in decision making.

<sup>1</sup>Jerald G. Bachman and Arnold S. Tannenbaum. "The Control-Satisfaction Relationship Across Varied Areas of Experience." In: Arnold S. Tannenbaum, editor. *Control in Organizations*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1968. pp. 241-49.



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