

Translating the Vision into Reality in California Schools

The reformers' vision for students is echoing throughout the educational system, as an integrative approach to curriculum planning and staff development creates broader, more complex roles for administrators and teachers.

Educators throughout California have come together in various forums over the past few years to create a vision to guide reform efforts in the state. They have been defining what they want to accomplish with students and imagining how that vision might look in the classroom. Now the spotlight turns to the local level. How can other teachers, staff developers, and administrators participate in the process so that they embrace it with the same degree of enthusiasm as those who were the original state-level participants in planning?

This effort requires a new approach to curriculum planning and staff development, one in which the two processes are treated as interactive, interdependent activities to be engaged in simultaneously. Here we outline what needs to be done if educators are to propel the substance of educational reform beyond state and district policy initiatives into classrooms in a way that will positively affect both teachers and students.

Establishing a Vision to Guide the Movement

In California the reform strategy is curriculum driven. Within this strategy, conceived and directed by State Superintendent of Public Instruction Bill Honig, groups of local leaders and highly regarded practitioners—outstanding teachers, administrators, staff developers, and subject area specialists selected from a group nominated by districts, county offices, and institutions of higher education—have met regularly to describe what they want for California students. Facilitated by state department of education staff, these various committees have published "Curriculum Frameworks" and "Model Curriculum Standards" in science, math, English/language arts, history/social science, foreign language, and fine arts.

These curriculum documents are based on a broad definition of curriculum, one reaching beyond the specification of content knowledge, skills, and attitudes. They recommend a

comprehensive plan for instruction in each subject area, including lesson strategies, learning activities, instructional materials, and assessment measures. The documents are meant to become a basis of discussion and planning, one of the resources local school districts use as they design the elements of curriculum and align them with one another.

As a result, a vision of excellence for California schools has emerged in which all students—regardless of incoming level of performance—experience a common core curriculum that provides a sound academic background and promotes literacy in the various disciplines. In that curriculum, content and skill development go hand in hand. For instance, students develop writing skills while commenting on their own life experiences and on what they are learning in their study of literature, science, history, fine arts, and other subjects. Similarly, students learn to read as they analyze, experiment with, and enjoy children's

literature. The various disciplines are also integrated, so that students may, for example, study literature, history/social science, and language arts together. Further, recognizing that each new generation of students develops a set of values within its own peer culture, the curriculum is designed to foster and infuse a strong sense of traditional values into that process.

Moreover, students learn to apply the skills and concepts from their academic study to problems of particular interest to them. This means carrying out activities that require them to delve deeper, project ahead, formulate recommendations, and communicate effectively with an audience.

Bringing Local Leaders into the Process

The state department is sharing this vision with local leaders and enlisting their help in refining and promoting it through the California School Leadership Academy's three-year, 45-day (15 days per year) training for school administrators. This program, delivered through regional Administrative Training Centers (ATCs), consists of a sequenced set of 15 modules on instructional leadership. In the curriculum module, for example, once participants have clarified the basic intent of the reform movement and considered what it would mean within a discipline they know well, they turn to the ques-

tion of how a teacher might translate the new ideas into classroom practice. Over 3,000 school administrators throughout the state are now progressing through the sequence of training modules.

ATC participants experiment with a procedure for designing a classroom curriculum plan aimed at enabling students to apply information, skills, and concepts to real life situations. Figure 1 presents a process for creating such a plan by expanding an existing history course. In this example, students are carrying out a "benchmark" research project, but in other disciplines, as in fine arts, for example, where students might be attending, critiquing, and responding creatively to an artistic performance, the term *activity* is more appropriate. Although a single-subject example is provided here for clarity, culminating activities usually integrate various disciplines. Once ATC participants experiment with this approach, they begin to see its benefits and the organizational changes needed to help teachers translate it into classroom practice. Some schools in California are being restructured to promote this interdisciplinary approach (see California State Department of Education 1987).

Grouped according to subject areas of their choice, ATC participants draft literacy statements and outline benchmark activities/projects for a hypothetical classroom. They also present visual illustrations of their plans to the entire group. As they carry out this short-term project and others within the workshop, the facilitator demonstrates how to manage and guide students during active periods in the classroom. Experiencing active involvement and seeing how the facilitator keeps things running smoothly provide participants with a powerful example of how a teacher can organize and manage the active classroom envisioned by reformers.

As they create curriculum plans, participants are encouraged to view the new approach as an expansion of what teachers are already doing. For instance, in addition to textbooks, students now also draw from primary source materials, including historical

1. **Define literacy in the discipline.** This statement, which will serve as the long-term goal for schooling, might read as follows:

A person literate in history/social science is able to apply the lessons from the past to a present situation, make recommendations tempered with reasoned moral and ethical judgments, and communicate them effectively to others.

2. **Describe "performance expectations" for students.** Outline the type of activity or project appropriate for students at the end of the course. This description, which will serve as evidence that students are making progress toward the long-term goal, reflects the literacy statement but is more specific, allowing students and teachers the latitude to design projects based on individual needs, strengths, and interests. Performance expectations for a project in this example might state that students should be able to:

- select a contemporary issue (political, social, environmental) of specific interest to them;
- research circumstances and events surrounding that issue;
- relate findings to a similar past event;
- conduct opinion surveys at home, at school, or in the community, gathering arguments for what should be done;
- formulate recommendations and get feedback from an expert in the field (government official, local businessperson, scientist);
- write a report that describes the project and explains recommendations in light of moral and ethical considerations;
- present the report orally to the appropriate audience (local health or planning department, school board, business executive, small group of students) using charts, graphs, videotapes, skits, and so on.

3. **Determine skills and concepts needed.** List what students must be able to do in order to carry out the project (e.g., conduct opinion surveys, carry out library research, create visuals, give oral presentations).

4. **Expand existing topics to include "benchmark" projects.** Outline a project students might carry out at the end of each major topic in the course. These projects allow students to expand on part of the content just studied, thereby developing a few of the skills and concepts needed for the end-of-year project.

For instance, at the end of the first major topic, students might conduct library research on the probable cause and effect of an event just studied, interview an adult to gain more background, and create a timeline showing what they learned, indicating what kinds of interventions might have changed the outcome. After studying the second major topic, they might research a current issue similar to one just covered, conduct opinion surveys concerning what action should be taken, and present their results using visuals.

As the year progresses, the tasks students are expected to do at the end of each unit increase in complexity, so that by the end of the year or course, they will be able to carry out relatively sophisticated projects (See Kierstead 1985 for additional information).

Fig. 1. Designing a Yearlong Classroom Curriculum Plan for History/Social Science

records, current newspapers and news magazines, documentaries, personal interviews, and so forth. In addition to teacher-directed lessons, students carry out independent research and

provide information for one another in small cooperative learning groups. Similarly, in addition to paper-and-pencil tests, benchmark activities/projects are a second means of assess-

ment. They serve as evidence of students' ability to apply learning in meaningful ways, a database for assessing student achievement that cannot be measured by machine-scorable

Phase I: Shaping a District Vision to Guide the Reform. In a small group, teachers and principals develop a common vision of the district reform and begin to see themselves as valued members of a team effort.

- Participants learn about the intent of the reform through cooperative learning techniques in which they read and discuss articles and district and state documents about the reform in general and its impact on specific disciplines.
- Participants begin to shape a mental image of what they want to accomplish with students and how this might look in the various disciplines.
- Participants break into subgroups to draft performance expectations for the major segments of schooling (as outlined in steps 1 and 2 of fig. 1). Those from the middle grades describe the type of culminating activity/project appropriate for graduating 8th graders, primary teachers describe one for exiting 3rd graders, and so on.
- District personnel review the performance expectations for grades 3, 6, 9, and 12 and return them to the group with suggestions for modification. This process is repeated until agreement is reached.

Phase II: Translating the Vision into Operational Plans. Once performance expectations are agreed upon for the major segments of schooling, participants begin long-range curriculum plans.

- The subgroups break down further to familiarize themselves with the design procedure shown in Figure 1—and to modify it for their subjects. Each subgroup outlines one hypothetical year-long plan.
- After sharing and critiquing those plans, the subgroups break down further. Individual teachers, or small groups teaching the same grade or course, outline benchmark activities/projects within a classroom plan for one of the subjects they teach.
- These plans, which will be their flexible guides for beginning Phase III, include a brief sketch of the sequence of events during the first unit: how they will introduce and develop content, skills, and concepts leading up to the first benchmark activity/project, and how they will assess learning. (Some principals may elect to leave the sessions in which teachers are developing these detailed plans.)
- Once plans have been outlined and the subgroups have reviewed and critiqued them, the entire group reconvenes to compare a few examples from each subgroup.
- Next, participants individually consider what "first steps" they could take to translate their curriculum plans into practice. Principals and teachers from the same school then work together to decide where to begin.
- The entire group decides on a game plan for how they will work together over the coming months. Ideally, the sessions in Phases I and II have been conducted during the summer. Now they set the schedule for a series of working sessions that will bring them all back together every three weeks or so during the school year. They establish the time and agenda for the first session.

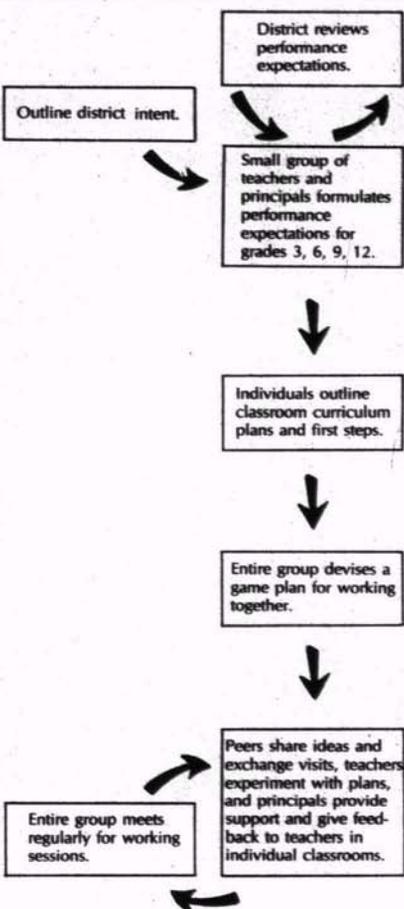
Phase III: Experimenting with the Plans.

- As teachers experiment with ways to modify classroom practices and principals develop ways to support them, the group meets regularly to compare notes and devise new strategies.
- They may call on specialists on topics such as developing lessons for a particular subject, establishing cooperative learning groups, and observing and giving feedback to teachers in the classroom.
- The facilitator may present additional information to expand participants' understanding of less obvious factors that may affect teachers and students, such as the effects of teacher expectations, of tracking, and so on.
- Teachers begin visiting one another's classrooms between working sessions to exchange ideas and provide feedback for one another.
- Principals exchange school visits to share ideas for school-level strategies for supporting teachers and for giving them feedback in their classrooms.

As the group proceeds, members will continuously modify their original plans so that curriculum planning and staff development are being carried out simultaneously. (See Mohlman et al. 1982 for a description of a basic process for structuring group activities during Phase III.)

Fig. 2. A Three-Phase Process for District Reform

Adapted from: Kienstead, J. "Is This Just Another Swing of the Pendulum?" in *Claremont Reading Conference, Fifty-First Yearbook*, edited by Malcolm Douglass. Claremont, Calif.: California School Leadership Academy, 1987.



tests. Further, by establishing such performance expectations; devising ways to assess their quality; and then collecting, quantifying, and publishing the data, a district can generate support for broadening students' learning experiences.

Viewing the reform movement as a process of expansion and having participants experience techniques for accomplishing that expansion usually generates enthusiasm. Once administrators feel more comfortable about moving their schools in this direction, the next step is to bring teachers into the effort.

Combining Curriculum Planning and Staff Development

Traditional approaches to curriculum planning and to staff development treat the two as separate enterprises, and the procedure flows in one direction. First, the district outlines the basic intent of the reform effort to teacher and administrator representatives on a curriculum planning committee. Second, the committee defines new directions, selects instructional materials, and advises on inservice training needs. Working through this process, committee members become knowledgeable and committed.

Educators not on the committee, however, are left relatively untouched. Administrators later learn about the new district curriculum, and teachers receive appropriate training. For many, though, the information sessions or training they receive are not enough to capture their interest and imagination, not enough to cause them to change the way they see themselves as teachers and administrators, and thus not enough to prompt them to make substantive change. They return to their schools and classrooms, put committee recommendations on the shelf, and continue their work in much the same way as before. Those who do embrace the new ideas return to their posts with the best of intentions; but, with no follow-up to remind them and no support as they attempt to work out the changes, most of them eventually go back to business as usual.

With this approach, it is unrealistic to expect any significant changes, because those who must spend time and energy making those changes are not drawn into the process in a substantive way. This is a point educational leaders cannot afford to overlook. A new vision for students means a new role for teachers; and to assume that new role, teachers will first have to create a clear picture of what it would be like to act differently in the classroom and a new set of expectations for themselves. Teachers, then, must be involved in a sustained effort—one designed in such a way that they fully understand and endorse the intent of the reform—and they must be given the long-term support they need to work it out.

To be willing to change the way they run their classrooms, teachers need to "fall in love" with the idea of being a new kind of educator and begin to search out for themselves ways to make it happen. Then their quest becomes not how to conform to district directives but how to become that new kind of teacher. For many teachers, a changed view of their role will require a dramatic shift in their thinking. They have been led to see themselves as purveyors of knowledge, drum masters marching students through prescribed materials. They have been encouraged to see their task as limited to transferring facts and information to students and then guiding them through exercises designed to make that new learning "stick."

Teachers need to be released from this restricted view. With the new vision for students, the teacher's task is broader and more complex. Teachers will still be helping students acquire a common set of facts, information, and specific skills. So the traditional teaching methods they are accustomed to will still be useful to them—at times. But they will also need to guide students as they pause periodically and branch out to explore deeper meanings, follow their own investigative leads, and ultimately attempt to devise effective and humane ways to deal with society's problems. No textbook or set of preplanned lessons alone can structure such a dynamic approach.

To carry out such a role means creating rich and varied learning experiences tailored to meet individual students' needs, strengths, and interests. Only by defining the vision in operational terms, beginning to see themselves carrying out a different role, and rolling up their sleeves to make it happen will teachers and administrators fully understand and embrace school reforms. Only by struggling together will they develop the support system needed to sustain their efforts.

Freeing teachers to be creative, however, does not mean abandoning them to figure out everything on their own; it means giving them time to wrestle with the ideas underlying the reform movement and to experiment with strategies so that they can pick and choose, modify and adapt, or devise new ones. It means giving them planning time to structure ways to teach and opportunities to collaborate with peers who are also experimenting with new approaches. It means encouraging teachers to become curriculum developers in action and transforming staff development into a process that supports them in that role.

In this approach, administrators guide and support teachers through the developmental process. So they need the same basic training experiences as teachers and the same opportunities to interact with peers. And all need moral support, the reassurance that those around them recognize that this will be a trial-and-error process. They need to know they will not be blamed when they hit a snag nor criticized for not having all the answers ahead of time; rather, those around them will recognize the complexity of their task and will stand behind them in their work.

Clearly, a new design for both curriculum planning and staff development is needed to change the way leaders approach practitioners and the way a faculty works together at the school. Figure 2 outlines a three-phase process for structuring this approach.

Getting the District Started

Involving so many people in such an intensive process can be overwhelm-

First Position

The teacher focuses on what students are to *know* and uses a test of information at the end of the course to assess learning. The course consists of a series of lessons, usually following a textbook: the teacher lectures, the students take a quiz, the teacher gives more input, another quiz, and so on. After several lessons, students take an end-of-chapter test. This sequence is repeated until the course ends with the final test.

Second Position

The teacher focuses on what students are to *know*, what *basic skills* they are to acquire, and what *understanding* they are to develop. Behavioral objectives guide planning. The assessment at the end of the course is a test of information, including essay and abstract problems. The course unfolds as with the first approach, but with a bit more active student participation, as here the teacher not only lectures but gives demonstrations that are followed with guided and independent practice.

Third Position

In addition to *knowledge* and *understanding*, the teacher expresses concern for developing the more affective student outcomes, such as *independence*, *responsibility*, *creativity*, *enthusiasm*, and a *sense of values*. In the third position, two changes begin to appear in the classroom:

- Lessons are organized into distinct units of study, each with a focus on a particular topic and ending with a culminating activity/project that applies and extends skills and concepts in a new situation. While some units may be related to others, this occurs more by chance than by design.
- The teacher still gives directed lessons as in the second position, but also uses other instructional strategies, such as cooperative learning, synectics, and inquiry.

In addition to the usual test, the teacher assesses learning by observing and questioning students as they carry out their end-of-unit projects and by evaluating the products they create.

Fourth Position

Student outcomes are expanded to include what students are to *know*, *understand*, and *be able to do in the real world*. Thus, a literacy statement—what a literate adult is able to do in the discipline—guides planning, and students are expected to carry out an end-of-year project to serve as evidence that they have reached the long-term goal.

Rather than a series of unrelated elements, the units are connected: the culminating activity/project in one is designed to build upon skills and concepts developed during the culminating activity/project of the others. Along with learning the usual course content, then, students are developing the skills and concepts they need to carry out the final project.

Fig. 3. Framework of Four Positions of Teaching

ing. But by capitalizing on what is already in place, and by working with a small group at first, it can be done. The first step is to select the target audience. The option we favor is to start with a group of volunteers from across the district, teachers and principals who are willing to give the new ideas a try. Within this group are bound to be some who are well on their way toward reaching the vision. During the first year, as this group works through the three phases, they not only develop new strategies for their own use, but help to shape the district's curriculum. For as they proceed, they are, in effect, serving as an "action-research study group," pooling their findings about what works and what doesn't, shaping the new curriculum by checking to see if the tentative outcomes they established are realistic.

By the end of the first year, new directions for the curriculum and new ways for individuals to work together will emerge. In addition, the district will have several examples of the new vision in the making and a cadre of potential

facilitators to work with the next group of volunteers. The volunteers in the second group will go through the same three phases. They will be encouraged to develop their own practical approaches but will benefit from the work already accomplished. With support, teams from the first group can facilitate these sessions, and the effort can thus grow geometrically.

Getting Individual Teachers Started

As teachers try out new ideas, they should be encouraged to proceed at a comfortable pace and to view the change as a gradual shift in some cases, as a process of expansion in others. For instance, in the case of moving from a basal to a literature-based reading program, the teacher may find that a gradual shift is best. The basal program can continue in its usual morning time, while the teacher and students experiment with the new program one or two afternoons a week. Then, as everyone's skill and confidence grows, the new program moves up to take the place of the basal

one or two mornings a week, until eventually the new program takes over all the time allotted to reading lessons.

In the case of an academic subject, the process is one of expansion, adding to what is already being done, as was shown in Figure 1. Here, to help understand where a teacher might begin, we find it helpful to use a framework of "four positions" to analyze how he or she is presently operating. This framework was developed by listening to what practitioners say about how the new ideas would affect what they are already doing. The four positions, which represent a continuum from a relatively narrow band of student outcomes to the broader range envisioned in the reform movement, are outlined in Figure 3. Notice that they represent a process of expansion, that teachers moving through these positions are building upon previous practice to provide a broader, richer experience for students.

While everyone may not need to go through these positions in sequence, we find that viewing classroom practice in this way is helpful in visualizing

what a teacher's next step might be. For instance, a teacher in the first position who lectures skillfully is probably ready to add demonstrations and guided and independent practice. But that teacher may not be ready to try independent student projects, as this requires a much more complex system of management and organizational practices. Similarly, a teacher in the second position who feels comfortable allowing a measure of active student participation is probably ready to incorporate one or two culminating activities/projects into a year's course of study. Experimenting with these will help the teacher develop the management and organizational strategies needed to eventually move on with confidence to the fourth position.

Perhaps more important, keeping these positions in mind helps teachers value existing practices as a step in the right direction, as a base upon which

to build. This is critical, for too often individuals see new ideas as either-or questions. This framework makes it easier to view any current reform as a process of expansion, a "yes, and now let's add" situation.

Looking Ahead

As the reform effort in California shifts now to the district level, it is becoming clearer that the changes envisioned for students must reverberate throughout the entire educational system. If students are to become more thoughtful and creative, so then must administrators and teachers be encouraged to use an even greater degree of creativity in their work and therefore be supported on the personal and professional levels more than before.

Working over the past several years with teachers and administrators—in California School Leadership Academy sessions and in other projects—we are

impressed by the rich, varied, and ingenious classroom curriculum plans they have devised, with their degree of enthusiasm for providing these kinds of experiences for their students, and with their ideas for moving schools in this direction. Supported by long-term, collaborative efforts, practitioners are translating the vision for California students into reality. □

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