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AUTHOR Ross, John A.
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ABSTRACT

Educational research suggests several ways that principals can affect teachers' curriculum choices. Although some researchers maintain that the use of extrinsic rewards (such as praise or allocation of resources) has some effect on teachers, others have found that teachers are much more apt to be influenced by intrinsic rewards such as student achievement. Principals can foster teachers' pursuit of intrinsic rewards by helping them with classroom management, by arranging testimonials from teachers who have successfully improved their teaching, and by publicly praising student achievement. Research findings also suggest that because of their central role in determining the norm structure of the school, principals can significantly influence teachers by acting as role models for professional conduct and by displaying enthusiasm for innovations. Some organizational theory and research suggests that allowing teachers increased participation in decision-making will increase administrator influence. Finally, although there is no conclusive research on the topic, there is considerable anecdotal evidence that the social behavior of principals affects teacher receptiveness to principal intervention in curriculum matters. In sum, research shows that curriculum leadership is possible for highly motivated principals. (Author/JM)

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The need for principals to influence the instructional programs in their schools has been raised in a number of previous editions. Here, Dr. Ross suggests that too little attention has been paid by principals to the reward structures in schools. Success depends on how 'active' principals are prepared to be with their teachers. (Ed.)

STRATEGIES FOR CURRICULUM LEADERSHIP

John A. Ross

INTRODUCTION

School principals with curriculum leadership aspirations are likely to be depressed by the well documented finding that the curriculum decisions of teachers are virtually impervious to the interventions of principals. Is it possible for a principal to take an active role in the curriculum choices teachers make? Educational research suggests that there are a number of ways in which principals can affect practice.

One set of strategies that is frequently touted rests on the formal authority of the principal. Yet this authority is limited by the scarcity of sanctions that are available to the principal, by the spatial and psychological isolation of teachers and by the complexity of the principal's role which requires he or she to accomplish a wide variety of curricular and non-curricular tasks with limited resources.

Extrinsic rewards provide the basis for a second set of strategies but here the problem is that extrinsic rewards in schools are relatively scarce and largely outside the principal's control.

Despite these limitations, manipulation of extrinsic rewards is likely to increase the principal's influence on teachers. Stephens (1974) found that innovative schools were distinguished by the control of the reward system by the principal. The use of public praise can be particularly effective in modifying the behaviour of teachers (Hanson, 1977). So too, allocation of school facilities, especially classroom location, and distribution of school resources can increase the influence of principals on the curricular choices of teachers. Increasing the total amount of resources coming into the school relative to the resources of other schools is also likely to add to the principal's influence.

INTRINSIC REWARDS

The relative weakness of extrinsic incentives as motivating forces for teachers is in sharp contrast to the potency of intrinsic rewards.

Jackson (1968) has provided extensive evidence that teachers derive their greatest satisfaction from events that occur within the classroom. Although teachers are sustained by the awarenss that they are engaged in socially useful work, it is the relationship with individual children that provides teachers with the greatest stimulation: the sudden dawning of awareness, the capturing of insight by the academic longshot, the dramatic improvement in a pupil that others have given up on.

Lortie (1975) largely confirms Jackson's contention that the strongest incentives are work related psychic rewards. Of these the vast majority are concerned

The Author

Dr. Ross is an associate professor in the Department of Curriculum at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Canada. He is currently head of the Trent Valley Centre. Dr. Ross has research interests in instructional improvement and program evaluation.

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with the achievement of classroom objectives: knowing that students have learned is the root of teacher satisfaction. Constant reference was made by these teachers to pride in the success and appreciation of former students, pride in successful classroom experiments, in public displays of student work and in rare instances of special enthusiasm of students for a particular educational activity. Similar evidence of the potency of intrinsic rewards has been provided by Firestone (1977), Spuck (1974), Walcott (1977), and Warren (1975).

The rewards of pupil achievement are not confined to the attainment of objectives within the "official" curriculum. Deeper satisfaction is derived by teachers through progress to more general goals: inculcating attitudes and values, promoting life-long learning, and ensuring that all children benefit from educational experiences. The psychic rewards of teaching are reduced by the fact that these goals are difficult to achieve, hard to measure and complexly related to nonschool variables, such that teachers are often uncertain as to the degree of their own success.

A fruitful set of strategies for principals is to reduce the loss of intrinsic rewards that tend to be associated with innovation (House, 1974). The psychic rewards that motivate teachers can only be achieved if control of the classroom is maintained. Since traditional teaching practice is associated with effective classroom management, change will be resisted unless the principal is responsive to the classroom management needs of teachers and protective of the relationship of students and teachers. Tactics such as encouraging mutual adaptation of innovations, providing guidelines for incremental adjustments to present practice, and providing a consultant to demonstrate new behaviours in the classroom, tend to neutralize the negative effects of change.

There is a second set of strategies related to evaluation. Principals can make the benefits of change visible to teachers since it is unlikely that teachers will suffer the costs of innovation unless the benefits are well known (House, 1974). There is little point in providing reams of objective evaluation data in support of the change since teachers appear not to be influenced significantly by such information; a more influential source is anecdotal data from classroom teachers who have successfully implemented the recommended behaviour. The evidence provided should indicate that the recommended change will increase student achievement of objectives that the teacher perceives to be important: testimonials to the value of the change for the achievement of the attractive underdog will be especially potent. Equally relevant is evidence that pupils are stimulated to greater effort or interest by the change. It is also important that the principal provide the teacher with simple means to determine that the purported benefits of the change for pupil improvement are actually occurring in his classroom.

A final set of strategies relates to the manipulation of teacher status. The principal might be more influential if he praises pupils rather than teachers. Public recognition of the social and academic growth of pupils is likely to be highly efficacious because student improvement is immeasurably rewarding to teachers and because they are uncertain as to its occurrence. Lortie's (1975) suggestion that principals reassure teachers of their effectiveness can become an opportunity for influence if the success is related directly to a particular behaviour which is to be repeated and emulated by others.

TEACHER NORMS AND BELIEFS

There is a substantial body of evidence which indicates that individual teachers are influenced by their peers when making curriculular decision (e.g. McIntosh-Newbury, 1977; Taylor & Reid, 1972).

The influence of norms on teacher behaviour is sharpened by the uncertainties of teaching: the lack of visibility of teaching outcomes and the difficulty each teacher experiences in gauging his own competence increases the importance of testimonial evidence from his peers. The mutual reassurance that teachers seek provides the susceptibility to influence from others and heightens the saliency of teacher norms.

The principal participates in the norm structure of the school in several ways. First, the principal is a teacher or former teacher who has shared the ethos of the classroom. Second, the principal provides an image of professional competence, demonstrating through his own behaviour the norms of the school. Third, the principal provides operational definitions of professional conduct. Similarly, the principal is central to teacher norms to the extent that he functions as a definer of what is best for children (Hanson, 1977).

The central role of the principal in the normative structure of the school suggests that the manipulation of teacher norms may provide a means to influence teacher decision-making. Hanson (1977) suggests that the control of the normative structure of the school is the basis for administrative influence on teachers. House (1974) makes a similar argument when he suggests that change in schools can be facilitated by raising the professional aspiration levels of teachers. McLaughlin (1975) gives evidence that the response of teachers to an innovation is heavily influenced by the implicit definitions given by the principal; lack of enthusiastic support for an innovation indicates to teachers that the change is peripheral to their professional conduct.

TEACHER PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOL DECISION-MAKING

There is a tradition of organizational theory which argues that providing subordinates with a role in organizational decision-making increases the control exercised by superordinates in the organization. There is evidence that participation of teachers in school decision-making is positively related to job satisfaction, but not necessarily to teacher productivity (Belasco & Alutto, 1972). The effect of decisional participation is related to which decisions teachers want to be involved in and how they wish to be involved.

The available evidence suggests that teachers want to maintain control of their own classroom context, especially with respect to the selection of learning materials (Simpkins & Friesen, 1969). Teachers also want a greater role in curriculum decisions that cut across classrooms. They do not want to exercise personal discretion in these larger issues, rather they would prefer to participate as a group acting with the principal as an equal and final adjudicator. They are content to allow the principal to make decisions which are not central to the classroom interaction with students. But when issues which have a direct impact on classroom activities are determined without the involvement of teachers, the staff experience deprivation.

The desire of teachers for greater participation in school-wide curriculum decisions provides an opportunity for the principal. The larger issues that teachers would like a greater role in determining all have an impact, directly or indirectly, on the classroom practices of teachers. By providing for greater influence of teachers in the settlement of school-wide curriculum decisions the principal can gain access to in-class decisions and thereby encourage the behavioural changes he deems appropriate.

The format for teacher participation in school-wide curriculum decision-making plays an important role in determining the outcomes. Schools which have formal curriculum organizations with regular reporting mechanisms are more likely to produce curricular changes than schools which have ad hoc structures. Teacher participation in curriculum decision-making is contingent upon opportunities for joint teacher planning; Fantini (1970) argues that it is an essential task of the principal to rearrange the school schedule to provide school time for regularly scheduled small groups to meet.

The role that the principal adopts is especially important to the outcomes of school-wide decision-making. The principal should not attempt to force teachers to appropriate a mode of instruction developed elsewhere in toto; it is desirable that teachers modify the changes and integrate them into their existing practices.

It is also important that principals employ effective problem-solving strategies to govern their own behaviour. Doyle (1969) discovered that the presence of a high status figure in a group of subordinates tend to support the idea of the high status figure without regard to the merit of his or her ideas. Consequently, it is desirable that principals adopt the strategies for reducing the negative effects of their own status suggested by Doyle and Ahlbrand (1973): create a "freedom to fail" atmosphere, be more concerned with eliciting ideas from teachers than submitting one's own ideas, and delay in expressing negative evaluations of suggestions until others have had an opportunity to examine them. It is also important that group problem-solving activities focus on issues that teachers perceive to be important; discussion of issues that teachers regard as trivial is likely to be desultory.

PERSONAL INTERACTION

There is considerable anecdotal evidence that principals with particular leadership characteristics are able to motivate teachers to move in particular directions.

Bredo (1977) found that the social behaviour of principals was the most important factor accounting for variance in teacher receptiveness to intervention by principals, although social behaviour was not related to the exercise of influence by the principal. Bredo concluded that supportive personal interaction strategies on the part of the principal are ultimately related to the exercise of influence because a climate of receptiveness is a necessary precondition.

The relevance of personal interaction strategies to the exercise of curriculum leadership by the principal is unresolved in the literature. However it seems intuitively sensible that principals who are able to build supportive relationships with individual teachers, particularly inexperienced teachers who require greater reassurance (Fuller, 1969), are likely to have a significant influence on their curriculum decisions.

PRINCIPAL ASPIRATIONS

The obstacles to curriculum leadership are formidable. it is not surprising that a large proportion of principals choose to function as passive observers of the curriculum process in their schools (Ross, 1981). Yet there are strategies available to the principal willing to make use of them. The crux of the matter is the aspiration levels of those charged with school leadership responsibilities.

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