

Staff Involvement:

The Role of the Principal

Juan Miguel Guhlin

University of Texas at San Antonio

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As the roles of teachers have changed over the years, so have the roles of principals. The principal is coming to be seen, just as the teacher, as a facilitator and an effective manager of resources. However, while the labels may change, often, principals do not. What are the characteristics of the effective principal? Is the principal the instructional leader of the school, and what are some things the principal can do to

facilitate the tough task of retraining teachers and sharing with them an unified vision in which each staff member feels responsible? And, the last question, what role does technology play in staff development and instruction?

Hussey (1989) identified five critical areas where a principal must possess information to plan for effective staff development. These areas include the following: (a) thorough understanding of the school environment; (b) must be current on educational research, especially technology and restructuring; (c) staff development must be relevant; (d) keep pace with information explosion by learning skills which help one adapt; and, (e) know own strengths and weaknesses. Despite these critical areas, the principal must be committed to continually work to improve the quality of his staff's performance. To be an effective instructional leader, the principal must be concerned with restructuring.

Restructuring

Frank Newman, president of the Education Commission of the States, cited by Conley (1993), interprets restructuring to mean the following:

changing the nature of schools from the

interior, so that students become active

learners, partners in the learning process.

Changing the nature of the schools naturally means starting at the school level. The persons responsible for the change are the teachers and the principal. However, the primary responsibility is that of the teachers. The role of the principal is to find a way to initiate development of solutions to educational problems rather than mandate resource allocation, structures, and rules. It also means commissioning people who work in schools to hammer out workable solutions to real problems and allowing those solutions the opportunity to fail

and the time to succeed (Conley, 1993).

Accomplishing this task would be difficult if current organizational structures remained the same. An organizational structure might be defined as the roles, rules, and relationships that influence how people work and interact in an organization (Newmann, 1993). Changing the government of the school from the principal to teachers involves serious changes. It means that teachers most responsible for changing the nature of schools are called upon to perform functions once delegated to administration. Proposed changes of this kind may either enhance the motivation and commitment of students and educators to learn and to teach, or their technical capacity and competence to do so. This change has already been mandated, with varying degrees of success, by the Texas Education Agency--it is known as site-based management.

The role of the principal in restructuring is ensuring that his school has a vision of the future and that teachers receive the staff development to translate knowledge into a vision. In terms of staff development, this means the development of peer tutors, mentoring programs within the school, and coaches in the classroom that arise from the school's staff.

While the purpose of this study is not to examine in detail the process of restructuring, only how it deals with staff development in the area of educational technology, there are important questions that must be asked to establish the setting for a restructured classroom, teacher, management and coordination of community resources. As we shall see, the use of technology in all these areas is gradually developing. Students, staff, and community must receive training in these areas.

In the realm of student experiences, some questions (Newman, 1993) to ask include the following: (a) Is learning time more equally distributed among whole-class instruction, small-group work, and individual study, rather than dominated by whole-class instruction?; (b) Do learning and assessment tasks emphasize student production rather than reproduction of knowledge?; (c) Do students participate in community-based learning?; (d) Is student work assisted by extensive use of technology (especially computers)? These questions in the realm of staff development

present several issues. One of them is the move to whole language instruction rather than the use of the passive model. The passivity model implies a whole-class teaching model in which the typical lesson scenario, with elementary math as an example, involves a sequence of review, development, controlled practice, and seatwork, with all or most students progressing through the curriculum together (King, 1993). Currently, students are required to compete with each other for grades, working against each other to achieve a goal that only one or a few students can attain. Students are graded on norm-referenced basis. This means that students work faster and more accurately than their classmates. The failure of other students is a success; it demonstrates their ability to succeed over others (the I win, you lose situation). When students work individualistically, they work to accomplish learning goals unrelated to those of other students. Their goal achievements are unrelated to what other students do (Johnson & Johnson, 1991). The move to whole language instruction allows students take responsibility for their own learning, working with subjects they are interested in and working in cooperative learning groups.

Cooperative learning is the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning. The key to the success of cooperative learning is that cooperative efforts result in group benefits. Thus, there is a positive interdependence among students' goal attainments; students perceive that they can reach their learning goals if and only if the other students in the learning group also reach their goals (Johnson & Johnson, 1991). Certainly, staff development must be provided in this area as it is an important step in the right direction. Staff must be trained not only how to use cooperative learning in their classrooms as part of whole language methodology, but also how to use it at an organizational level with each other (Johnson & Johnson, 1992).

What questions do principals concerned with staff development need to ask in the process of restructuring? Some of the questions (Newmann, 1993) include the following: (a) Do teachers function in differentiated roles, such as mentoring of novices, directing curriculum development, and supervision of peers?; (b) Do staff function with students in extended roles that involve advising and mentoring; (c) Do staff help to design ongoing, on the job staff development based on local needs

assessment?; (d) Do staff participate in collegial planning, curriculum development, and peer observation-reflection, with time scheduled during the day?; (e) Do teachers exercise control over curriculum and school policy?; (f) Are there specific organizational incentives for teachers to experiment and to develop new programs and curriculum that respond more effectively to student diversity?; and, (g) Do teachers work with students as much in small groups and individual study as in whole-class instruction?

As this area--training teachers so that they can answer positively to the above questions--involves the principal and staff involvement, it bears careful study. Empowering teachers to assume responsibility and make informed decisions about their form of instruction and student learning, especially in technology, teachers must receive technology training. In order to demonstrate how principals would restructure their school, the following is a staff involvement plan implemented at Alonso S. Perales Elementary in Edgewood District. The role of the principal is clearly one of facilitator and resources manager.

Technology

One of the criteria identified earlier by Hussey was that the

principal stay up to date with current educational research. Current educational research, discussed earlier, recommends the use of cooperative learning techniques in the classroom. Another important criteria is that principals keep pace with the information explosion by learning skills that help them adapt. Unique in the educational technology field is one-computer classroom methodology. This methodology focuses on developing creative problem-solving and decision-making strategies in the one-computer classroom. Principals, as resource managers, are responsible for the allocation of resources. The use of one computer in the classroom as a tool of instruction, rather than as a learning center in the back of the room, allows teachers to take advantage of the simulation power available in a computer. The principal can allocate one computer per classroom, provide extensive staff development, while at the same time gradually building up a central computer lab.

One-computer classroom methodology fits in well with whole language and cooperative learning. In cooperative learning groups, a new exciting element has been added--the computer. Particular software that simulates a situation not otherwise available in the classroom, the teacher can focus discussion around a central issue or theme. Broken up into small groups, students work together to solve a problem. They are then required to justify their decisions and explain their reasoning to other groups. While this is not unique, the use of the computer allows students to receive immediate response. Students can key in their decisions into the computer and the computer informs them of the consequences. One-computer classroom methodology, then, focuses students on a theme and allows the teacher to become a facilitator with less work. It allows the teacher to offer students real life experiences in the classroom in concrete ways, rather than asking students to imagine the whole situation. Simulation prepares students to cope with real situations; simulations do the following: (a) Prepare students for the real thing; (b) Allow the student to take risks; (c) Provide students with the opportunity to practice; (d) Educate students on the subject in fun and exciting way (Guhlin, 1992). The key to success of the one-computer classroom is the dynamic interaction between students working in cooperative groups; to achieve the next level of the program, they must work together to solve a problem. Through this interaction, problem-solving and decision-making strategies are developed.

In order to ensure successful implementation of technology-aided instruction, extensive staff development is necessary. However, the focus is not on computer literacy or simply on how to use technology, but on how to use that technology instructionally. The instructional responsibilities the principal has include providing teachers with access to information, focusing on benefits of cooperative learning and whole language teaching environments rather than passive model whole class instruction, and envisioning a school where technology use is transparent, rather than a separate entity. Students and teachers employ technology to solve problems and aid decision-making. The focus, once again, must be on how technology may be used for instruction, not on how to use technology. Computer literacy, or technological literacy, will come from daily use.

At Perales Elementary, staff development has focused on one-computer classroom methodology training, teacher productivitytools (word processors, spreadsheets, databases, Hypercard/HyperStudio), and interactive multi-media products on compact disk (CD-ROM books). The principal has allowed staff to schedule Saturday workshops. After reviewing evaluations from the first Saturday workshops, for which neither teachers nor presenters were paid due to lack of funds, the principal fulfilled another of Hussey's criteria: that the principal be knowledgeable of the school environment. Inservices allowed one-computer classroom methodology instruction to be given by trained teachers from on-campus. The inservices and Saturday workshops were followed up by over thirty-seven hours of in classroom modeling of the instructional use of technology.

Another key component in providing staff development is the delegation of authority to a technology committee composed of teachers. These teachers are committed to enhancing their teaching ability and maximizing the instructional use of technology. This allows teachers to assume responsibility for their own professional development, choosing what staff development is appropriate for them and will be of the most use to students.

One final component is the development of a technology plan that deals with the allocation of computers, how the computers are to be used, and articulates an educational philosophy. The technology plan provides for the integration of technology into the curriculum. While the principal may participate in writing

this plan, it really must arise from the teachers responsible for implementing the plan. This is an example of organizational structure shift from traditional roles to that of site-based management.

However, while a technology committee is responsible for deciding where computers go and how they are to be used instructionally, the principal is also responsible for making the necessary technological tools available. While this involves another teacher-run committee--Budget--the principal can easily decide that computers must be made accessible to both students and teachers. This means allocation of funds for computers in classrooms (where students are introduced to problems, writing process is demonstrated) and computer labs (where students work on their own to master their writing, engage in research or achieving proficiency in productivity tools). In terms of serving as a manager, the principal can allocate resources according to the recommendations of the technology and budget committee.

Thus, in terms of facilitating the use of technology, several important points must be made: (1) Comprehensive staff development based on needs assessment; (2) Peer training and mentoring from proficient teachers to beginning teachers; (3) Organizing a technology committee to oversee and direct staff development; (4) Development of a technology plan that discusses in detail how technology will be integrated in the curriculum; and (5) Providing for the acquisition of technology and allowing teachers the daily access time to work with computers. Other important process issues include topics such as campus outcomes for technology, alignment of technology with curriculum and expected outcomes, ethics and copyrights, software evaluation, incentives for staff, flexibility to train during times available to teachers, as well as community involvement. Tax dollars spent on technology means that such technology must be available to the community. Computer literacy adult education programs could be instituted and team-taught by different teachers. For example, at Perales Elementary, two teachers taught two nights a week to the parents of students attending the school. They received training in productivity tools (word processors, spreadsheets, databases). Rather than serving the children of the community, principals can incorporate parental involvement in staff development. The parent serves as the primary role-model for the child; students can work with their

parents on the computer to complete homework assignments. Once again, technology provides an exciting area of collaboration between the school and the community in a concrete way. Not becoming techno-peasants (Thornburg, 1993) is an important factor today. In California, one cannot work as a clerk in a warehouse if one lacks computer experience. Facilitating the technological education of the community--young and adult--is a role that the principal can play if he is willing to make the school available to the community after school hours.

Conclusion

The role of the principal has indeed changed. As changes in organizational structures continue to shift from administration governed to teacher governed, the principal's role is that of facilitator and manager. Certainly, in terms of facilitating the integration of technology into the curriculum, the challenge is the same. Providing on-going support for teachers both in workshops and in the classroom, and daily access to technology so that both students and teachers become familiar with it. The community must also have access to the technology, especially in low-income areas.

However, integrating technology and planning for staff development allows principals to facilitate the retraining of their teachers, thus moving them from whole class instruction into cooperative learning groups and whole language methodology. Technology serves as a catalyst for change, changing the way teachers teach, as well as what they teach and how their students learn.

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