

THE PRINCIPAL AS A CURRICULUM FACILITATOR

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One of the important functions of a school head is to facilitate curriculum development work at the school level. A contemporary secondary school principal, however, seems to be more involved in school administration, leaving curriculum work and the related pedagogical practices in the hands of respective heads of departments. Losing control of curriculum and pedagogic power to subordinates, a principal is unable to perform his/her leadership and supervisory roles adequately. Present day secondary schools seem to be "over-administered" and "under-led". Increasingly, therefore, there is an urgent need for the principals to re-orientate their work in favour of curriculum facilitation. It has been argued that the supply (and perhaps oversupply) of curriculum packages and division of labour between curriculum development, implementation and reception within the competitive academic curriculum have acted to deskill and devalue both the teacher's and principal's pedagogical power. It is not surprising, therefore, that many principals have assumed protocol, distribution of pre-chosen material and general filing duties.

Curriculum is understood by many as a document or a plan mailed to our schools. However, agreeing with Sharpes, I see curriculum as a "plan in action" and as a "teaching act". Accordingly it is not a body of knowledge, but rather someone knowing what to teach and how to teach. Therefore, principals and

teachers should know and understand what the curriculum is and how best it can be communicated to learners. Notably, curriculum according to Sharpes is "what the teacher does and what the teacher knows, and who the teacher is - the teacher's behaviour, knowledge and personality". I see teachers and principals as well-informed persons who are disposed to include non-formal and informal education, and out-of-school experiences into their educational agenda. A principal's work is not just "desk-bound" or confined to school, but also moves out into the community. Through promoting gainful adult education programmes, a principal can work towards creating the learning and educative society needed for the "lived world".

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In executing a curriculum facilitative role, a principal should have a deep understanding of the foundations of curriculum development and the contributing disciplines of Psychology, Philosophy and Sociology, and how these operate to develop a curriculum. There are two ways of thinking about curriculum, as many writers on curriculum have indicated. One way is to think of it as a naturally occurring phenomenon, always made up of the same four basic components: initial guiding objectives, specific content, learning experiences and evaluation. Curriculum development typically works outwards from some centre, seeking to civilise the outposts. One of the implications of this centre-peripheral model of curriculum development is that it is imposed from elsewhere and comes down from "above" for the teachers to use passively. It is generally followed blindly, whether it is relevant or otherwise, and is not questioned as long as students pass external exams. Some curriculum writers refer to this as the "syllabus view". In this approach, curriculum development involves clear

division of labour between the designers and the implementers, who are defined as receivers; in this model, teacher expertise is seen as limited and largely technical.

Another way is to think of curriculum as an activity. Allow me to explain this by using the analogy of seven-a-side rugby (in which Fiji has a proud record). It is difficult to understand much about seven-a-side rugby by reading the rules or even listening to a radio commentary. The game's deepest meanings are reserved for the players. It is the same with the curriculum, which also needs crucially to be "played out" in appropriate settings. If we think about it for a moment, we can imagine how school-learning could be organised differently. For example, why do children or adults in the main expect to learn individually? Is it not possible to imagine a situation where groups of students and adults could learn things jointly?

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There is need for more active teachers and active learners in our countries, and this calls for the principals to take a more active role in curriculum development at the school level. One of the pre-requisites for encouraging more active teacher participation in curriculum design and implementation is to prepare them to change their attitudes towards curriculum in particular and their work in general. Through regular staff development programmes, principals can prepare teachers for active participation in curriculum implementation at the school level. Furthermore, a healthy school climate can be created where teachers have opportunities to release their potential, interact with colleagues, make better use of resources, appreciate individual differences and learn from one another.

It may be difficult to bring about drastic changes in the existing curriculum straight away. Perhaps principals can begin by seeking to facilitate knowledgeably the existing curriculum prescriptions. The first step is to study the various prescriptions carefully, understand them well and help heads of departments and respec-

tive teachers to interpret them correctly. The basic concepts upon which the prescription is built should be identified and mapped, allowing the emergence of a conceptual framework on which the teaching process can be anchored. For example, some of the concepts in the Form One Social Science prescription are "conflict", "co-operation", "family", "community", "government" and "culture".

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The next step is to work with the teachers in drawing up programmes of work in their respective subjects on the concepts identified. A programme of work contains a range of topics to be covered over an extended period of time. It should be flexible, with adjustments made as the need arises during teaching. Normally a programme of work includes topics, a rationale and sections devoted to content, learning experiences and evaluation. The rationale should show the need for the unit, unit objectives, teaching approaches and notes on the organisation of pupils, space, resources and time.

The third step involves helping teachers to prepare lesson plans (or notes) on the topics identified. In Fiji, for example, this phase is important because a large number of teachers do not have qualified teacher status. Lesson plans would normally include headings (subject, topic, year, date and time), learning objectives, and the procedure to be followed while teaching the lesson. One would expect an introduction which sets the scene of the lesson, a substantive main section (including teaching approaches, key ideas, use of resources, a time plan and pupil activities) and a conclusion which summarises the main points of the lesson. A lesson plan should also specify work exercises, evaluation procedures (diagnostic, formative and summative) and allow opportunities for self-evaluation. In laying down these standards and in their effective supervision of teaching, principals can discharge honourably their responsibility to the school and the school community.

REFERENCE

1. Sharpes, D.K. (1988). *Curriculum Tradition and Practices*: London Routledge.