

HANDBOOK 7: Providing Leadership at the Classroom Level

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A Handbook in the Collaboration for Excellence Series
North Dakota Division of Independent Study
Office of Curriculum and Improvement
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This handbook is one of a series published for the project Collaboration for Excellence: The North Dakota Curriculum Project.

The publication is free to public school educators in North Dakota, who may make copies without permission.

These handbooks represent a team product. A major contributor was Ann Clapper, who was previously Director of the Office of Curriculum Leadership and Improvement. Numerous educators in North Dakota reviewed all these materials and made valuable suggestions. Especially helpful were the following North Dakota educators: Janet Edlund, Dakota Prairie High School; Cheryl Kuhas, North Dakota Department of Public Instruction; Karen Nelson, Hettinger; Sandra Willprecht, Forman. Allan A. Glatthorn, Distinguished Research Professor at East Carolina University, served as consultant to the project.

It should be emphasized that the processes suggested here should be seen only as recommendations, not mandates. The authors value the ability of North Dakota educators to develop their own processes that reflect the needs and resources of their schools.

1. UNDERSTANDING THE NEED FOR CLASSROOM LEADERSHIP

Teachers play a key role in curriculum, even though many teachers do not understand their own importance. Many who reject such a role believe that the curriculum is the responsibility of the state or the school system. Even in states that play a very active role, there is still much for teachers to do. To understand this assertion, consider these two examples.

***Tom Walker** sees himself as a very creative teacher. He believes that the state is too intrusive. He does not want to be bound by state regulations. And he doesn't want to work with colleagues--it takes too much time. He teaches from units he developed some years ago, most of which have no relation to the curriculum adopted by the school system. He mocks the principal who has talked with him several times about "curriculum alignment." And he ridicules the state-testing program as "a good job of asking the wrong questions." When he sees the results of the state-testing program, he just attacks the test.*

***George Nordstrom** also values his creativity, but he sees himself as a realist. He analyzes non-confidential information about the state test and develops long-term plans based upon the test information and the district curriculum. He provides leadership to his team as they develop long-term plans and curriculum units. The curriculum units are shaped around knowledge and skills derived from the standards, but the units emphasize concept development and problem solving. A few days before the test, he reviews test-wiseness skills. His students usually do well on the state tests.*

Obviously the differences in student achievement result primarily from the differences in teacher attitudes and performance.

2. ASSIGNING THE FUNCTIONS OF CLASSROOM LEADERSHIP

The specific functions assigned to teachers will, of course, depend on several factors: size of central office staff; extent of school-based management; expertness of teachers in the area of curriculum; and the leadership role of the principal. Therefore, rather than prescribing a single set of functions, it would seem to be more productive to suggest a process by which each school faculty can determine the approach they wish to use in implementing classroom leadership.

A Recommended Process

The following process has been reported by several schools as being both efficient and effective.

- (1) **Assemble the faculty**
 - In a meeting devoted solely to it, discuss classroom leadership with the faculty.
- (2) **Discuss the importance of classroom leadership.**
 - Discuss the importance of classroom leadership and provide an overview of the process to be used.
- (3) **Distribute the survey of teacher preferences.**
 - Distribute the form shown in Display 7-1 (or your own version of it). Stress that the form should be completed anonymously. Also explain that they should respond under the condition that existing arrangements regarding the school schedule and preparation periods might possibly be changed if there is sufficient support.
- (4) **Explain each survey item.**
 - Make sure teachers understand each item's meaning and implications.
- (5) **Have the teachers respond on the form** as you explain each item.
- (6) **Collect the completed form.**
- (7) **Adjourn the meeting.**
- (8) **Tally the results** during the next few days.
 - Find the mean score for each item, using these weights:
SA=4, A=3, D=2, SD=1, ?=missing (ignore)
 - As a general rule of thumb, any curriculum function that has a mean score of 3.0 and above should be considered as having teacher support.
- (9) **Distribute the results and discuss** their implications at the next faculty meeting.

Display 7-1: Survey of Teacher Preferences

Directions:

Listed below are several statements about the teacher’s role and functions with respect to curriculum. Consider each statement carefully. Then circle your response. Remember that there are no right or wrong answers.

Teachers should . . .	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Uncertain
1. Work in teams on the curriculum.....	1	2	3	4	?
2. Develop long-term plans based on the district curriculum guide	1	2	3	4	?
3. Align the curriculum.	1	2	3	4	?
4. Develop curriculum units based on the curriculum guide.	1	2	3	4	?
5. Work with the principal to be sure that the district guide being implemented	1	2	3	4	?
6. Analyze results on state tests and remediate as necessary.....	1	2	3	4	?
7. Teach students test-taking skills.	1	2	3	4	?
8. Develop and implement enrichment units for all students	1	2	3	4	?
9. Provide significant input into the development of the district guide	1	2	3	4	?
10. Evaluate the district guide.	1	2	3	4	?

Comments:

3. PROVIDING STAFF DEVELOPMENT FOR CLASSROOM LEADERSHIP

Once it has been determined that there is teacher support for several leadership functions, then the school's leadership team should work with central office staff in designing and implementing a series of staff development workshops that will help teachers acquire the skills they need to discharge each function.

Here are guidelines for making such workshops successful (drawn chiefly from Sparks, 1995).

- ! Provide the training in quality time.
- ! Establish a climate of open inquiry. Use a problem-solving approach if differences arise.
- ! Get the teachers actively involved by encouraging them to express their views.
- ! Do not lecture. If you have information to present, prepare a handout or an overhead transparency.
- ! Begin with a skill with which teachers are likely to achieve success.
- ! Devote sufficient time to the development of the skill to enable teachers to master it in depth.
- ! Provide follow-up to the workshop session by using peer coaching in which teachers observe each other and give each other feedback.
- ! Use the session as a means to develop school policies and procedures with respect to the issue under consideration.

An example of how this process might work is in Display 7-2.

Display 7-2: Teacher Workshop Example

The teachers at Happy Valley Elementary School want to align the following curriculums: hidden/learned and the taught/learned. With input from the teachers, the principal schedules the following initial workshop sessions. (The topic is stated and then the general method is noted in parentheses.)

1. What is alignment of the taught and the learned, and why is it important?
-- (Make a brief presentation followed by discussion.)
 2. How do you observe a class to discern the gap between the taught and the learned?
-- (Show a videotape and then lead an analysis of the gap.)
 3. How does peer coaching help in understanding the gap?
-- (Provide time and direction for peer coaching on observing for the gap.)
 4. What causes the gap and how can a teacher reduce the gap?
-- Provide time for discussion followed by tape analysis.)
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REFERENCES

Sparks, D. (1995). Focusing staff development on improving student learning. In G. Cawelti (Ed.), *Handbook of Research on Improving Student Achievement* (pp. 163-170). Arlington, VA: Educational Research Service.