

CURRICULUM PLANNING IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY:
MANAGING TECHNOLOGY, DIVERSITY, AND CONSTRUCTIVISM TO
CREATE APPROPRIATE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS FOR ALL
STUDENTS

Walter S. Polka, Ed.D.*

P. Rudy Mattai, Ph.D.^o

ABSTRACT

Elementary and secondary curricula at the dawn of the Twenty-First Century are dynamically changing as a result of the following three key educational forces: (A) omnipresent use of evolving technologies, (B) acute focus on the value of diversity and (C) professional emphasis on constructivist principles. (Withrow, 1999 and Brandt, 2000).

Planning effective curricula for schools impacted by those forces in Twenty-First Century America requires that educational planners utilize the proven curriculum planning principles of the past as well as provide for the emerging personal and professional needs of educators. The five personal needs of education, according to contemporary social science research and literature are: **Challenge**, **Commitment**, **Control**, **Creativity** and **Caring** (Polka, 1997). The six professional needs of educators, according to educational research and literature are: **Communication**, **Empowerment**, **Assistance** in Decision-making, **Leadership**, **Opportunity** for Professional Growth and **Time** (Polka et al., 2000).

The ability to effectively manage the aforementioned three dynamic forces in conjunction with those emerging personal and professional needs is the key curriculum issue confronting educational leaders at the present time.

PRINCIPLES OF CURRICULUM PLANNING

Curriculum planning as a strategic educational process for the improvement of learning first appeared in the educational literature of the post-World War I era (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1988). Since that time, curriculum planners have utilized several different approaches in designing curricula to improve teaching and learning in light of changing societal factors (Hyman, 1973; Brandt, 2000).

However, a curriculum planning framework that has effectively been utilized in the later half of the Twentieth Century to improve teaching and learning is based on the premise that curriculum planning activities should be designed to be **Cooperative**, **Comprehensive**, **Concrete**, and **Continuous** (Krug, 1957). Contemporary educational leaders need to keep those Twentieth Century four C's in mind whenever planning curriculum improvement projects to meet the ever-changing educational landscape of the Twenty-First Century.

*Walter S. Polka, Ed.D. Superintendent of Schools, Lewiston-Porter Central School District, Youngstown, NY 14174

^oP. Rudy Mattai, Ph.D. Director of Educational Foundations, Buffalo State College, Buffalo, NY 14222.

THE PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL NEEDS

Contemporary social science research and literature on coping with change has identified five individual needs as significant for organizational and personal satisfaction and productivity in a climate of pervasive change (Polka, 1997). Accordingly, each individual must look at life as a constant **challenge** and develop the ability to see change as an opportunity, not a crisis (Csikszentmihaly, 1990). People who are able to cope successfully with significant life changes exhibit a strong **commitment** to themselves, their families, and their organizations (Kobasa, 1982). Individuals who believe and act as if they are in **control** and can influence the course of events in their particular lives are better prepared for change (Glasser, 1990). People who have the **creative** ability to envision optimal experiences are able to cope most effectively with change. (Csikszentmihaly, 1990). However, a **caring** family attitude in the work place plays an important role in the effective adjustment to changes (DePree, 1989).

The six professional need areas were initially identified in Twentieth Century curriculum research and literature as: (1) Freedom to teach (**Empowerment**); (2) **Time** for Teacher Preplanning; (3) Improved **Communication** and Articulation; (4) Instructional **Leadership**; (5) **Assistance** in decision-making areas; and (6) **Opportunities** for Professional Growth (Harnack, 1968). The significance of these six professional needs related to effective curriculum planning activities were reconfirmed by subsequent regional (Yuhasz, 1974) and national (Polka, 1977) research studies and are integral components of the contemporary literature and research (Beane et al., 1986), (Brandt, 2000) .

CONTEMPORARY FINDINGS VIS-À-VIS THE NEEDS

Research conducted at Niagara University and Buffalo State College, New York, commencing in 1992, with a sample of two hundred and seventy-nine (279) educators, reconfirmed the significance of the five personal needs and the significance of the six professional needs (Polka, 1994). Most recently (1998), three hundred and twelve (312) educators from two different samples also completed the comprehensive survey instrument. The results of these studies have been fairly constant.

Generally, educators surveyed over the past eight years rank the five personal needs into two broad categories as follows: (A) The personal needs of most importance have consistently been identified as those of **Control**, **Creativity**, and **Caring**; (B) The personal needs of moderate importance have consistently been **Challenge** and **Commitment**. Those same educators ranked the six professional needs into the following three distinct categories: (A) The professional needs of greatest importance have consistently been **Empowerment** and **Time**; (B) The professional needs of considerable importance have consistently been **Assistance** and **Leadership**; (C) The professional needs of moderate importance have consistently been **Communication** and **Opportunity** for professional growth (Polka, et al., 2000).

TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY EDUCATION SUCCESS

However, change in education is a process, not an event, and it is accomplished first by individuals (Hord, et al., 1987). Subsequently, the most effective curriculum changes, or the ones that will yield the most personal and organizational satisfaction and productivity, reflect attention given to the five personal needs of **Control**, **Creativity**, **Caring**, **Challenge**, and **Commitment**, as well as the six professional needs of **Empowerment**, **Time**, **Assistance**, **Leadership**, **Communication**, and **Opportunity**. Consequently, curriculum planning projects that address the three contemporary dynamic curriculum change forces of technology, diversity or constructivism, must be introduced to educators with attention given to their personal and professional needs using the **4 C's** of **Cooperative**, **Comprehensive**, **Concrete**, and **Continuous** as a *strategic* framework.

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