



Curriculum Leadership

ECRA Literature Review

- Roles
- Responsibilities
- The 360° Assessment

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Introduction: Curriculum Leadership and the 360° Appraisal

Curriculum leadership involves a careful balance of instructional and administrative leadership responsibilities. The role is multi-faceted and complex, embedded not only in the formal trappings of authority (as supervisor of faculty) but also in functions that cut across a number of roles affecting student achievement, including professional development, professional accountability, and curriculum development (Ogawa & Bossert, 1995).

Much of the current thinking on the role of the curriculum leader distinguishes the traditional, or “maintenance,” responsibilities commonly assigned to the position and the so-called “dynamic” tasks that extend the curriculum leader’s impact to community building and school improvement processes. The former reflect those tasks of managing the instructional program, such as spearheading textbook adoption, maintaining subject area expertise, and reviewing student achievement; the latter includes vision-building, tailoring standards and benchmarks to the particular needs of the student population, engaging and communicating with stakeholders, and managing the change process (Wiles, 2008). According to Wiles (2008), the most effective curriculum leaders embrace the dynamic role and go beyond the expected responsibilities. They establish new directions, align people and resources, motivate participants, and aid school improvement processes (Wiles, 2008). In this sense, strong leadership at the curriculum management level is also *inclusive*, embracing work that is carried out collaboratively with individuals at different levels of the system and with different purviews over instruction (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001).

The Curriculum Leadership 360° Appraisal evaluates both the maintenance and dynamic responsibilities of the curriculum leader.

The most effective curriculum leaders:

- Embrace the dynamic role and go beyond expectations
- Establish new directions
- Align people and resources
- Motivate participants and aid school improvement processes

What is 360° Assessment?

Multisource feedback systems, commonly referred to as 360° assessments, refer to the process of collecting multiple viewpoints in order to provide a detailed and accurate picture of individual performance. When 360° assessment is applied to school leaders, *teams* of evaluators are utilized to gain the input of all members of the school's professional community, thereby offering an overall assessment of the individual (Fletcher & Baldry, 2000). Evaluators may include supervisors (school board members, superintendents, etc.), colleagues (assistant superintendents, curriculum directors, etc.), school personnel (educators, office staff), and community members (parents, students, etc.). All participants respond to the same survey items, thereby providing many perspectives and viewpoints on the actions and impact of the school leader being evaluated.

Because 360° assessment focuses on feedback and subsequent action to strengthen school leadership, the method reflects the research literature's support of the mechanism as a formative evaluation tool to help school leaders focus on personal and leadership development and target particular areas for professional improvement (Moore, 2009). Furthermore, by comparing a leader's perceptions with the evaluation of stakeholders, schools encourage enhanced self-awareness and performance improvement from all participants (Carlson, 1998). Anonymous 360° feedback ensures leaders get honest feedback. In turn, it can create a culture where individuals become more ready to commit themselves to seeking and accepting feedback (Moore, 2009; Fletcher & Baldry, 2000; Santeusanio, 1998).

- A 360° assessment, a multisource feedback system, is the process of collecting multiple viewpoints in order to provide a detailed and accurate picture of individual performance.

How the School Leadership 360° Appraisal was Constructed

The Curriculum Leadership 360° Appraisal is a comprehensive evaluation program that utilizes a multi-rater, evidence-based approach to measure the effectiveness of school leadership behaviors known to positively influence student achievement and school culture. The instrument consists of 40 items that comprise six core domains, as well as an open-ended response item. In this 360° evidenced-based assessment of leadership behaviors, each respondent rates the curriculum leader's effectiveness on a six-point scale. The curriculum leader in question does not need to have performed the leadership behavior directly, but may have ensured that the behavior was done by others. The reference period is the current school year.

ECRA initiated a multi-step development process to construct its 360° survey. The initial step of any 360° assessment is to define the competencies of the position and to identify the learning outcomes that are the target of the evaluation (Cottrell, Crow, & Shumway, 2007; Santeusano, 1998). Building upon its experience constructing program and talent evaluations, ECRA first reviewed proprietary leadership evaluation instruments, including earlier work completed for IPA. Next, several evaluation tools were consulted, including standards from the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC, 2008) and other current leadership evaluation instruments on the market. An analysis of these standards and instruments led to the classification of six domains of leadership criteria, qualities that reflect the balance most curriculum leaders seek in their role as both curriculum leader and manager-administrator (Jenkins, 2009). Many current leadership assessments vary greatly with respect to how much they focus on the managerial work of schools or on learning outcomes (Wallace Foundation, 2009). The Curriculum Leadership 360° Appraisal, however, emphasizes leadership behaviors representative of *effective* curriculum leaders.

This focus on best practices acknowledges the multifaceted role of the curriculum leader while prioritizing the instructional focus and school guidance responsibilities that commonly define the 21st century curriculum leader.

360° Appraisal Construction

Vision and Values —Items in this category measure the curriculum leader’s vision and commitment to excellence; the alignment of district programs to the broader mission, vision and philosophy of the district; and the promotion and upholding high expectations for all stakeholders, including his/her own professional behavior.

Curriculum and Instruction—Items in this category measure the curriculum leader’s ability to plan, implement, and assess the efficacy of the school or district’s instructional programming.

Assessment and Research—Items in this category measure the curriculum leader’s ability to plan, implement, and evaluate the efficacy of the school or district’s assessment programming, as well as to use that data and other sources of external research to inform school improvement practices.

Staff Development—Items in this category measure the curriculum leader’s role in evaluating and enhancing the professional skills of school personnel; the items address the hiring and retention of competent professionals, conducting teacher observations, and providing meaningful professional development.

Communication and Collaboration—Items in this category measure the school leader’s ability to involve stakeholders, particularly faculty, in realizing the school’s vision and improve student achievement.

Management —Items in this category measure the curriculum leader’s effectiveness in managing relevant school operations (e.g., budgeting, compliance), in monitoring organizational performance, and in providing oversight over the instructional program.

Leadership Domains

The following sections review the research literature supporting the inclusion of the six categories.

Vision and Values

Assistant superintendents of curriculum and instruction and/or department chairs function as leaders when they focus on improving key aspects of their school or district's progress—including its mission, vision, engagement, and adaptability—and engage others in complex work to achieve these goals (Danielson, 2006; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). By contributing to and directly engaging with the goals of their institution, they create policies, structures, and incentives that build upon school or district assets (Bowman, 2002; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). Effective curriculum leaders are proactive and analytical, conscious of emerging issues and concerns related to personnel. They pinpoint problems through effective questioning, monitor the effectiveness of school practices, and prioritize and coordinate plans of action with staff members (Gabriel & Farmer, 2005; Marzano et al., 2005). Strong curriculum leaders take responsibility for their own behaviors and distribute leadership responsibilities to colleagues who embrace the vision and goals of the school or district (Blase & Blase, 2000; Hatch, 2009). In so doing, educational leaders create the conditions that maximize the actions of all stakeholders by mobilizing effort along multiple pathways that lead to student, professional, or system learning (Copland & Knapp, 2005; Laurie, 2001; Wiles, 2008).

Curriculum and Instruction

Curriculum leadership is a significant driver in improving academic achievement. The curriculum leader is directly involved in the design and implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices; it is his/her knowledge of instructional strategies, current research, and application of student achievement data that gives shape to instructional programming (Copland & Knapp, 2005). Teacher leaders earn credibility from other teachers respect when their expertise and their personal and professional values on instruction positively influence school culture (Patterson & Patterson, 2004). By focusing on learning, teaching and monitoring progress, curriculum leaders help educators improve their instructional practices and ensure student achievement improves as a result of meaningful, supportive decisions about pedagogy, coursework, and instructional materials (King, 2002).

Assessment and Research

Effective leaders must have a keen ability to monitor the progress of instruction and analyze achievement data to determine ongoing solutions to issues related to academic achievement (Danielson, 2006). They focus on specific, high-yield instructional practices; use assessment data to improve student learning and teacher practices; and remain vigilant about adapting programming to changes in demographics, legislation, and/or research trends (Fullan, 2009; Gabriel & Farmer, 2005). They also strive for continuous self-improvement in the field, continually adding to their knowledge base of curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices to ensure school programming is aligned to the latest educational research so that the school or district's instructional goals are within reach (King, 2002).

Effective curriculum leaders:

- Focus on specific, high-yield instructional practices
- Use assessment data to improve student learning and teacher practices
- Remain vigilant about adapting programming to change in demographics, legislation, and/or research trends.

Staff Development

Because the assistant superintendent or department chair directly affects teacher behavior and attitudes, curriculum leaders are arguably the most powerful influence on the performance of school faculty (Donaldson, 2007; DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Effective curriculum leaders are focused on enhancing teacher quality at all stages of the staff development process, including hiring, mentoring, evaluating, et al., and do so by establishing clear criteria for professional growth and by applying differentiated approaches to the support and assessment of faculty (Danielson, 2001). The effective curriculum leader also provides extensive staff development, regular opportunities for teacher collaboration, and encourages the formation of professional learning communities that lead to transformation from within (Copland & Knapp, 2005; Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001; Patterson & Patterson, 2004). They work alongside teachers in adult learning activities such as study groups, school visits, and examination of students. They also model exemplary practices for others, helping faculty and staff develop needed pedagogical skills and understanding (Ackerman & MacKenzie, 2006; King, 2002).

Communication and Collaboration

Research shows that teachers and students are most productive when they work in a context of caring, support, and trust (Patterson & Patterson, 2004). Curriculum leadership, then, is also about cultivating relationships with those stakeholders who can contribute to the school climate and encourage learning (Gabriel & Farmer, 2005; Hoerr, 2005). Effective leaders are visible on a regular basis; they communicate their vision and goals in a clear and timely manner; they listen to staff members and are mindful of their needs, wants, and concerns (Gabriel & Farmer, 2005). To be effective, curriculum leaders need to facilitate professional dialogue, distribute or share responsibility, value the input of their colleagues, make strategic use of staff members' special skills, and form leadership teams to build strong support systems (Donaldson, 2007; Marzano, 2003; Marzano et al., 2005). In short, effective department chairs foster shared beliefs and a sense of community, recognize the influence of relationships on professional culture, and establish strong lines of communication and interaction to build additional assets for school growth and improvement (Goletnan, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002; Spillane, 2006; Marzano et al., 2005).

Management

Implementation of effective organizational processes influences student achievement (Davis et al., 2005). In order to foster instructional improvement, curriculum leaders must efficiently manage relevant school operations, including staffing, budgeting, and compliance matters. Curriculum leaders monitor organizational performance, modify organizational structures that may undermine effective practice, and provide systems thinking to addressing concerns that connect administrative procedures to student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2004). Strong managerial skills allow all the other dimensions of schooling to aid the improvement of student learning (Knapp et al., 2003).

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