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School Renewal Teams: A Format To Implement Articulation Between Junior and Senior High Schools

by Arnie Cooper

The need to effect a transition from junior high to senior high school indicates an "unfortunate gap" in our secondary education system (NASSP NewsLeader, 1985, p. 15). The importance of articulating programs and plans from one level to another is both a long-standing matter of concern as well as a major issue in contemporary educational practice. Gruhn (1947) not only cited articulation as one of the major historical functions of the junior high school but he also staked out in 1962 a compelling role in the articulation process: "The junior high school has the major responsibility for providing leadership among teachers at all grade levels to maintain satisfactory articulation in the total school program." (p. 5).

The NASSP Committee and Council on Middle Level Education cited the importance of articulating "instructional and school programs across the middle level-high school continuum" (p. 2) in a significant policy recommendation in 1983. This statement extolled the virtues of cooperative planning and challenged school administrators to begin "an effective local study" to improve interaction between levels of schooling.

The purposes of this paper are to review the relevant literature on articulation that addresses dialogue across faculties and staffs and to propose a format that can contribute to improved communication between the junior and senior high school.

The Practice of Articulation

Articulation refers to the "systematic coordination of course and/or program content within and between educa-

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tional institutions to facilitate the continuous and efficient progress of students from grade to grade, [and] school to school." (Houston, 1984, p. 18). A review of the related literature on articulation reveals that there are certain practices that have a direct bearing on what is needed to enhance the connection between the staffs of different school levels. Gruhn (1947) believed that satisfactory articulation demanded that "teachers in each school unit be kept informed regarding the objectives, learning activities, and instructional methods of other school units" (p. 416). Byers (1955) noted that articulation involved not only "bringing people together to work on common problems but providing for the exchange of materials and information through records, reports, bulletins and other means (p. 417). While Ball (1960) cited a "lack of professional interaction" (p. 419) between staffs as a major factor inhibiting the success of articulation, Campanale (1961) discovered that teachers recommended practices of a "more professional nature" beyond meeting with colleagues (p. 423).

Brinkopf (1962) described a student advisement effort implemented by school counselors from different school levels that was suggested by a school superintendent, a significant source of support and encouragement. Pew (1980) also found that commitment and leadership from the central district administration were needed in order that articulation across professional staffs became more than a token effort. Leiter (1981) devised a program that relied significantly upon interschool conferences between teachers while Nasca (1981) touted teacher communication to alleviate problems when gifted and talented students leave one school level for another. When Fowler (1982) examined the prerequisites for the successful transition of students with special needs, she concluded that teachers and administrators needed to share information regarding teaching strategies, behavior management and curriculum activities.

The Joint Statement of the NASSP Committee and Council on Middle Level Education (1983) called upon principals and district administrators to facilitate the solution of transition problems by defining "the kind and degree in which such articulation problems are reflected in program, methodology and adjustment of students as they matriculate to the high school" (p. 4). Hord and associates (1983) maintained that improved articulation between school levels could occur when "leadership cadres" of professional personnel met on a regular basis. These "cross-school groups" (p. 6), aided and abetted by central office personnel, generated activities that enabled participants to develop better communication.

From a number of different vantage points, practitioners of articulation believe, then, that the process consists of several key ingredients:

1. professional interactions among a wide range of personnel
2. an informational function where materials and methodologies are shared
3. visible and active support from central office personnel

The literature on articulation practices offers an integrated and consistent framework for assessing the articulation process. The centrality of interdependence between school level personnel is difficult to ignore.

School Renewal Teams: An Articulation Device

Format

One way to accomplish articulation of both purpose and programs for the junior and senior high school is to cre-

ate School Renewal Teams (SRT) at schools of each level. This format would provide key school personnel such as principals, assistant principals, guidance counselors, department heads and teachers with opportunities to plan and promote the essentials of articulation. The salient features of the SRT concept are:

1. Each SRT meeting would have a planned, printed agenda.
2. Minutes of each meeting would be taken and distributed to all SRT members.
3. Each SRT meeting would have a discussion leader. This individual would come from the central office staff. The presence of key central office figures is crucial, since their attendance would lend authority and credence to a school district's intent to implement articulation.
4. SRT members would meet formally once a month. Guidance counselors, department chairpersons, representative subject matter teachers and principals would meet initially in separate teams. At periodic intervals all SRT members would meet collectively.
5. Agenda building for the SRT meetings is crucial. Prior to the meeting of each group, a brief questionnaire (see sample) would be mailed to all participants and returned before the group met. The purpose of the questionnaire is to solicit topics of interest that would be addressed.

Purposes

- The purposes of the SRT Format are as follows:
1. To contribute to improved dialogue between levels of schools.
 2. To assist a school district to plan more effectively by encouraging participants to meet on a regularly scheduled basis.
 3. To encourage planning between levels of schooling with a view towards initiating communication among other district personnel i.e., district supervisors-principals, principals-school community representatives, superintendent-building levels, etc.

Implications

The SRT Format could be extended to many areas of a school district. For example, bringing new teachers together from different school levels could be a significant aspect of orientation activities at the start of the school year. The concept of School Renewal Teams fosters a team approach to school planning and addresses the problem of dialogue across faculties and staffs of different school levels. SRTs promote the idea that staffs from different schools can be interactive and proactive collaborators. An effective articulation format, however, must do more than help participants react to problems. Such a format should be based on the premise that junior and senior high school personnel should be better connected. Mutual support is the imperative. The SRT Format is designed with the principles of articulation as revealed in the literature in mind. An SRT can help erase barriers and build bridges because the process engages participants in focused discussions about practices and issues that have a direct bearing on the problems of articulation.

School Renewal Team Questionnaire

Date: _____ Name: _____
 Position: _____ School: _____

I am very much interested in seeing that we as a school district implement plans and programs effectively. One of our efforts is to bring together personnel from the junior and senior high schools. You will be an important part of this endeavor. Meetings are planned with your counterparts. In order for this process to become a meaningful one, I am requesting that you complete this form. Your comments will comprise agenda items that will be discussed in future meetings.

Superintendent's Statement

- I. List at least three questions about how the articulation process will work that you would like answered:
 1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____
- II. List at least three areas of interest that you would like to discuss with a colleague from the junior/senior high school:
 1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____
- III. List at least three ways you would like to cooperate with a colleague from the junior/senior high school:
 1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____

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