

10

Welcome to **ATTACK!** a two-page occasional publication. Most of **ATTACK!** will be concerned with the holistic curriculum which, if acted on, is a fundamental way to undermine the present undemocratic education system. Don't be discouraged if opportunities to teach holistically are limited, do your best, be a guardian, and act as a witness to this culturally significant and inspiring way of teaching and learning. **ATTACK!** is a partner to <https://networkkonnet.wordpress.com>

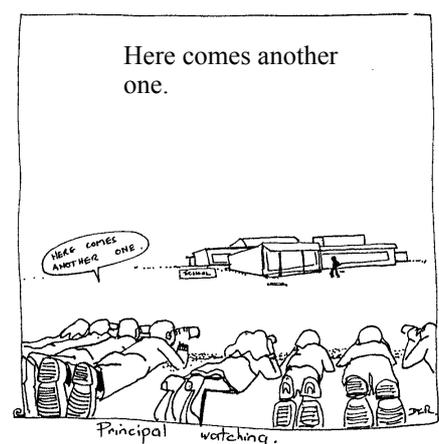
Schools are ineffably sensitive to any education system change. What appears the tiniest change at the top can escalate to severe dislocation for teachers and the curriculum at the bottom. In most Western countries, those in charge of education systems have devised a managerialist system of separating the administration of the education system and role of principal, from teachers and classroom practice. This is done by having those in administration inculcated in the values of the centre so that the values and purposes of schools don't get in the way of the values and purposes of the centralised agencies. People are purposely chosen for administration on the basis of no experience in education, or no experience in that part of education, or being highly amenable to the centre's values. From the centre's view, this has the further advantage of desensitising those undertaking actions to the effect of those actions on schools, and of demeaning the value of the knowledge held in schools and the professionalism of those involved.

### **Holistic curriculum-driven leadership as against a control managerialist-driven one**

There is an urgent need for a holistic curriculum-driven leadership theory to be developed and advanced to challenge the managerialist-driven one. The managerialist leadership theory in education is about hierarchy of the sort that functions on the belief it knows; it knows how education works; how it can be organised and standardised into unproblematic and manageable parts; made utterly assured in its mission by the ideas of quantitative academics who also know. Curriculum-driven leadership is based on teacher knowledge, on commonsense through informed experience, on the value of variety in education, on education as part of life in a social democracy, on identifying the essences of curriculum areas, on a commitment to a broad-based curriculum, and on teaching and leadership being significantly an art.

The reality about principals and their knowledge of the curriculum was devastatingly and, in a way, inadvertently revealed in 2008 by the ministry publication, *Kiwi Leadership for Principals*, which said that most principals had lost touch with the curriculum even though (I would claim significantly 'because') they work 50 per cent harder than their overseas counterparts. This was entirely to be anticipated given the *Tomorrow's Schools'* stance that if principals got administrative systems right, the appropriate curriculum implementation would devolve from that. And an appropriate curriculum implementation did evolve from that – a curriculum appropriate to the way the bureaucracies worked, a way to make easier the way the bureaucracies worked, and a way to extend managerialism to schools. Unfortunately, it was a way that narrowed and reduced the curriculum for children. What took the place of a broad-based curriculum was the layering of classrooms and schools with measurable objectives: they were declared good by managerialists, just what the doctor ordered, what education should be about – that is, a narrowly-focused view of literacy and numeracy and the rest of the curriculum take the hindmost.

A crucial element of curriculum-driven leadership is establishing the essence of particular parts of the curriculum – the task for principals and teachers having discerned these is to believe in them and pursue their logic through to the implications for the administrative structures of schools. Leadership would, to a great extent, be the sum of those implications. For a broad-based curriculum, principals are central to the provision of contexts in which teachers will feel sufficiently free of constraints, and understood and supported enough, to teach in an



imaginative and creative manner. Principals, however, in being drawn away from the curriculum, are increasingly vulnerable to challenging teachers administratively rather than where it matters, through the real curriculum. In curriculum-driven leadership, the challenge should come through an inspired view of the curriculum, not an unbalanced view of administration.

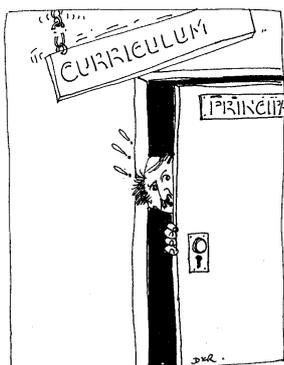
The imposition of a tight framework of measurable objectives over the school and what happens in classrooms is not about a deep and interrogative relationship with the curriculum – it is a formulaic overlay. Any jackass by functioning at the level of management by measurable objectives can sound knowledgeable about education, pandering as it does to the current obsession with certainty and precision. Management by measurable objectives eases the way for external and hierarchical control over schools, laying the basis for an industrial model of education. In schools, management by measurable objectives makes education understandable to those who don't understand the curriculum and a nightmare for those who do.

Leadership courses should be about the curriculum, about clarifying the essences of curriculum areas and coming up with main aims that make curriculum areas cohere. These essences can't properly be handed down as a list; they need to be worked out, school by school. Leadership courses should discuss the philosophy behind this process and ways to get it going. Current leadership providers, however, take as a given the managerialist basis for administering schools which is the way managerialism comes to drive the curriculum. The curriculum is set up for observable and measurable outcomes and, not coincidentally, for expert, bureaucratic, and political control.

In practice, the distinction between curriculum-driven leadership and managerialist can be identified in a school's willingness to vary from official policy in the interests of children (an important source for genuine originality); the range of sources from which the school seeks external professional advice and the reasons for seeking that advice; the attention to the broad curriculum; the emphasis in policy statements on the setting of aims leaving teachers to set objectives, which can then be transformed to criteria; the attention to symbolically-laden curriculum references; the centrality of curriculum essences; the recognition of the power of the interaction between the affective and the cognitive; the attention to establishing high motivation contexts; the degree of timetable freedom; the avoidance of formulaic overlays on classroom practice; the emphasis on teacher observation as the basis for evaluation; the way teachers are involved in important school decisions; the classroom teaching contributions of all in the school including the principal; the degree to which the classroom is seen as the basic unit of the school (in other words, considerable freedom being available for teachers to teach with a degree of separateness from syndicates and the rest of the school); the way computer use is driven by curriculum imperatives not the other way round or by school marketing considerations; and the care taken to use metaphors appropriate to curriculum-driven leadership.

Guided by the curriculum essences, the ideas put before teachers are likely to be straightforward in expression and symbolically-laden in implication, for instance, why not (it might be suggested to teachers), in written expression, concentrate for a time on just one aim – sincerity? Or why not in social studies concentrate on developing a feeling for the people being studied through the acquisition of knowledge that contributes to that? Or why not in an art activity concentrate on exploration? Or why not in maths setting up a study which is about real problem solving? Such symbolically-laden curriculum ideas allow teachers to put ideas into practice first, allowing the implications and theories to follow in their slipstream.

The argument in this writing has not been that one orthodoxy should be replaced by another, but that there is an alternative to managerialist leadership theory. Because the purposes of education are highly contestable, the education system should be based on valuing variety, providing a place for both leadership theories and everything in between. (If the education system was based on valuing variety, it wouldn't be the hierarchical, authoritarian system we have currently, which would mean managerial leadership theory would be a choice individual schools make rather than one imposed on them.) Curriculum-driven leadership



works best when directly stated in policy documents and thoroughly understood by teachers. Definite gains are made when this is done. It should be presented to teachers, boards of trustees, and external authorities as an expression of a school's special character. In a way, curriculum-driven leadership is everything managerial leadership isn't: home grown, holistic, broad-based, curriculum derived and concentrated, teacher informed, practical, aim and essence based, being-there evaluation, democratic, interrogative, and an art. Given the hostile environment, to put such leadership into practice requires both guile (to give unto Rome) and moral courage. That a small group of principals is still there, still putting into practice curriculum-driven leadership, gives hope that a whisper of enlightened education can still be sounded as we wait it out for better times.

