Curriculum Leadership Strategy

Effective curriculum leaders strive for a deep understanding of how the informal, or hidden, curriculum at the district and/or school levels affects the growth and development of students.

Research on brain growth periodization has significance for curriculum planning and the problem of the match at various age levels. It suggests that there are five periods of growth spurt, which alternate with intervals of growth lag, in the development of the human brain from birth to about the age of 17. Herman Epstein (1978, 1990), a biologist, reports that growth spurts occur at 3–10 months, 2–4 years, 6–8 years, 10–12 or 13 years, and 14–16 or 17 years. He suggests that "intensive intellectual input should be situated at the spurt ages" (Epstein, 1978, p. 362) and that too much input during the plateau periods may reduce the learner's ability to absorb information at a later, more appropriate age. The challenge for curriculum leaders, then, is to make the timing and content of learning experiences fit these known patterns of brain growth.

THEORIES OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Several theorists' and researchers' ideas about human development have significantly influenced curriculum leadership, including Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development, Erik Erikson's developmental outline for stages of "growth toward a mature personality," Lawrence Kohlberg's cognitive-developmental view of moral development, and Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs. These four human development theorists maintain that the developmental stages they describe have a fixed order, and that each person passes through these stages in this order. Sufficient resolution of the challenges and developmental tasks associated with each stage is necessary for the individual to proceed with vigor and confidence to the next stage, and there is a "teachable moment" or opportune time for this development to occur.

Piaget's Model of Cognitive Development

Piaget's theory maintains that children learn through interacting with their environments, much as scientists do, and that a child's thinking progresses through a sequence of four cognitive stages. At the sensorimotor intelligence stage (birth to 2 years), behavior is largely sensory and motor; while cognitive development is occurring, the child does not yet "think" conceptually. At the preoperational thought stage (2–7 years), the development of language occurs, and the child can think of objects and people beyond the immediate environment. At the concrete operations stage (7–11 years), the child explores and masters basic concepts of objects, numbers, time, space, and causality and can use logical thought to solve problems. Finally, at the formal operations stage (11–15 years), the child can make predictions, think hypothetically, and reason abstractly about language.