

Curriculum Development: What Do We Need To Know?

James B. Macdonald

MANY of us are involved in the day to day problems of curriculum development. To say that we "know" nothing about the subject would be an insult to our own experiences of successful curriculum development. Yet, *what* do we know? What knowledge do we possess that has been uncovered by empirical methodology and has general or common meaning for curriculum development?

One may reasonably infer from the June 1963 issue of the *Review of Educational Research* (1), entitled "Curriculum Planning and Development," that our empirically validated knowledge of curriculum development is sparse indeed. So, granting the fact of the existence of a goodly number of curriculum development artists with considerable "know-how," we are in trouble when it comes to "knowledge-that" can be considered common coin of the curriculum realm.

Purposeful Change

Curriculum development is essentially purposeful change in school programs. Sometimes this process is called "progress." Whatever we wish to call it, it involves at least the following considerations:

1. Change in programs means change in the behavior of a great many individual personalities.

2. Change in programs takes place in a social context with structured status and role realities.

3. Change in programs occurs in the context of a curriculum culture which is embodied in the total existing program.

4. Change in programs is directional and thus laden with value questions, such as the nature of knowledge, the nature of learners and learning, and the function of the school.

5. Change in programs cannot be "known" unless some systematic plan of measurement accompanies it.

6. Change in programs will be known to the degree that our measurement procedures are controlled in the situation so that our evaluation will be the outcome of reasoned inference.

If these considerations are valid, or whatever elements are valid dimensions of curriculum development, one of the foremost tasks is the development of models or theories to describe and relate the variables in coherent patterns. Whether theories of cultural change developed in other disciplines will suffice is highly doubtful. It is more likely that we will need specific models developed

within the curriculum context. There is considerable activity in theory building at present, but we still await the presentation of useable frameworks. Until this time arrives we can project possible needs for knowledge from the above considerations.

Individual Personalities

Frymier and Urick (3) discussed "Personalities, Teachers and Curriculum Change." They pointed toward one basic dimension of personality which they called resistance to change. Perhaps the term flexibility catches this idea. Flanders (4) presented evidence that teachers *can* change, but we have a need for much more understanding of personality dynamics in relation to curriculum change. This, of course, includes all staff members as they function in the developmental process, not just teachers. Certainly studies of the differential response of staff to innovation and change in terms of likely personality variables is one area of needed research.

Carrying this concern one step further, we have philosophies of curriculum development which suggest that certain procedures, such as total staff involvement, will insure the cooperation and active participation of individual staff members. Some precise testing of these procedures appears called for.

Social Contexts

Curriculum development is clearly a social interaction situation (a series of situations). Within this context we have individuals invested with a variety of responsibilities and roles, with differing increments of power. What kind of leadership is called for? Who shall be the agent(s) for change? What staff percep-

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tions of status and role are necessary for productive change to take place? Are there certain prerequisites of the social context as a system, such as necessity to promote integration, which cannot be violated through innovation?

The Curriculum Culture

The existing program exhibits a symbolic pattern of relatedness. One such pattern is called "balance," for example. Innovation and change take place in the "culture" of the school. A number of problems can be projected from this idea. Can bits and parts of programs be grafted on in an additive and subtractive fashion? Is there a functional integration of values that cannot be violated if productive change is to take place? Are there cultural boundaries beyond which a proposed change produces cultural disintegration? Are some

changes more easily instituted in existing types of programs than others?

The Staff Philosophy

Closely related to the curriculum culture but separate in the sense of being a step removed from the ongoing curriculum are the statements of value, belief or philosophy of a staff and school. These are the things that we profess to believe. Change and innovation may be related to these basic beliefs. For example: Can productive change take place when the direction of change is contrary to the professed values of the staff? Is change more easily brought about in systems where the philosophy is stated, known and agreed upon by the staff? Can productive change take place where staffs exhibit severe differences in professed beliefs?

The measurement of change is an integral part of the change situation. It becomes part of the change in that measurement of change is also a "new" element introduced into the ongoing program. Because measurement becomes part of the innovative circumstance, it may possibly play a crucial role in the outcome. Some questions that might be asked are: Does the kind of measurement utilized affect the outcome of innovation? (e.g., will subject matter measures be easier to "teach for" than other kinds of measures?) How does the schedule or placement of measurement in the plan for change affect the outcome? Is there a difference in the achievement of change when measures are general in nature and less related to specific change goals (specific behavior changes vs. general attitude, interest, personality, etc.)? Will change be more easily effected when the staff members know about, understand and have played

a role in the development of a systematic plan of measurement?

The Nature of Evaluation

The measurement of change is one base to which we then apply our judgment and values in the process of making inferences about the success of the new venture. The evaluation of any curriculum development project is thus considerably more than the measurement of change. It involves the introduction of subjective or not measured variables as well as a level of confidence in the nature of the outcome. A host of questions arise at this point. Some of these questions are: Will the setting up of curriculum change in a research design facilitate or hinder curriculum change (for example, in comparison with a demonstration project)? Will change be more productive when the hypotheses being tested are related to theory? Will the use of specific research design, such as control groups, affect the outcomes of curriculum development? How much success in innovation is due to "newness" or special attention?

Odds and Ends

There are many possible questions beyond the brief suggestions given here. Little has been said about the effects of the power structure or curriculum change in the educative enterprise as it extends beyond the specific staff into local, state, and national levels. The role of the learner in curriculum development has only been hinted at, but generates serious questions. The use of consultant help and the patterns and procedures involved also need further study.

It is not quite fair to say that we have no answers to any of these questions. It

is rather more accurate to state that we need much more information about all the relevant concerns in curriculum development before our knowledge can be said to be founded firmly on an empirically validated base.

The Central Issue

At the bottom of all the questions which suggest our needs for knowledge about curriculum development is a familiar issue. We have all faced this issue before in one form or another. Knowledge about curriculum development is knowledge about the *process* of development. To gain knowledge about this process we must set up systematic plans for studying it. A plan for studying process by necessity relegates the outcomes of development to a secondary position. We must, in other words, be willing to risk developmental failure to gain

knowledge about successful processes. Here is the central issue.

It is easy to say that our present orientation to the outcomes of development is a penny-wise, pound-foolish procedure, but it is quite another thing calling for considerable courage objectively to examine process at the increased risks of failure. One need only observe the state of curriculum development at the college preservice level to appreciate the general readiness of the profession in relation to risking something to gain knowledge. Nevertheless, as someone has said, "No knowledge is gained without risk."

There does not appear to be any realistic alternative to risk for professional educators. The power for change in our society does not reside principally in their hands. The educator's power does not stem from the larger nexus of soci-

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etal needs or into political, economic and moral decision making. His power resides principally in the knowledge he brings to bear upon the exercise of his professional responsibilities. The only hope of professional educators for full partnership in decision making in the educative process is incumbent on taking the necessary risks to gain the knowledge needed.

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3. Jack R. Frymier and Ronald Urick. "Personalities, Teachers and Curriculum Change." *Educational Leadership* 21: 107-11; November 1963.
4. Ned A. Flanders. "Teacher Behavior and In-Service Programs." *Educational Leadership* 21: 25-29; October 1963.

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Editorial—Foster

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confronted with displaced hostility of the teachers or to be met with indifference. In the centralized approach, decision making is taken away from the classroom level and often results in psychological detachment of the teacher.

Self-development of the teacher must be inspired and nurtured by a sympathetic environment. Some of the basic hypotheses for this growth have here been presented. The articles in this issue will support, extend and test these theories.

—RICHARD L. FOSTER, *Superintendent, Jefferson Elementary School District, Daly City, California.*

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