

Making Use of National Curriculum Studies

Alexander Frazier

THE national curriculum studies have now been with us long enough to be seen as tremendously rich resources for use in our local programs of curriculum improvement. However, our own sense of purpose, our particular pupils, and our present program—all tell us that we must learn how to relate to the product of national studies on terms that are professionally our own.

Perhaps it will help us find ways to do this more effectively if we become as conscious as possible of what is involved in learning new ways of working. The present paper undertakes to contribute to such a growth of awareness by (a) proposing a way of looking at the process of both local and national curriculum improvement, (b) relating the services that bear on curriculum improvement, (c) describing local curriculum improvement programs in "normal" times, (d) seeking to generalize about the nature of national curriculum studies, and (e) identifying the key points of contact between local programs and the national studies.

Steps in Curriculum Improvement Process

To make it easier to deal with, perhaps we may be allowed to simplify the process of curriculum improvement. Let us think of this process as taking place in six steps:

Defining purpose. The sharpening of purpose or movement to a new level of purpose leads us to decide that we are going to teach our students of modern language to understand the language as spoken and to speak the language so that they can be understood.

Identifying structure. To realize our purpose we need to be fully aware of what specific learnings we will be pur-

su-ing—the basic concepts and generalizations in the field and their interrelationships. This may mean taking a fresh look at a field of study or discipline for major understandings that may have been developed recently or have been overlooked or undervalued by us.

Selecting content. Now we may ask what particular content we shall use to develop the desired concepts and generalizations. Many choices could be made. To develop a beginning understanding of the social nature of man, we might select for study the Eskimos, the pygmies, or perhaps the Navajos.

Collecting resources. We make a search for the kinds of resources that will offer content in such a way that learners can gain from it the needed understandings. This may mean that some new resources will need to be created to add to those already available.

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Teaching the new program. Using the resources, the teacher tries to develop through selected content the structure of understandings that will result in achieving with learners new or sharpened purposes.

Evaluating improvement. How well instruction goes and perhaps, too, how adequately resources serve and eventually how appropriate content may be to structure and structure to purpose and even perhaps how relevant a given purpose may be to the larger goals of education or of society—these are the tasks of evaluation.

We can separate the six steps easily enough in our minds when we take them up this way in turn. Perhaps their relationships can be further simplified if we think of purpose, structure and content as belonging primarily to the developmental phase of curriculum improvement and resources, instruction and evaluation to the phase of implementation (see Table 1).

Services That Support Curriculum Improvement

Perhaps, too, it will help us in talking about the points of contact between national and local curriculum improvement programs if we can see in relationship the kinds of services that support curriculum improvement (see Table 2).

Table 1

Steps and Phases of Curriculum Improvement

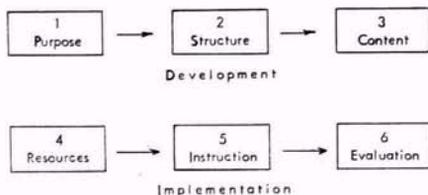
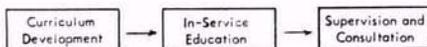


Table 2

Curriculum Improvement Services



Curriculum development. As is obvious, this service deals with the three stages that we have characterized as belonging to the development phase—defining purpose, identifying structure, and selecting content.

In-service education. This service provides for the preparation of teachers for taking on new tasks and, in the current context, centers on the results of curriculum development. Its end, of course, is implementation through the proper use of resources, effective instruction, and adequate evaluation.

Supervision and consultation. This service has to do with implementation and may be considered in this period to be concerned with helping teachers with whatever problems they may encounter in teaching new content.

In preparing to identify the points of contact, it may be well to recall what the local program of supervision and curriculum improvement looked like in general before the advent of the national studies, after which we may try to generalize about the nature of the national programs themselves. Then we will be ready to identify the key points of contact between local programs and national studies.

Characteristics of Local Programs in "Normal" Times

When things are "normal" (1940-1955?) and business can be conducted as usual, the local programs of supervision and curriculum development may be characterized as follows:

Development. The attention that goes to the three steps of curriculum development (defining purpose, identifying structure, and selecting content) is perfunctory. Purpose is taken more or less for granted and is spelled out in rather high-flown terms that may sound suspiciously alike from one curriculum guide to another. The list of desired understandings, skills and attitudes is equally imprecise and ubiquitous. The selection of content really raises no questions. In fact, most of the vital decisions about the curriculum are seen as having been made in the past. The real attention now goes to implementation.

Implementation—that is, attention to resources, instruction and evaluation—receives the major portion of our energy in normal times. The questions to be answered here are simple but recurrent: Which texts and other materials and resources should we use? How shall we orient new teachers to our program? Can we find better ways of teaching beginning reading? Do we need new evaluation devices to help us locate our strengths and weaknesses? How can we make better use of test results? And so on.

In general, our questions have to do with improving the teaching of the program that we have come to accept as desirable and even perhaps as inevitable. If we have any dissatisfactions, they probably come from our failure to secure as many resources as we need . . . or to get teachers to teach as well as they could . . . or to evaluate as many of our purposes as we wish we could.

Thus, in normal times curriculum development takes less of our energy than in-service education and supervision. In fact, after our initial writing of curriculum bulletins, their revision in normal times most often coincides with the adoption of new textual materials. Outlines

of content in the revised bulletins often read very much like the table of contents of newly adopted textbooks.

In-service education and supervision also tend to focus on the needs of teachers new to the system. Experienced teachers may call for assistance but are not likely to do so; they come to our notice mainly in connection with selecting new teaching materials and revising study guides—or when they falter in the process of growing older or run into some kind of trouble outside of school.

Nature of the National Curriculum Studies

Most of the national studies begin with redefinition of purpose and move resolutely through each successive stage of curriculum improvement, stopping short only at evaluation or at full evaluation. While the greatest initial investment of energy and funds goes to the development phase (purpose, structure and content), once the product of this phase is at hand, then typically the energy and money are diverted into implementation, at least into concern for resources and instruction.

Implementation means something different here, of course. The search for resources, for example, may lead soon to a conclusion that new study materials will have to be produced. Thus we have today a great many national studies that put out materials for student use some time during their work, quite often on a tentative basis or as illustrative of the kind of material that needs to be produced commercially. Some national studies, it is true, have gone into partnership with publishers in the commercial production of textual materials. However, this plan runs counter to the dynamics of change in an open educational system

and is quite likely to be remembered as a mistake rather than to survive as a model.

As for the services supporting curriculum improvement, the emphasis is obviously on curriculum development and in-service education (see Table 3). Supervision and consultation are not generally in the picture at the national level.

In-service education differs in kind very greatly from what is normal for the local curriculum program. The national programs, because they are working on genuinely new developments, must include experienced teachers in their in-service efforts. One of the major challenges we face today is how to make use of the new conception of "mid-career" education that has developed with foundation and federal subsidy during the past ten years.

Some Points of Contact

The analysis that follows of how local curriculum improvement programs tend to come into touch with national studies makes use of the preceding definition of curriculum improvement in terms of the phases of development and implementation, the steps in the process, and the nature of attendant services (see Table 4 for an attempt to bring these together).

1. The first point of contact has most often been at the level of instruction. School systems have been invited to send a teacher off for a training session in how to teach a new course. The expectation has been that when the teacher returned, he would be regarded as a demonstrator of the new program—and that his colleagues would learn from him.

This procedure has had many interesting angles. It has removed from local personnel the responsibility for making

Table 3

Differences in Concerns of Local and National Curriculum Studies

	Local	National
Curriculum Development	<p>Concern for breadth of purpose, particularly in terms of needs of all learners.</p> <p>Structure seen as province of scholar.</p> <p>Content as one way to develop structure; other content choices possible.</p>	<p>Major concerns in redefining or sharpening purpose, identifying new learnings as needed, and defining new content.</p>
In-Service Education	<p>Concern for education in purpose and structure as well as content.</p> <p>Inclination to see choice of content as open, with competing alternatives.</p> <p>New resources seen as examples of possibilities rather than prescriptive or required for teaching.</p>	<p>Tendency to focus on mastery of new content and use of new resources for teaching.</p>
Supervision and Consultation	<p>Concern for teacher's feeling of worth of purpose and appropriateness of content as well as his success in teaching new content.</p>	<p>Little attention except perhaps in first days to see whether new content can be taught.</p>

most of the decisions related to improving the curriculum. All that is needed is to authorize a teacher to go away and, upon his return, to teach what he has learned to teach. In the first flush of the new national programs, some school systems had teachers set up in a dozen different showcase classrooms.

Yet eventually the question has to be asked: What next?

2. A second point of contact has often come as local systems have puzzled over

Table 4

Curriculum Improvement: Phases, Steps in Process, and Services

Phases of Curriculum Improvement	Steps in Process of Curriculum Improvement	Services for Curriculum Improvement
1. Development of Improved Curriculum	1. Defining Purpose	1. Curriculum Direction
	2. Identifying Structure	
	3. Selecting Content	
2. Implementation	4. Collecting Resources	2. In-Service Education
	5. Teaching The New Program	
	6. Evaluating Improvement	3. Supervision and Consultation

the problem of making good use of the imported program. Here the program is; what do we do with it besides show it to visitors?

Perhaps meanwhile other teachers have also been going away for training and the number of staff involved in teaching the new program has increased sufficiently so that some effort can be made to compare the imported with the domestic program. For some reason, this has gone by the name of experimentation; it is really a form of evaluation. By using the regular tests and adding new tests provided by the national study, matched students are compared, with the familiar finding that the students of the new program have learned as much as or slightly more than the control group of what has been valued in the domestic program and also have learned some new things not heretofore taught.

Sometimes the result has been a kind of stalemate. The local district, victimized in part by not fully understanding the dynamics of what is happening to it, may see only three alternatives: (a) continuing with both the old and the new, (b) returning to the old, or (c) moving entirely to the new. In fact, none of these alternatives is acceptable. Maintaining two programs becomes administratively untenable as well as instructionally indefensible. Going back to the older program will never be agreed to by teachers who have become expert in new purposes, structure and content. Giving up their professional ideal for the unknown virtues of an imported program will be accepted by the teachers of the older local program only under duress.

3. What is needed is a fourth alternative, which then sometimes comes; in fact, it is oftener before us now as an alternative as we move away from a

single national study in a given area into multiple sources of new content. That alternative is to put old and new together in a program that will really belong to us.

The problem that faces us is only partly the early tendency of national studies to be one of a kind in a given field. Part of it comes from what has already been pointed out as our tendency to short-cut the process of curriculum development locally; we have not had much recent experience in defining purpose, identifying structure, and selecting content. Most of our energy has gone over into implementation, especially in the review and selection of resources. Not surprisingly, that is where we now have a tendency to begin in our efforts to create a new program of our own. We begin by studying the text materials provided from the national study or studies with which we are concerned.

We must begin in truth with the necessary in-service education of everybody concerned, including ourselves as leaders. The attention in local in-service programs is bound to shift from new to experienced teachers. Before we can begin to think about developing a new mathematics program on our own terms, we have to know a lot more about new structure and content and perhaps purpose than we now know.

It is quite interesting to take note of the ways we are learning what we need to know. In addition to using the study materials of national programs prepared for young learners, we are also using enrichment kinds of materials that can be added to existing programs and that help us learn as we teach. Fortunately for us, materials written specifically for teachers and not tied in directly with any particular program are increasingly avail-

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schools. On the basis of these assessments they act to sanction classroom personnel or to tolerate and accept what seems to be going on.

This system of ideas, generated by a political orientation, could be and should be developed further. The concept of power suggests that because teachers, administrators, college teachers, and non-professionals have different control points or different types of decisions and sanctions, they might also need quite different ideologies. The educational search for an acceptable curricular theory or philosophy might actually be hiding the need for quite different curricular points of view for various groups of educational workers. In other words, current curricular theories or proposals are simply not adequate for grasping and shaping today's curricular problems and possibilities as these emerge within a political framework.

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National Studies—Frazier

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able. This is already notably true for elementary mathematics.

The national programs themselves have had to learn that in-service education is needed for all teachers, not just for a few, and that the aim should be an understanding of new purposes and the structure of meanings as well as or perhaps indeed instead of merely knowledge of new content and familiarity with how to use the special teaching materials for a given course.

Needed Next Steps

Obviously, as we move into greater local concern for new purpose, structure and content, we are going to need to tie in the base of in-service education very closely with the process of curriculum development. The national studies are providing us with great riches for use in our in-service program. They also are stimulating us to relate new purposes to those we may still wish to hold to for our pupils, our community, and our conception of the good society; to enlarge the structure we have of valued learnings to include new or undervalued concepts and generalizations; and to open up the choice among possible kinds of content more widely than before.

We are going to need also to provide for more assistance to teachers. The supervision and consultation service of the past will no longer carry the burden either of local in-service education or of curriculum development to say nothing of the many kinds of help teachers will want for classroom implementation. Of course, it is here that we can begin to look for the best uses of the specially trained teachers who have had a chance to learn more than the rest of us. We may need new patterns of consulting relationships besides the usual ones of demonstration or supervision.

Finally, we ourselves need to understand as fully as we can what is happening to us both locally and nationally. This present account is crude in its distinctions among the steps and phases in curriculum improvement and in the relationships among services. Its attempts to characterize local and national programs are doubtless on the primitive side. Probably the effort to identify the points of contact between local and national programs and to suggest a sequence for these contacts is also not as insightful as it should be.

Yet if we are to come through this period with credit, we should become as self-conscious as we can be at this moment. We must try to understand as well as we are able what is taking place so that we can participate in the process rather than merely accommodate ourselves to it. We have surmounted our anxieties about the ambiguities of the early national curriculum studies. Now we need have ambitions larger than merely to survive. Our aim ought to be to come out of this era with a stronger base for local curriculum development. We need to be abler in defining and meeting local needs as well as in making fuller use of proposals for improvement.

Active Citizen—Dineen

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may argue that a teacher should not be a member of any school board while serving as a teacher, but I am inclined to disagree. There is some merit to having a person on such a board who has firsthand knowledge of the problems. If a person is serving in another area, there seems to me to be little chance of a conflict of interest arising from such a situation.

As an employee of a political organization, it is possible in some areas that the teacher who elects to take part in politics—whether in pressure groups or in a political party—is leaving himself open to economic pressure. This can only be fought by expecting it to happen. As James Madison observed, if men were angels there would be no need for government in the first place. In anticipation of such pressure, methods can be taken to prevent it.

The chief means of rendering a teacher independent enough to take part in politics are tenure or civil service, membership in a professional association, the PTA and similar institutions which will (a) give the teacher an appeal if pressure is used or (b) cause any move against him to be made publicly. The potential publicity and embarrassment from either situation are the main lines of defense from economic pressure by unscrupulous politicians.

To make sure the representative system does not have a detrimental blind spot, then, teachers should take part in some political activity. Because of their training they should recognize—without falling into the sin of pride—that the training they have received means they have something special to offer. One reason for political activity is that, seen

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