

CURRICULAR CHANGE INVOLVES PEOPLE

LAWRENCE D. FISH

Director, Bureau of Educational Research
University of Oregon, Eugene

WE ARE living in the midst of a revolution in education; and curriculum is the most important battle line of that revolution. At no time in the history of public education has there been greater pressure or greater need for curriculum evaluation and change.

Some of the pressures and forces at work would give breadth and depth to our educational program. They would cause parents, pupils and teachers to reach out for greater quality of experience for all within our school classrooms. Other pressures would force curriculum into a mold of the past, limit the opportunities of children, limit the children who participate in these opportunities, and make innovations and adaptations of new concepts and new knowledge difficult or impossible.

There is only one way in our society to assure the success of the revolution that is upon us in education. Involvement, consultation and continuing dialogue among all concerned groups is the necessary way. The responsibility for an effective school curriculum for children from infancy to adulthood lies with all members of our society.

Parents, least of all, can escape this responsibility.

Process of Renewal

The school curriculum consists of the opportunities planned for the young of a society to help them grow into effective adults in that society. In this process, society is continuously becoming that which this educative process makes it. If children experience school programs which assist in making them effective adults, society grows stronger. If children experience school programs which are inadequate and ineffective, the results lead to ineffective adults and, in the final analysis, to the failure of society.

School curriculum in a democratic society is the result of the continuous interplay of ideas among individuals and groups of individuals who concern themselves with the future of our society. Individuals and groups of people who understand the school's importance in giving direction to society will involve themselves in the process of determining the nature of school curriculum. They will not be content to let it "just grow," or to let it be domi-

nated by special interest groups and impersonal forces in our society. They will take part in the continuing dialogue which is necessary in order to determine the purposes, processes and procedures of our educational program.

Groups for Involvement

Three groups with important abilities and responsibilities play significant roles in the curriculum development process: (a) children, (b) parents and (c) professional educators.

Obviously, these groups are not mutually exclusive. Many people can classify themselves in more than one group. The purposes of each group do not belong to that group alone, but can be identified as related to each of the other groups. However, there is enough distinction here to provide a system for analyzing the roles, functions and responsibilities of all persons in the process of developing more effective educational programs for the young and the adults of a democratic society.

Role of Children

Children operate continuously, both directly and indirectly, in the realm of curriculum development. In a very real sense, the curriculum for each child consists of what happens in the classroom. The continuous interaction of pupil, teacher and content constitutes curriculum development in process.

Role of Parents

Parents are vitally important in curriculum development. Except for children, parents have more at stake, more personal involvement in the results of curriculum, suffer more from ineffective curricula, and get more personal satis-

faction from the effects of excellent school curricula than any other single group in our society.

Parents must be involved for the insights and understandings they can bring to professional educators about children. Parents are "in the process" of experiencing the results of child growth and development and learning processes. Often they can communicate this knowledge to educators, and educators can profit from the knowledge.

Parents as a group have a key role to play in determining purposes for the school. The schools will become what the people want them to be, and parents are an important part of the group which has the responsibility of determining the schools' objectives. If parents neglect this role, they abandon the education of their children to the whims of chance or, even worse, to forces which would take educational programs in undesirable directions.

Parents operate in two ways in having an impact on school curriculum: (a) as individuals contributing insights, values and commitments to improving school programs for their own and other children, and (b) as members of community groups in which individual identity is submerged to group consensus concerning educational programs within the school community. Although concern with the school program is a secondary factor within such groups, it is, nevertheless, an important factor in the educational climate within a community.

In fulfilling their responsibility for involvement in school curriculum, parents ought to be concerned with:

1. Aims, purposes and goals of education

2. Prograess of their own children within the educational program

3. Solutions to conflict and controversy within the school community

4. Discussion of policy questions referred by school personnel.

Role of Educators

Professional educators, in this context, include all professional people associated with the educational establishment, including psychologists, sociologists, classroom teachers, administrators and other scholars within the organized disciplines.

Professional educators spend their lives in commitment and dedication to the process of education. From a technical standpoint, they know more about the process than do other citizens. They know the research and practice in child growth and development, educational methods, learning, organizational patterns, materials, media and content. The technical and professional knowledge required for organization and implementation of the school curriculum must come largely from members of this professional team.

Involvement Processes

The role of school people is to determine *means* of achieving goals, purposes and objectives which have been determined through appropriate consultation with all groups. Since these groups do not always speak clearly and with a single voice in the community, educators must act as interpreters of purposes expressed by diverse individuals and community groups.

The involvement of all of these groups in the curriculum-making process is extremely important to the future

of our nation. This involvement does not "just happen." It has to be planned by professional educators who understand the importance of such involvement. Each school district and school unit should plan a democratic, representative structure for the involvement of people and the consideration of ideas for improvement of the schools. Ideas should be encouraged from all sources and each idea, no matter its source, should receive consideration as to its suitability for adoption and implementation in the school program. This is one of the most important tasks of the school administrator.

It is also important to remember that we are referring here to a continuing process. Final answers are not sought and are not found. The process never works perfectly and is never completed. It results in "best judgments" on the basis of evidence (data, opinions, values) available at the time of the decision. Even after decision points are reached, the process continues.

Curriculum development processes occur in different ways with different foci, and at different levels of sophistication according to the interests, needs and degrees of readiness of the various individuals and groups involved. There is no magic formula for the application of these principles. For this reason, it is well that educators understand the processes and apply them artistically and scientifically in the curriculum field.

The school must be a model of democratic processes in action. This is the most effective means of assuring the improvement, refinement and the ultimate success, not only of the school curriculum but of our way of life.

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