

COMMUNICATION IN CURRICULUM

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MAN is distinguished from the rest of creation by speech and the accompanying written language. Group awareness depends upon ability to communicate with symbols and meanings which are understood and accepted within the group.

Most learning involves some form of communication. People learn best (communicate) when they want something, do something, and get something from the experience. The best way to start communication flowing is to directly meet the needs of those with whom you work. There is a basic need to communicate. In some respects it is a developmental task. It is fundamental to the acceptance of the individual, to the recognition of his integrity, and his sense of belonging.

Cantril and Allport have shown that media can be characterized as to whether or not they invoke much or little participation. Schramm made a rough scale, running from most participation to least participation as follows:

- personal conversation
- discussion groups
- informal meetings
- telephone
- formal meetings
- sound motion pictures
- television
- radio
- telegraph
- personal correspondence
- form letters
- newspapers
- billboards
- magazines
- books.

In curriculum this gives only a little guidance. It does highlight the fact that personal factors should not be neglected. Media of communication should be carefully selected to meet the purpose intended.

Research is disturbing as to both the effect and the quality of materials com-

municated when their source and credibility are considered. This is confirmed by Brickell's work on the communication of innovation and by practical experience. Teachers appear to learn most from teachers. Rough curriculum materials often do more to cue a teacher than more finished materials.

Schools, agencies and organizations make relatively little use of the many channels open to them. The mass media are not widely used to effect curriculum change and improvement.

Directives present a particular problem. Timing often is not good. Their form is not well thought out and they lack clarity and precision. Few directives concerning curriculum carry through the who? what? when? which? why? how? series.

The exchange of materials among schools and school systems, except in a limited way, is not on a systematic basis. Exchange usually is not considered an important factor. However, the Bureau of Curriculum Research Library in New York City makes a great effort at exchange, as do the U.S. Office of Education, and the International Bureau of Education in Geneva.

Curriculum units in libraries are few and far between, except in a few large centers and in teacher education institutions. State and local authorities usually do not have the resources or the disposition to develop this function on a systematic basis.

Only a little attention has been given to the theoretical basis of communication in education, and the kind of setup which would be necessary to make curriculum communication effective. This has been recognized in some of the studies being made at the New York State Department of Education, in the Albany State University, and in Study Councils. There has been no widespread evaluation or concern for the idea behind communication. For the most part, communication funds are used primarily for public relations. This sometimes results in misuse of the function for the promotion of an individual or his ideas and not for real curriculum work.

Much that needs to be communicated is not in such form that it can be communicated. This is particularly true of research findings. Researchers lament the fact that nobody pays much attention to what they do or to their findings. They often do not recognize that what they wish to communicate is not cast in appropriate form nor is it beamed to the people who might make use of it, provided they could understand and accept it.

From Words to Action

Here are five points that will help to improve curriculum communication:

1. *Is the word the flesh?* In this year of the Dante celebration we are reminded of the difference between the word, the idea for which the word stands, the thing, and the action which the word generates. Words and ideas have meaning only in terms of the individual's experiential background, present situation, needs and drives. We assume that people understand us when we talk to them, or when we issue a directive. Very often they do not. We often provide no opportunity to explore new meanings, to gain background in an idea.

The workshop way of learning is a way of communicating par excellence, because it allows more time. It probably has made the greatest contribution of any one technique to curriculum reform in the U.S.A. When we found out that what we put on paper (words) was not enough, curriculum leaders wrongly concluded that curriculum reports were redundant and that word-of-mouth experience was all that was needed.

The oral word is only the flesh when it has personal meaning and significance to the individual. Communication must unite the word, the concept behind it, the action which gives it reality, and the commitment and drive which carry it forward. And we must provide curriculum materials (courses of study and reports) that can be consulted at leisure.

Recently in Belgrade, I carried on a conversation with a distinguished colleague who has been sadly disillusioned by the writing of curriculum materials. He says only teacher training will suffice. I say the experience must also be written down and described, and that it must be in printed and AV form to be fully communicated. Not doing this is where we have missed the boat. Communication in curriculum, whether for children or teachers, is a complicated process, requiring experience, patience and understanding.

2. *Don't put all of your eggs in one basket.* In education we are calling for a multi-media approach to teaching and learning. We should also call for a multi-media approach to curriculum communication. With all of the resources available to us, it is inexcusable to depend so exclusively on the lecture

or the written directive or even the curriculum bulletin (words).

Teachers need and can take solid stuff. Radio and television, the film and tape recorder, and the overhead projector, have put at our disposal means of communication which those who would influence teaching and learning cannot ignore. The difficulty with some of the research in communication is that it establishes a scale for effectiveness of means of communication with regard to a particular situation, and does not recognize that in another situation something else would be more appropriate.

Sometimes the best thing that we can do is hand a person a book or a curriculum bulletin, or an article. Another time we can ask an individual to listen to a lecture or give him a telephone call, try sociodrama or even hold a five-minute conversation with him. A change of pace or medium will excite the same interest and expectation with the teachers as with children.

3. *Strike while the iron is hot.* We learn when we want or need something, when we do something, and when we get something out of it. So it is with communication. The curriculum worker must have at his disposal many curriculum ideas and materials. This is why I believe that the curriculum library, documentation center, and laboratory are *sine qua non* to a curriculum communications program. (I have visited many materials centers in Europe and Africa, and I see great promise in this development.) When a teacher or supervisor needs something, then is the time to strike.

There is much communication for good or ill in how you give help. Both

children and teachers are often afraid to ask. Casual offhand help is often the best and most lasting, especially since there is no threat behind it. There is no wrong way to help a teacher if it is when he needs it, and if the spirit of the communication is one of helpfulness and professional interest.

4. *Two-way communication is the essence of the democratic process.* It engenders a feeling of trust and promotes good interpersonal relations. It helps to build people and, in building people, you also build confidence and trust and a feeling of human value and human dignity. An attitude of humility is also engendered. "We-ness" is encouraged and morale lifted.

The effective curriculum worker says "It seems to me . . ." and allows a place for a disagreement, an elaboration, a question or a proposal. This does not mean that one does not present his point of view directly, explicitly, and with full force. It does mean that at the appropriate time there is opportunity for modification, and even reversal without loss of face or integrity. Professionally trained people all over the world have a great fault of assuming that their professionalism also makes them good communicators. A first duty of the professional worker is to help others to make good choices. Child or adult, one learns to make good choices only when one has an opportunity to make a choice, live with the consequences, and grow from the experience.

I should not like to minimize the place of symbols and plans in communication, whether they be people like my professors of the past or the new crop. Nor would I want to minimize the use of word symbols behind ideas

such as "Learning by doing," "Children should be free," "The integrity of the individual," "Freedom to teach," or "Freedom to learn." Neither would I want to minimize the symbol value of the flag or the four freedoms or the school bell. However, I would want those who use the symbol to communicate an idea or a commitment to recognize that the communication has value only in the meaning which it leaves with the individual. This is a fundamental curriculum tenet.

5. *Pooling ignorance is no way to run a railroad.* Curriculum requires a particular synthesis of communication of many strands, many facets, many levels. I believe that these three aspects are essential: research, experience and scholarship.

Research plays too little part in curriculum communication and decision making. Good curriculum is a different thing from usual educational research. It cannot be fragmented. It must be in a situation. It requires a different design and pattern than the usual approach to educational research. Last summer I was in Cambridge, where I attended an International Conference on Educational Research. I found there, as in America, that what I know to be good research in curriculum is thought not to be research.

The American Educational Research Association recently recognized the importance of Curriculum Research by setting up a curriculum section. This is still in the embryo stage. The national curriculum projects have attempted new patterns but have been somewhat dogmatic and incomplete in their approach, and far less effective than they might have been. We have little in edu-

cation which corresponds to the rigorous applications of Operations Research in industry. Action Research, which held so much hope and which S. M. Corey so brilliantly conceived, never quite got off the ground, largely because of the hostility of the research elite.

Importance of Research

There are many exceptions to the preceding statement—in the New York City Bureau of Curriculum Research, in the Horace Mann-Lincoln Institute, at Ohio State, Harvard, Maryland, Pittsburgh and like centers. But by and large research and curriculum units in states and cities are miles apart. Temporarily scholarship through national projects is riding high. It is usually on a unilateral and highly individualistic basis. Synthesis is not the order of the day in these projects. Much of the overall thinking of the past has been lost in the mirage of the "disciplines," with too little attention to A. W. Foshay's analysis in this regard. Research personnel are generally not associated in a fundamental way with curriculum work. The big drive is to do small, neat, unrelated studies, to supervise, to keep things going, to implement, whether or not what is implemented is for good.

Is there any hope? Yes. But AASA, AERA, ASCD and other organizations must replace play acting with substantial effort. The Foundations and the U.S. Office of Education must awaken to the great need in American education for synthesis, collaboration and integration. Will they? This remains to be seen. In the meantime what are we curriculum workers to do, whether we are

teachers, curriculum supervisors, researchers or scholars? As each curriculum project is launched, consider it also as a problem in communication. We ask "What does research say? What do teachers say? What do scholars say?" We add to that what the needs of children require, what community needs demand, how what we are doing is affected by national and international developments. In the absence of special personnel we use the simple technique of assuming roles in a committee or group, and carry on our investigation in a manner worthy of the professionals that we are. The amount of assistance available is surprising when this is done even in a village community. There is far more expertise available for curriculum work and communication than is now being used.

I consider it very important to write down our experiences and I have worked hard to improve curriculum publications as a means of communication. I know full well both the limitations and the value of such materials. It is only when people write down what they think that they can look at it again, review it and revise it. Most curriculum publications should be distributed only *where they are prepared*. When used elsewhere their limitation should be recognized.

On the other hand any materials, good or poor, serve to "cue" teachers to undertake new approaches, new plans. This is why I have urged exchange as a means of communication. From this point of view, exchange is not a pooling of ignorance, but rather a stimulus to action.

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