

Preparation of Curriculum Workers

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HOW can the curriculum specialist become more effective, more productive? Let us examine five options as possible answers to this question: attending conferences and/or workshops, taking university courses, professional reading, talking informally with job-alike people, or working on the job. Which would you rank as most effective? Which least effective?

In a recent descriptive-survey study sponsored by the Indiana ASCD and the Curriculum Research and Development Center of Indiana State University, this question was posed to 650 curriculum workers in 277 Indiana public school corporations. In *all* categories sampled (including elementary, secondary, and general curriculum workers, media specialists, content specialists, and supervisors of special services) the consensus was that working on the job was the best means for becoming a more effective curriculum worker. In *all* categories sampled (as listed above) the consensus was that taking university courses was the least effective of the options!

Even assuming there are university courses and university courses (some effective and some not as effective), the value of current university courses on the whole for preparation of curriculum specialists may be seriously questioned. If working on the job is the most valued kind of experience, then the implication may well be that university

courses should move in the direction of on-the-job experiences.

Need for Relevance

How can university courses be reconstructed to become more relevant to the practitioner's needs? The following changes are possible alternatives to existing requirements:

1. Existing programs of preparation are traditionally couched in terms of course requirements (specifically listed, with few electives). Certification requirements might be better indicated in terms of a variety of experiences rather than a body of knowledge. More specifically, process areas might be included, such as internship or practicum, rather than formal lecture-discussion courses such as Curriculum 500 and Supervision 521.

Greater flexibility might be possible through inclusion of process areas. A student might have credit granted from six to twelve semester hours in practicum, and be similarly credited for internship. Approximately 35 semester hours above the B.S. or B.A. might be required for certification.

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2. Preliminary experiences might well be through workshops and seminars in which foundational areas such as philosophy, sociology, psychology, and history could be integrated in a meaningful way involving curriculum theory and development. The workshop experiences would entail the use of resource people—practitioners. As a matter of course, the workshops might be specifically designed to meet the needs of a particular school district.

An outcome of the workshop could well be a curriculum guide designed for a particular district or a specialized area of content. Seminars might be completely open-ended, with the needs of the participants giving structure to the give-and-take sessions. Seminars would deal with issues and problematic situations; seminars would provide alternatives and implications for action, rather than definitive instructional answers.

3. An intermediate step in the program might be independent study, in lieu of the

research course typically offered in the master's program. The emphasis could be on action research growing out of an immediate instructional problem or concern. Independent study could well involve visitation at various grade levels to become familiar with articulation and methodological processes. Independent study could involve the development and possibly even the implementation of a curriculum guide—with a critical evaluation and with changes to be made in the guide as the "try-out" would seem to necessitate.

4. The practicum could be part-time involvement in some of the duties performed by a full-time curriculum worker. The practicum might involve participation in trips to universities or colleges to interview potential teachers before their employment. It might involve serving as a member of a textbook adoption committee or a curriculum revision committee. It might involve the coordination of in-service programs for the school. It might involve more coordination of extracurricular

activities in the secondary schools. It might involve supervision of a few first-year teachers in the district.

The practicum could involve preparation of a substitute teacher list, or coordinating student teacher assignments in the district. The schedule of the participant could be arranged to provide an adequate time block to arrange for part-time participation in a variety of activities of the full-time curriculum worker.

5. The capstone activity would be the internship. This would be a full-time assignment of working with a curriculum specialist or an assistant. The school district would agree to pay half the intern's salary for a specified period. The university would coordinate the program through a field professor who would visit the intern every week or 10 days—and hold three-way conferences.

6. In summary, the university program for the preparation of the curriculum worker would be a four-step program:

- | | |
|-------------------------|------------|
| 1. Workshop and Seminar | 6-12 hours |
| 2. Independent Study | 6-12 hours |
| 3. Practicum | 6-12 hours |
| 4. Internship | 6-12 hours |

As indicated before, a minimum of 32 to 35 hours would be necessary to complete the program, and six hours would be the minimum in each of the process areas.

7. The university faculty member who teaches or coordinates these process areas should have had on-the-job experience as a curriculum worker. Theory is important, but theory is most relevant when accompanied by adequate policy and practical implications.

8. The university professor would be essentially a field worker. (Every two weeks,

for example, there might be a staff meeting on campus.) In fact, the locus of the university professor's operation would not be the university community, but a region of the state.

9. "Courses" would be offered primarily through extended services. Workshops and conferences would be held on the university campus during the summer months as supplementary activities. The typical residence requirement for graduation would be waived.

10. An advisory board of curriculum workers would be established to meet with the director of the program, who would be stationed on the university campus, and with the field professors to offer suggestions and make recommendations for program development in all its phases.

11. A close working relationship would be established with the state and regional ASCD group, especially through the director of the program. Liaison would be established by the director with the department of public instruction in the state, as well as with the "umbrella" administrative organization in the state, if such exists.

The Indiana survey of how to make curriculum specialists more effective and productive shows that what is needed in the preparation of curriculum workers is relevance. A program should be developed that is flexible and that can be tailored to the goals of individuals—there are a multiplicity of roles in curriculum work. There needs to be a technical basis for the program; "learning by doing" in the broader Deweyian perspective is not old hat. The preparation of curriculum workers ought not to be isolated from the reality of "firing-line" experiences. □

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