

Opening the System from the Inside

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INSTITUTIONS, systems, and curriculum designs there are and always will be. Some are productive, while others may be even terribly ineffective. People of contrasting dispositions, motivations, and behaviors there are and always will be. Some are creative, while others may be even pathetically negative and inept.

A curriculum design is the plan for presenting learning opportunities to students in the schooling system within the institution of education. Some people look upon the design as a means to protect a domain, to further a sacred discipline, to maintain the status quo, to reinforce intellectual egos by esoteric exercises, or to attain a power base for trade-off in bargaining. These, however, are not adequate rationales.

Curriculum designs are for learners. A child is the supreme expression of the potentiality of man and the universe. His growing mind probes and reflects, wonders and analyzes, seeks and evaluates. His body matures through youth and adulthood, and his complex environment molds him in intricate and often imperceptible ways. This delicate yet indomitable being is the reason for a curriculum design, for a system of schooling, for the institution of education.

Who will develop such a design? *Outsiders* will volunteer criticism and panaceas. They will characterize the design as sluggish,

unresponsive, and unenlightened. "Look at the bureaucracy. Look at the products. Away with the system." *Insiders* will highlight the accomplishments, describe the total scope, explain patiently and sometimes defensively the realities of bonds and budgets, agree that there is much to be done. But the system, they will insist, is competent and cares about the participants.

Some insiders seem to depend upon outsiders to make them move. They are wrong to do so.

While spectacular forays from the outside have dramatic value, offer therapy for individuals, or serve as a necessary form of external pressure, the most significant changes can be brought about by insightful and enthusiastic individuals *within* the system who know the workings and the people. They can find ways of moving the system in a purposeful and persistent manner, unflagging, undaunted, unflinching.

Framework for Freedom

Within the past decade, thousands of articles on innovations have been published. Brochures outlining new approaches have

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been distributed. A multitude of books have commented on the blemishes on the schooling scene. Research is rarely conclusive, problems remain unresolved, solutions mysterious.

Such, however, is not the case with "Framework for Freedom"—F+2S—curriculum opener or, stated another way, "Freedom Framework for System and Self." This is both a game and a serious endeavor.

Keep your own score. Each time you check response a, award 3 points; response b, 2 points; response c, 1 point. Assess your system and yourself. This is the grid:

Components	System	Self
Foundations		
Forces		
Factors		
Functions		
Totals		

F-1: FOUNDATIONS. Does your system and/or do you:

A. Believe that learners come first (a-completely, b-pretty much, c-if it fits in with own well-being and welfare)?

B. Subscribe to the following assumptions?

—Theory is practical. Action is based on some recognized or unrecognized basis; the more we understand this basis the better off we are. (a-agree, b-sort of, c-stating postulates is too demanding and we can get away without doing it.)

—Process is content. *How* we learn is *what* we learn; separation negates the fundamental unity of learning. (a-agree, b-method is important, c-content is separate from process.)

—Cognition is affective. How we think determines how we feel and how we feel determines how we think. (a-agree, b-feeling needs to be considered, c-intellect and emotions are divorced; it is too much to try to deal with both in the curriculum.)

C. Operate on the following tenets?

—Learners need some acceptable reason for doing what they are doing. (a-agree, b-

most of the time, c-not necessary for them to know why now, they will understand later.)

—There is a fine line between degree of success in learning and amount of built-in challenge; success is vital but not at the expense of challenge. (a-agree, b-success is very important, c-the tougher the better; let them know early their ability and achievement level.)

—There is no one way to learn anything—individual learning involves options and choices, various methods. (a-agree, b-generally agree, c-some subjects defy any approach except lecture and reading.)

F-2: FORCES. Do the following forces get their play, have their day: teachers, administrators, scholars of the disciplines, learning theorists, parents, citizens, school board members, politicians, professional associations, educational industries, and of course always and forever the students? Are there channels to feed in and feed back? (a-yes, in an attentive and organized way, b-deal with most of them fairly well, c-such an array of contradictory groups defies any systematic treatment.)

F-3: FACTORS. Is there realistic acknowledgment, understanding, sensitivity to the currently operating factors of involvement, confrontation, shared decision making, right of expression, dramatic appeals, bargaining demands, power struggles, public relations, and politics? (a-yes, sophisticated and positive inclusion, b-deal with these factors but is psychologically draining, c-they are making life and education a shambles; none of them were there in the good old days.)

F-4: FUNCTIONS. Are these behaviors functioning: caring, competence, compassion, persistence, responsibility, joy, risk taking, standing up and being counted? Is there a relationship between what is said and what is done, between hurrying and humanism, between perseverance and imagination? (a-yes, yes, all those good things, b-*comme çà* *comme ça*, c-little hope, excitement, joy.)

These are the openers for the design. What is the rating for your system and yourself, a high of 30 or a low of 10?

Both System and Self

Institutions, systems, and design there always will be. Institutions exist to further society. Systems hopefully are composed of people of expertise brought together to solve problems. Designs, ideally, are imaginative ways for getting things done.

People of all kinds there always will be.

If they are involved in curriculum design, they need to be fascinating and fresh, with verve and vigor. They must always remember, however, that curriculum designs are for that supreme expression of potentiality, the learner. Insiders who cannot realistically rate their attainments at the highest level need to try to raise the scores for both system and self. □

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