

The Greening of Curriculum

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AS ONE examines the curriculum scene with a focus on "opening things up," as those writing in this issue have done, a new optimism is justified. One can support Charles Reich's controversial thesis that there is a greening of America with increasingly strong evidence that there is also a greening of the curriculum.

For Reich, the greening shows up in a new consciousness that has emerged from the "machine-made environment of the corporate state like flowers pushing up through a concrete pavement."¹ This new consciousness has clearly helped to nourish alternative curriculum designs, which are beginning to push up through the many hard-rock traditions of curriculum development reflected in the so-called conventional wisdom of the field.

Until recently, it was not at all evident that such growth was possible. To be sure, there were countless reports of innovations in response to the question, "What is new?" So often, however, these innovations were little more than a rearrangement or a redeployment of the conventional elements of curriculum planning. They affected hardly at all the quality of life in the school.

New Concepts Required

In effect, the conceptual tools—if one may think of an underlying rationale in these terms—available to curriculum planners caught up in change were quite inadequate for the generation of truly imaginative curricular alternatives. We were victimized by a technological mentality and locked into the kind of technological language it had generated.

Many thoughtful observers called this to our attention—Huebner, Macdonald, Mann, Kliebard, among others. Yet, curriculum decision makers, when pressed to reflect on what they were doing or hoped to do, invariably responded with "selecting and organizing content" in terms of

¹ Charles A. Reich. *The Greening of America*. New York: Random House, Inc., 1970. p. 395.

"purposes." And these purposes, they commonly asserted, were to be formulated from an analysis of data drawn from the "needs of society," the "needs of individuals," and the "nature of knowledge."

The difficulty with this rationale lies not, it seems, with the naming of the data sources. Serious disjunctures occur at every point in the process. In fact, as a rationale, it breaks down so often in practice that most experienced teachers have come to regard curriculum development along these simple, but compellingly logical, lines as a myth. It is something we can talk and write about, using highly refined technological language if we choose, but it really does not relate in any discernible way to what actually takes place. Nor does it give one a sound base for controlling or predicting curricular change.

The "larger learnings," for example, that Frazier called to our attention and the "new priorities" that Berman explored have not been in the picture. Indeed, there has been no adequate curricular language even to talk about them, let alone for planning new curricular designs to open things up in schools. The many versions of new organizational schemes do not, in themselves, do this, whatever the increased flexibility they may have the potential to provide.

Promising Breakthroughs

A significant breakthrough came in the spring of 1970 in ASCD's courageous action to adopt a new platform statement on the quality of life and society in the United States. This platform developed by Frazier,² with the help of others, examined seven facets of emerging counter-culture values. The seven cut across all of the conventional data which might be drawn from traditional curriculum planning sources. In effect, this statement began to recognize data for curriculum planning that such critics of American culture as Mead, Galbraith, Henry, and Roszak have urged educators to examine. New "realities" identified by some of the most thoughtful future planners were brought into focus.

But adopting a platform statement is not enough. Professional groups have had a long history of doing that. There remains a large and critical job to be undertaken by us all—theoreticians, developers, and practitioners—to translate these emerging values into adequate curricular designs in school settings. New conceptual tools will be required to help us do this, tools that do not have the built-in error of most of our present curriculum development concepts.

Among other things, we must reassess the political power context of curriculum making. John Mann has performed a useful service in his examination of the political power question which, in his words, goes beyond the patchwork affair of "piecing little tidbits of humanism onto a thoroughly manipulative, impersonal, mechanical sort of curriculum."³ Other curriculum concepts that impinge on the design problem must be subjected to similar hard-nosed scrutiny.

² Alexander Frazier. "The Quality of Life and Society in the United States." In: Robert R. Leeper, editor. *A Man for Tomorrow's World*. Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1970. pp. 62-84.

³ John S. Mann. "Political Power and the High School Curriculum." *Educational Leadership* 28 (1): 24; October 1970.

An effort under way in a long-range project sponsored by the University Council on Educational Administration illustrates yet another promising thrust. This project, called the Monroe City Simulation, has one task force focusing on changing the curriculum. Those currently involved in this work are developing a new conceptual framework to guide in the selection of more adequate simulation experiences for curriculum decision makers.

John Herbert's efforts at the Ontario Institute to develop a more effective curriculum theory network is another encouraging development with implications for the curriculum design field.

The continuing work at the Center for the Study of Curriculum at The Ohio State University merits attention also. Ten of the Center staff members were involved in 1970 in a joint research and development effort with the Nuffield Foundation and Schools Council-Supported Humanities Curriculum Project in London, England. Clearly, this project, which originated to develop more adequate curricular materials for early school leavers, has served to open up the secondary school curriculum in England. Like the best of the "open" primary schools in that country, it suggests thoughtful alternative curriculum designs for us.

The greening turns up also in the descriptions of alternatives throughout this issue of *Educational Leadership*. This writer continues to be inspired by what some of the free schools have done, for example, to reconceptualize the problems of curricular design and to create new roles for students and community as well as teachers.

The Task Ahead

In the months ahead, this greening process calls for good, accurate descriptions of what is happening without all of the Madison Avenue talk that has so often characterized our reporting. The effort of Arthur W. Foshay⁴ in reporting what has happened in the past several years at Murray Road School in Newton, Massachusetts, stands as a good example. And, clearly, we need to create more adequate concepts for controlling and predicting change.

As an editorial writer for this issue, I am convinced that we must keep in mind, more than ever before, that values are quite central in this process of curriculum development. Attention to the values reflected in the articles included here and to the quality of life commitments the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development has made will give us a new base for generating more adequate curriculum designs.

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⁴ Arthur W. Foshay. *Curriculum for the 70's: Agenda for Invention*. Washington, D.C.: NEA Center for the Study of Instruction, 1970.



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