

Curriculum Development Accountability

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IT IS our contention that the curriculum developer can be held accountable for a number of decisions, by a number of groups (audiences), for a number of reasons. Further, we contend that the curriculum developer has an obligation to attend to the needs, goals, and expectations of the myriad special interest groups as they relate to the decisions he makes.

The Case for Accountability

Traditionally, curriculum developers have focused their attention solely on the intents, contents, and methodologies of an instructional package, to the exclusion of the audiences who will react to decisions they make. Usually if attention is paid to an audience, it is given to teachers and students, in terms of "what is best for them," not "what are they thinking, feeling, demanding." To be sure, some audiences suggest only generalities: "The school should teach my child how to prepare for adult life." Other audiences suggest specifics: "Teach my child how to read." In both instances, it remains for the curriculum developer to develop the details of a curriculum. Nonetheless, even the generalities espoused by the various audiences provide meaningful cues for the curriculum developer concerned about building and implementing his curriculum.

Any curriculum tends to touch a variety of people, in a variety of ways, at a variety of times. These diverse groups can be viewed as audiences who come with various biases and demands, public and private concerns, and motives of assorted legitimacies; each of these "pockets of persuasion" may serve its notice of accountability to the curriculum developer. The amount of "clout" these audiences possess in serving that notice is not at question here; the reality of their existence is. The manner in which the developer must account for (report, explain, or justify) the curriculum will differ according to who is raising the questions, what those questions are about, and when they are raised.

Curriculum Development

Curriculum development *may* be seen as a series of decision points at each of which an alternative, or combination of alternatives, is selected by some process. The alternative selected at each decision point determines subsequent developmental procedures.

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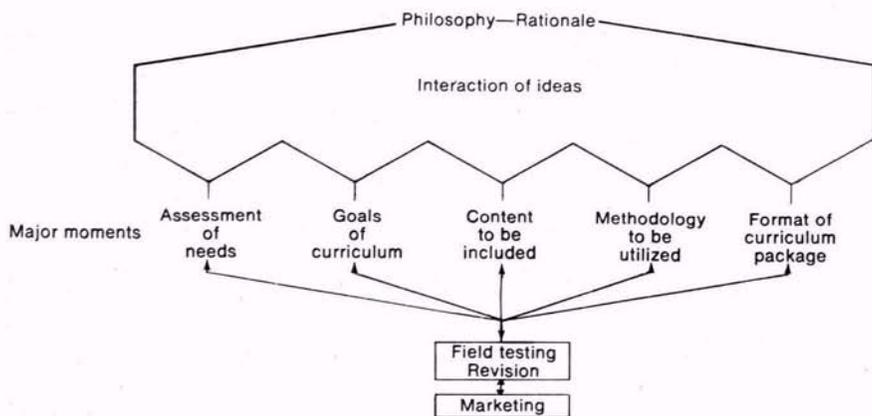


Figure 1. The Process of Curriculum Development

In the development of a curriculum of national scope, a vast number of decisions must be made by a wide variety of decision makers. Many of these decisions are made on a daily basis; many are implicit, a few explicit. There exist, however, some decisions that must be made explicitly; these decisions determine the ultimate nature of the curriculum package. The *major moments* are the focal points in the decision-making process and, as such, are the points at which various interest groups may direct their claims of accountability.

Figure 1 illustrates a very general conception of the curriculum development process. We have identified five major moments in the development of the curriculum package. Field testing is a major moment also, as “go or no-go” decisions related to the curriculum package as a whole or parts thereof are sought prior to consumer purchase of the package.

A continual process of interaction, over time, occurs among ideas brought into play by the curriculum developers. Thus ideas about content interact with ideas about goals, as well as ideas about methodology and ideas about the format of the package. As the development process unfolds, widely divergent ideas may be expressed. Daily decisions will be made about some of these ideas; some will be eliminated, some kept, and some revised.

However, a number of “ultimate” decisions must be made: debate about which goals to pursue cannot continue indefinitely; some content must be selected, a methodology suggested, a format chosen. These “ultimate” decisions we have called major moments.

We have chosen to “cap” our model with the philosophy or rationale for the developmental process. The rationale for the curriculum being developed defines, in some sense, the parameters of the project. The interaction of ideas about content, methodology, and all other relevant (and irrelevant) variables is bounded by the developer’s rationale. To be sure, this rationale may not always be clearly discernible, thus presenting problems for an evaluator, those working on the curriculum, as well as those who finally use the curriculum. The evaluator may see as a part of his responsibility an attempt to have the rationale clearly stated by the curriculum developer.

Curriculum development, viewed as a series of decisions about the curriculum package and its testing, usually involves a host of people, only some of whom are directly connected with the curriculum project. Each person who is directly involved brings his beliefs, attitudes, values, and assump-

tions to the decision points. Each represents an influence on the final shape of the package. It may be difficult to separate the decision from the person who most influenced it.

Our treatment of curriculum development has been brief, but we hope these statements provide a frame of reference for subsequent remarks. The major moments we have identified may be too many, too few, or too vague. Nonetheless, the idea of major moments suggests a rather unique role for evaluation in the curriculum process.

One Role for Evaluation

Those involved in the work of developing a curriculum package make the decision suggested by each major moment. We contend that the curriculum developers' decisions should not be made without a careful analysis of the "hopes, fears, and aspirations" (not to mention the *demands*) of the several audiences who are but indirectly connected with the curriculum project, yet who might reasonably lay claim to providing input into each major moment.

This is the problem—parties interested in the curriculum development and outcome are often not at the decision-making scene. They appear later, to voice directly their protest against a decision made earlier, or to displace their protest toward an object (for example, a school tax issue) which they themselves can influence directly. They question the alternatives from which a choice was selected; they hold the distributor (the school) accountable for what the developer did, or failed to do. Educators repeatedly find themselves backpedaling to rationalize a decision already made, rather than anticipating the nature of the demand and inquiry *prior* to making decisions.

Exit for now the mode of evaluation concerned with outcomes, statistics, and compare-this-program-to-another, and enter evaluation operating in a who's-asking-what, who's-doing-what, how-do-the-groups-with-an-interest-stack-up-in-terms-of-potential-influence mode. In this mode, evaluation raises many questions (few answers), alerts the curriculum developer (sensitizes?), and

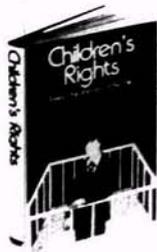
causes a lot of concern about justifying, explaining, and relating. It is not a comfortable mode. Yet neither is it comfortable to be holding a beautifully structured, logically sequenced curriculum that no one can or will let into the schools!

Consider, if you will, the major moment: "What are the objectives of our proposed social studies curriculum package?" Suppose we decide our curriculum ought to enable students to think critically about our social system—a reasonable objective. Some of the "best" minds tell us this is the essence of social studies; students must learn critical thinking. With that decided, we move on to deciding content and methodology and format.

Yet why was that one objective chosen to the exclusion of others? Members of a discipline-oriented audience may not see it as an appropriate objective. A culturally-different audience may not see it as an appropriate objective. A culturally-different audience is likely to say, "Forget critical thinking; let's tell it (the social system) as it is." A parent audience wants to know the relationship between a curriculum centered around this objective and the skills the college entrance exams measure. And so it goes. These groups may be verbal and are likely to exert their influence on the curriculum distributor (the school): the telephone rings, the principal and the superintendent incur pressure, the school board reacts. And that curriculum, with that objective, must go. The curriculum package can be defended by the members of any group of experts who *know*—but it is gone.

Does the curriculum developer have a responsibility to support the curriculum distributor (the school) as the curriculum consumer (the student) and consumer-related people raise questions? Look at this decision again. What audience may react? What groups may protest, support, resist, affirm? What do they want to know? What are they demanding? What group can you antagonize and still see your curriculum implemented? What are the trade-offs? Where are you

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likely to be held accountable for failure, and where are you likely to be given credit for accomplishment?

You need not call it evaluation, but we suggest that the curriculum developer spend part of his time identifying audiences, "pockets of potential persuasion." Furthermore, it is not enough merely to acknowledge the existence of different audiences. Judgments made by these audiences about the focus of the major moments and the reasons given for decisions made at these moments must be ascertained and considered by the developer in his decision making. The developer, or the evaluator, may be able to uncover (not by second-guessing but by direct inquiry) the questions these groups will be asking, the claims they will be making, the axes they seem to want to grind. Armed with that information, the developer, or evaluator, can determine what kinds of data should be ready for use in response to potential questions. Perhaps more important, the data can be used as developmental input; the data can exert an influence on what is developed.

The curriculum developer cannot follow suggestions made by all audiences, nor should he. Suggestions may be in direct opposition to each other, for example. However, by considering possible suggestions and possible demands, the developer has determined, before the fact, what the consequences of not attending to a particular suggestion or group might be. He need not yield only to those who speak the loudest; he may not follow the demands of audiences. He *does* need to know what people want and think, if only to know better how he is to report, explain, or justify what has been done, and why.

Selling your expert's soul? Yielding principle to pressure? Not as we see it. Evaluation, by identifying questions, groups, and data available, enables the curriculum developer to confront reality nose-to-nose. The expert skills of the curriculum developer include the ability successfully to combine the substance and methodology of a certain discipline with the expectations of audiences who come in contact with the developmental process and the curriculum package.

Evaluation in the Scheme of Things

What we are suggesting is that by using a more formal system of evaluation, the curriculum developer can promote action, rather than mere reaction; he may anticipate audience reaction *before* it happens, thus reducing the necessity for the curriculum developer and distributor to react rather than constructively act.

From the very practical standpoint of time and expertise, the developer cannot perform all the evaluative tasks needed. Thus, the curriculum development *team* may well include an evaluator.

There are a number of roles the evaluator can play in the performance of this task. He may be a raiser of questions; he may collect and interpret data; he may serve as judge. In our scheme, the evaluator collects, throughout the developmental process, data about what the audiences are thinking, feeling, and wanting with respect to various developmental foci. He may, after appropriate study of the data, interpret what he has found for or with the curriculum developer, thus continually reminding the curriculum developer of his accountability. The evaluator can be the amplifier of consumer demands, as well as the communicator of curriculum distributor needs.

Perhaps the most difficult task facing the curriculum development team is the integration of accountabilities to create a curriculum that is most responsive to the audiences that are affected by it. The evaluator is not unlike the symphony conductor who must

blend individual sounds into a pleasing composite for his audience. The evaluator must amplify some audience demands, increase the fidelity of others, filter others, and eliminate still others in his attempt to help the curriculum development team determine the best combination of accountabilities.

Implicit (and unfortunately, usually *too* implicit) in all of this are the value systems of everyone concerned with curriculum development and usage. The developers value some things more than others; their product reflects their value orientations. But what of the values of other audiences, particularly the consumer-related people? Potential conflict is only too apparent. The developers of curriculum err when they do not consider the values of those who will use the curriculum package. The introduction of sex education courses is a case in point. Valuable though such courses may be, their impact will not be felt if the value orientations of the potential consumer-related persons block implementation of the program.

Again, the evaluator serves the function of providing information about consumer values to the curriculum developer. The object of this information is not to rule out all things contrary to the expressed values of the consumer, but rather to utilize knowledge about consumer values in the most appropriate means for organizing, explaining, and justifying the curriculum package. It just may be that "a curriculum in operation is worth two on the shelf," assuming that the curriculum in operation has been carefully and thoughtfully evaluated throughout the developmental process. □

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