

# Student Teachers Need Experience in Curriculum Development

HERBERT A. SEARLE\*

**C**URRICULUM development should be a primary concern in at least part of the clinical experience of the teaching novice. Some attention already is given to curriculum development in student teaching programs as the student prepares to teach each day's lessons. However, curriculum development in its broadest sense is subordinated to the need for getting through the teaching routines. Observation and actual practice teaching, therefore, should be limited to six weeks.

## Curriculum Priorities Neglected

There are three good reasons for this recommendation. In the first place, valid criticisms of our typical student teaching program are being heard, such as: "All too often the classroom teacher affords anything but a proper model of how to teach," and "The student has little option but to follow the cooperating teacher's prescribed plan."<sup>1</sup>

Second, the real purpose of practice teaching is to expose the novice to the actual experience of teaching. In this way he may discover firsthand whether or not he really

likes teaching and is able to perform credibly as a teacher, according to existing normative standards. Six weeks of observation and teaching, it is believed, are enough time for the student teacher to make these two discoveries.

Once this commitment has been made, the novice can probably spend his time more profitably than actually teaching (he will be doing that all the rest of his teaching career). What he will have less and less time for, when he has the full responsibility of teaching, is examining and reflecting upon the curriculum in a close student teacher-pupil relationship. Today the problem is that of knowing what to do with certain groups of individual students—indeed, the problem is one of curriculum development.

Finally, concentrated curriculum development activity by the novice in the field, using public school materials and interacting with students in the schools, would very likely be more productive than in the less real surrounding of the college campus. Such clinical experience is a necessity if the criteria of involving students in curricular

<sup>1</sup> Charles E. Silberman. "Even Student Teaching Is Dismal." *Today's Education* 60 (1): 22-25; January 1971.

\* Herbert A. Searle, Professor of Education and Psychology, Shippensburg State College, Shippensburg, Pennsylvania

decisions are to be met.<sup>2</sup> Pressure for meeting these criteria is growing among community groups that demand worthwhile educational objectives for today, with observable results and accountability.

I propose that the teacher in training should use the time beyond six weeks of actual practice teaching to concentrate on curricular problems. Just how the time beyond the six weeks of actual observation and teaching should be spent to complete a clinical experience of nine, twelve, or more weeks in the field cannot, of course, be exactly stated; yet an outline of a structure is possible.

It is evident that some areas of the curriculum stress cognitive content more than they do psychomotor skills. As a result, the nature and extent of preparation entailed in getting ready for teaching a series of classes would vary in accordance with content and skill objectives. Common elements do exist, however, and there is a suggested outline from which to begin a curriculum building experience that would apply universally to all subjects in the curriculum.

Hilda Taba's curriculum development guidelines might well provide the structure from which the student teacher could begin to work. Starting with *concepts* or a pattern of ideas and/or skills which serve as a basis for the development of objectives, the rest of the structure follows:

*Objectives*—Goals expressed in terms which determine the kind of behavior to be developed in the learner. Based on: Knowledge of concepts and skills.

*Supportive Learnings*—Important facts, generalizations, and skills related to the objectives. Based on: Objectives.

*Pupil Experiences*—Satisfying experiences possible of attainment which provide opportunity to practice the kind of behavior described in the objective. Based on: Objectives and Supportive Learnings.

*Evaluation*—Processes which involve identifying the strengths and weaknesses of achievement in relation to objectives. Based on:

<sup>2</sup> Mark R. Shedd. "Have We Substituted Routine for Relevancy?" *Pennsylvania Education* 2 (7): 39; January-February 1971.

Objectives, Supportive Learnings, and Pupil Experiences.

*Critical Suggestions*—Suggestions for adapting the curriculum to meet needs, interests, and abilities of disadvantaged, handicapped, gifted, and normal learner; also for including special situations of a local, economic, cultural, and social nature that provide an opportunity to further a worthwhile educational objective.<sup>3</sup>

## Priorities of the Supervisor's Job

The job of the college supervisor and the cooperating teacher should also be structured, and should be focused on priorities of curriculum development. The following three criteria are strongly suggested for emphasis in the curriculum building experience of the teaching novice:

1. To encourage the imagination of the novice in his planning efforts toward the relating of content and skills to students' lives by involving them in curriculum decisions during the planning stage, with later choices built into the curriculum

2. To insist upon the setting of clearly focused, attainable objectives in cognitive learning tasks, with special attention to be given to affective needs, as much as the circumstances will allow

3. To emphasize the logical meaningfulness of concepts to be taught, that is, having the qualities of non-arbitrariness and substantiveness capable of being expressed in other terms, and of being related to the cognitive structure of the learner.<sup>4</sup>

We could, thus, make teacher preparation more realistic by coming to grips early with the problems of curriculum development during the student teaching experience. It is left to each subject department or team of teachers and supervisors to decide specifically how this training is to be accomplished. First, we must have the idea of a structured curriculum development program for the novice accepted as viable. □

<sup>3</sup> Hilda Taba. *Curriculum Development: Theory and Practice*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1962. p. 425.

<sup>4</sup> David P. Ausubel. *School Learning*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1969. pp. 51-54.

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