Criteria for Curriculum Development

JACK J. WICKERT*

GREAT interest has been shown in the past decade in the curriculum field. Most of the emphasis has appeared to center around multiethnic approaches, new academic programs, building autonomy, new school organizational patterns, and media technology rather than around curriculum development procedures. Consequently, school systems have found ample help in determining which new programs to adopt; often these programs have been package proposals complete from goals to evaluation. New patterns of school organization also have been recommended, beginning with such changes as adding classes for prekindergarten on through ungrading the elementary and secondary schools and the making of suggestions for a middle school which would change the more traditional junior high structure.

All of these ideas are bombarding those responsible for decision making in such matters. Less prevalent are suggestions which would enable school systems to examine and critique their curriculum development procedures. Those responsible for curriculum planning need help which would enable them to employ an effective process for establishing goals and determining the appropriateness for their particular situation of the many new ideas for school organization and for academic programs which are confronting them.

In this article two terms are used which need definition:

Curriculum—an organizational pattern for structuring learning. This is the preplanned dimension of the instructional program.

Instruction—the process of putting opportunities for learning before the student. It is the implementation of the curriculum.

The purposes of the study reported here were: to identify criteria for curriculum development that are crucial, functional, and observable; and to test these criteria in existing school systems.

Development of the Criteria

Twenty-four criteria for the development of curriculum were identified. Each criterion was accepted on the basis that it was: (a) *crucial*—it must stand alone as being decisive and critical to any list formulated; (b)

* *Jack J. Wickert, Assistant Superintendent, Kalamazoo Public Schools, Kalamazoo, Michigan*

functional—it must be understood and applicable by a user; and (c) *observable*—it must be readily identifiable as a philosophical or practical operant.

An extensive survey of the literature was conducted in an attempt to formulate the 24 criteria for curriculum development. A preliminary list of over 90 guidelines, suggestions, and criteria for curriculum change in schools was developed from ideas found in the works of noted writers in the curriculum field. From this preliminary list a refinement was made, using the three standards described earlier: cruciality, functionality, and observability. An attempt was also made to write criteria that were succinctly stated, nonambiguous, and discrete. A final list of 24 was thus developed.

The following criteria were used in the evaluation:

1. There is a clear statement of the philosophy (mission) of the school.

2. Written information is available which clearly states the directions and/or responsibilities for individuals and committees appointed to do work in curricular areas.

3. The curriculum tasks to be done are understood by the respective groups and committees.

4. A planned strategy is in operation for curriculum planning which establishes a sequence of steps or tasks as well as a timetable for curriculum planning *and* evaluation covering all aspects from goals to means of implementation.

5. Administrative expedients for curriculum development are provided, such as released time, physical facilities, appropriate materials, clerical help, and discretionary funds.

6. School organization and instructional patterns and facilities are determined by the curriculum rather than vice versa.

7. There is a central curriculum committee for the school district which consists of professional representatives of every school level and which is responsible for coordinating all curriculum development decisions.

8. One specific person on the central administrative staff is responsible for coordinating curriculum and instructional planning and evaluation.

9. Individualism is encouraged. For example: (a) The individual school is considered the basic operational and planning unit for curriculum improvement; the central office may encourage and aid the staff of each building to develop curricula adapted to their particular community and pupils. (b) Individual teaching styles may also be encouraged within the framework of established criteria.

10. The work of curriculum committees progresses rapidly enough to help all participants gain a sense of achievement.

11. Provisions are made for considering proposals for curriculum improvement which may emerge from anywhere in the school system or community.

12. Citizens groups are encouraged to participate in the development of goals for the school curriculum.

13. The board of education translates the curriculum goals into operational policies.

14. The school staff is responsible for the design, development, and implementation of the curriculum.

15. Provisions are made for all professional staff members to have an opportunity to participate in some capacity in curriculum planning at appropriate points in the development activities.

16. Open communication, both oral and written, provides for reactions from all concerned groups and individuals.

17. Provision is made for studying the learner's needs as an integral phase in the improvement of curriculum *and* instruction.

18. Experimentation and action research are employed as integral parts of the curriculum improvement process.

19. An evaluation is carried on to determine the effectiveness of the curriculum planning.

20. Effective status leadership is evident on all levels of curriculum development. A leader is thought of as one who moves the group under his responsibility toward mutually agreed-upon goals.

21. Emergent leadership which helps to clarify goals is encouraged.

22. Provisions are made for professional growth of staff members through such activities as: attendance at local and national conferences, school visits, the study of new materials, and in-service programs in developing skills in curriculum improvement.

23. Curriculum improvement is viewed as a change in attitudes, perceptions, values, understandings, and skills of the staff as well as a change in the educational program.

24. Objectives for the learner are written in behavioral terms in all subject areas.

Selection of Jurors

A jury was made up of persons who were considered to be expert judges of school systems in Michigan which had effective curriculum practices. This jury selected three school systems for purposes of this study.

The three school systems were all known for exemplary curriculum development procedures. Two districts were large (over 20,000 students); the third was small, with a student population of less than 4,000. All were suburban districts in the southern part of Michigan.

Evaluation of the Criteria

With the use of the criteria, data were collected for the purpose of determining to what extent the curriculum development procedures in each of the three school systems followed the criteria. The data were gathered by means of examining written materials, interviewing and questioning school person-

nel, and observing committees and other groups in action. In order to have consistency and uniformity in the data gathering, an interview schedule, an observation guide, questionnaires, and a list to be used for the examination of materials were composed.

The same questions were asked, the same types of material were examined, and similar observations were carried out in each school situation. This was done by considering for each criterion the types of information that could be secured to determine the extent of its attainment in any particular school system.

Conclusions

Following the evaluation of the 24 criteria in the three exemplary school systems, the following conclusions were drawn:

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1. The 24 criteria were of a manageable size for carrying out an analysis as described.

2. The criteria listed were comprehensive.

3. The criteria proved to be crucial, functional, and observable.

4. There is in general a strong agreement between what the authorities in the literature state are the criteria for the process of curriculum development and what is practiced in exemplary school systems.

5. A need was evidenced for central coordination for all curriculum decisions. This responsibility can best be carried out by one person in the central office.

6. Size of the school district appears to be a determining factor as to whether there is a central coordinating committee. The larger a school system becomes, the less likely it will be that a central committee will be functioning.

7. Experimentation, evaluation, and analysis of the learners' needs require extra money and were carried out to a greater extent in the more affluent school district.

8. The preparation of behavioral objectives has become a desirable feature of the curriculum development process.

9. The list of 24 criteria could be employed to rate or guide school systems in curriculum development processes.

Recommendations

1. School systems interested in carrying on effective curriculum development practices should use an instrument such as the list of criteria in this study to measure their program.

2. Administrator leadership should encourage individualism on both a building basis and in the classroom. A "grass roots" approach is recommended.

3. More should be done in school systems to encourage student and citizen involvement in the goal-setting stage in curriculum development.

4. Opportunities should be afforded all staff members, both administrators and teachers, to help develop and to gain an understanding of the philosophy and goals of the school.

5. More effort should be put forth for experimentation and evaluation, especially in districts interested in relevant curricula.   □