

Future Education: A Systematic Approach?

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A CRUCIAL issue which continues to face our schools is the question of future content. How can educators predict what content will be helpful to students who will be facing a world so different from any known today—students who will, during their lifetime, fill a multitude of social roles, hold numerous jobs, and live in many places?

One logical approach to the question is through examining the broad objectives of future education. Since without the use of a crystal ball one cannot possibly pinpoint the specific conditions and specific needs of future living, one must focus on broader objectives. By examining some of the current and recent changes in society and subsequently in the role of education, one can infer and predict with some degree of certainty the probability of the extensions of some of these trends. Although this process clearly has some limitations, it is perhaps the most reliable approach to predicting future relevant curricula.

Recent Changes in Curriculum

The following is a list of some recent significant changes in curricula which will probably be around for several years to come.

1. From emphasis on content to emphasis on process
2. From rigidity in discipline to interdisciplinary

3. From predetermined, set objectives to continually changing objectives

4. From textbook centered to multi-sources

5. From teacher source to multimedia sources

6. From teacher interest content to student interest content

7. From emphasis on accumulating knowledge to emphasis on how to find and create knowledge

8. From highly structured classes to less formal classes.¹

Yet one may ask, if these trends do have implications to future needs of future curricula, why do not more curriculum workers, teachers, and other education planners study them and their implications? Why do students permit the overlooking of this important function? Why do we not keep our schools tuned in to the world outside?

Turner answers these questions by pointing out that the people in the system are so busy satisfying internal requirements that they have little time for exploring con-

¹ Deborah P. Wolfe. "Trends in Science Education." *Science Education* 54: 71-76; March 1970.

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nections with the outside world. Students fall into a routine of taking course after course because they are required for graduation (a reason often more practical than sensible). Teachers are so busy with certification and accreditation that they forget to concern themselves with performance. College and university professors are busy with research and publication which may be remote from any concern with student needs.² Granted, some educators do exert efforts to predict future changes in education; however, the predictions are often so specific that they focus on content changes alone, and the likelihood of their hitting the target is almost nil.

An examination of these current trends confirms the prediction of Mark Krug that more attention will be given to students' interests and to student involvement in curriculum making.³ But involvement on what types of issues? On what content? As early as the 1960's we knew that student interests were beginning to have implications which reached far beyond the schools. College students had become vitally interested in the civil rights movement, Vietnam, and, more recently, pollution and population control.⁴

A Need for Priorities

Curriculum in the near future may—indeed must—go even beyond the content which is relevant at any time. It must begin to investigate the basic motives and reasons which underlie the present and predicted future world conditions. This suggests that we help students focus on priorities. Having just returned from a year's lecturing in a British university and working in some forty British secondary schools, the writer is keenly aware that one of the top priorities in British education is to help students develop

their own priorities.⁵ A systematic approach much like the following is utilized for this purpose.

The teacher attempts to:

1. Develop in the student an awareness of the existence of priorities by introducing them to the student;
2. Develop in the student a feeling that priority use is important by pointing out the advantages of considering priorities in situations which require decision making (choices); and
3. Aid the student in developing the ability to use priorities in both his professional (academic) work and in his personal life by presenting situations which necessitate the choosing among numerous alternatives on professional problems and in his personal life. Through individual tutorials, the professor helps him identify those things which are important to him and rank order them in terms of their relative significance.

Before we Americans can begin to work successfully with priorities, we (as a nation) must stop trying to protect students from reality. For example, we must learn to share with a student all of his alternative behaviors, and we must be able to discuss objectively with him the good points in those alternatives which we feel would be bad for him and also discuss with him the undesirable qualities in what we feel are acceptable modes of behavior.

A System Needed

Just as teachers must learn to help students analyze their lives, needs, and goals to eventually set priorities, school administrators must learn to predict the future needs of the schools, and they must learn to do so with accuracy. This will require the development of a system. Some specific, significant headway is already being made in this direction. Donald Robinson has identified

⁵ At the time of the writing of this paper, the author had just returned from a lecturing assignment at Battersea College of Education, a part of the Inner London Education Authority, where his work included supervising some forty student teachers in inner London secondary schools.

² Joseph Turner. *Making New Schools*. New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1971. 302 pp.

³ Mark M. Krug. *What Will Be Taught the Next Decade*. Itasca, Illinois: F. E. Peacock Publishers, Inc., 1972. 244 pp.

⁴ Edward W. Najam, Jr. "The Student Voice: A New Force." *Educational Leadership* 26 (8): 749-53; May 1969.

three international societies whose major role is to perfect techniques for predicting and planning for the future.⁶

History of Futurism

The process of predicting the future outcomes of educational futurism is analogous to tautology. The process is included in the outcomes, which is not unlike "the message is the medium." That is to say that the outcomes of educational futurism will be affected significantly by the processes of educational futurists. What do they hope to achieve? What are their priorities? Following are examples of such bodies and their priorities.⁷

The World Future Society was founded in 1966 to call attention to the importance of studying the future and to promote development of methods for the study of the future. Since then it has striven to facilitate communication among groups and individuals interested in studying or planning for the future.

In 1968 the Institute for the Future was founded. This organization was dedicated to systematic and comprehensive studies of the long-range future (5-50 years). It has worked to enlarge existing understanding concerning technological, environmental, and societal changes and their long-range consequences and to develop new methodology to carry on such tasks. The Institute makes the results of its research available to the public. It serves as an educational and training center for selected persons from business, government, foundations, and universities. Since 1968 the Institute has forecast social and technological trends. It has focused its attention on the major problems of the world. Specific attention has been afforded to examining the future environment of education and to the planning of educational programs.

Both of these programs have included in their objectives an intent to improve

⁶ Donald W. Robinson. "Trying To Know Tomorrow Today." *Phi Delta Kappan* 53 (4): 257; December 1971.

⁷ *Encyclopedia of Associations*. Volume I. Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1972.

communications regarding futuristics. The Future Information Network (FIN) was organized to compile information on trends, forecasts, and proposals, as well as educational programs in futuristics. The scope of FIN is worldwide. It proposes to promote quality and comprehensiveness in future documentation and to avoid duplication of effort in the study of future social trends and trends in the disciplines and professions.

Although the World Future Society, the Institute for the Future, and the Future Information Network include in their activities research into the future of education, none of these organizations exists for the sole purpose of education. In 1970, such an organization was established, the International Society for Educational Planners. Its intent is to strengthen the professionalism of educational planners, to further knowledge about educational planning, and to promote cooperation and exchange among planners. Surely, the works of this body will influence the direction of education.

Future of Futurism

Concern with futurism is inescapable. The question is not "Shall we concern ourselves?" but "How shall we approach educational planning for the future?" Both the general curriculum specialists and the discipline specialists must begin thinking of how they can alter the existing professional associations and develop new associations to channel efforts in those directions which will produce the best results.

An examination of the goal priorities of these organizations may provide insights into both the future of education and the future of educational futuristic planning.

Technology

When Professor Gerald O'Grady, the University of Texas' so-called "Medievalist of the Future," was asked why he, a history professor, was so future-oriented, he replied, "There must be 100 explanations," and pinpointed several reasons. Included among them was the notation that the media used

today by the teacher are revolutionary and demand that we think of the future.⁸

Perhaps no recent development has changed our society more than the technological advancements of the present and recent years. Surely this one area of change is going to continue into the future. If so, it, more than any other development, will promise a growing rate in future societal changes. Certainly then any system for predicting future curricula must include a study of the expected technological developments.

Communications

Another factor of major concern to the futuristic organization is communications. An examination of the role of communications in our present schools suggests that this factor is at least as valuable in education as it is in other societal agencies. Most administrators agree that the bulk of their problems stem from either a lack of communications or existing faulty communications. Therefore, future-oriented curriculum planners must develop means of keeping abreast of developments in communications and consequently study their implications for curriculum planning. The field of educational technology has just begun making its dramatic contributions to education.

Planning Methodology

That each of these futuristic organizations ranked planning methodology near the

⁸ Howard Lindsay. "Gerald O'Grady, Medievalist of the Future." *Educational Forum* 36 (2): 159-68; January 1972.

top of its priority lists seems to suggest that any future-oriented planning organization must continually analyze and improve its approach. Because the future curriculum planner is designing experiences for a time which is relatively uncertain and unknown, he must continuously readjust his curriculum plans and his methods of curriculum planning to fit his ever changing picture of the future.

Role of Education Associations

The current movement of the study of the future suggests that our professional education associations soon may not exist as we now know them. They will either change and direct themselves to the study of the future rather than the present, or new associations will be formed to assume these responsibilities. For example, an association may be developed whose purposes are to keep the education community informed of developments in communications and to conduct an ongoing study of the implications of these developments for education planning.

Of the four existing future study organizations, only one is concerned with the future of education per se. Surely similar organizations must be developed to study the broad changes coming to education. The emergence of these four organizations and their concern with systematic planning gives hope of development of new insights into study of future societal conditions and needs which will have direct implications for future education. Without them the decrease in effectiveness of our schools will probably continue at an ever increasing rate. □

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