

Must We Systematize Curriculum Building?

Gordon Cawelti

THE question posed in this title reflects the attitude of many persons who have deep reservations about certain of the movements in education today. I believe it touches the real issue at stake more accurately than the term "accountability." My response to the question posed is affirmative despite many of the unproductive characteristics of the processes we are now seeing. I do believe, however, that there is a need for persons with new specialties if school systems are to be able to diagnose existing classroom environments and provide help to teachers in designing better teaching.

Curriculum workers¹ who are deeply involved in a systematic approach to curriculum building are recognizing the complexities of the task and the shortcomings of in-service education methods and dealing with them in the following ways:

● Too many assumptions were made about *which* new goals were to be pursued,

¹ An inclusive term broadly including persons from associate superintendent for instruction to general or special supervisor levels.

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and thus we find needs assessment and participatory decision-making processes being refined.

● Too many assumptions were made about the teachers' perception of the need for in-service education, and thus organizational development techniques and interpersonal skills are improving.

● Very often only the teacher component of the education system was involved in in-service, but now staff development activities increasingly include principals and central office personnel, as well as teachers.

I feel that these developments were previously overlooked but are now being compelled by the forces which shape education. The result of these changes will be a strengthening of curriculum building procedures.

Despite improvements in these processes, I have some skepticism about our real capability, as school districts are presently organized, to help teachers grow professionally. Many districts are too small to have the supervisory personnel needed for frequent interaction with the members of school faculties. Other districts are so large that the few supervisory staff members who are provided cannot possibly serve each school and they are often bogged down with logistical duties. Many urban curriculum workers have thus been long removed from the classroom and, because of teacher attitudes and time problems, are uneasy about really serving as change agents on significant curriculum issues.

Specialists Are Needed

There is no question but that school districts need specialists in various subject areas to remain abreast of new curriculum materials and to give leadership in helping teachers to select content. Such persons must also be knowledgeable about which learning strategies are most appropriate for certain instructional areas or types of learners. However, with only these kinds of competencies, two barriers to effective curriculum building exist:

- Too many districts simply do not have any or enough supervisory help.
- Providing specialists does not assure competencies needed in the areas of management skills or organization development, human growth and development, motivation, teaching and learning styles, etc.

In last month's *Educational Leadership*, I presented a formulation of the components of meaningful and effective instruction via an article on instructional theory.² There is an urgent need to develop a taxonomy in these instructional areas similar to the now classic formulation on instructional objectives by Bloom and Krathwohl. This same

kind of work is needed for theory building purposes and to disseminate knowledge from these areas of research to the classroom teacher.

Even if such formulations were now available, I have some doubts about the ability of the teaching profession to broadly apply, for example, what we now know about human growth and development to classroom practice. The same would be true for motivation and some of the other components of meaningful instruction. These are complex areas requiring interpretation and demonstration.

If we are to systematize instruction in a manner that will have a positive influence in the learning experiences of students, I anticipate that people will need to be made available to local building faculties who are professionals in organization development, management skills, human growth and development, motivation, and climate, for example. If one accepts the idea of the building as the unit of change, then we could envision professional teams of six to eight persons diagnosing a given school's program and then assisting in an advisory way to design a new learning environment which would reflect the combined professional skills in these new kinds of specialties.

If a local district is too small to provide such supervisory personnel, intermediate or other kinds of larger districts or consortiums of schools can be formed. Perhaps just as important will be the willingness of curriculum workers to boldly engage themselves in the most difficult school situations in the district. They must be willing, as Richard Foster puts it, to "go where the action is."

I believe most teachers will welcome opportunities to strengthen their professional skills—if curriculum workers have something viable to offer, and can demonstrate it. This is the great challenge in ASCD—to better equip curriculum workers to demonstrate how essential they are to systematic renewal efforts in the schools.

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² Gordon Cawelti. "Components of a General Instructional Theory." *Educational Leadership* 31 (5): 427-30; February 1974.

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