

Some Relationships Curriculum Platforms, Social and Empirical

DECKER Walker has produced a useful model to guide empirical research into the process of curriculum development.¹ If not the ideal conceptual base for classifying phenomena observed in practice, it is at least a practical start in establishing priorities for research. Existing literature of the field could be classified according to the scheme to reveal areas of the process most in need of attention.

The "Platform" Element of Curriculum

One of the appeals of the Walker model is its emphasis on the primary function of values and beliefs in the curriculum development process. Walker terms these the "platform" element of the curriculum. As a fundamental base of the curriculum, "The platform includes an idea of what is and a vision of what ought to be, and these guide the curriculum developer in determining what he should do to realize his vision."² The platform is a referent for subsequent curriculum judgments.

Walker describes, in useful detail, components of the platform which account for

¹ Decker F. Walker. "An Empirical Model of the Process of Curriculum Development." ERIC ED042 252. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Conference, Minneapolis, 1970.

² *Ibid.*, p. 2.

How can an empirical research model affect the adoption of curriculum platforms which reflect social change?

differences in curriculum designs. He suggests the existence of both explicit and implicit beliefs and values. The latter "less carefully conceptualized notions"³ may account for many decisions. Walker additionally shows that when one's platform is inadequate for a decision process, empirical data could become "a most persuasive basis for justification"⁴ of a decision.

The primacy of platform components in Walker's model of curriculum development lends logical importance and credibility to the humanistic, sociological, and philosophical approaches to curriculum research. Macdonald, for example, in essence calls for reconsideration of fundamental beliefs. His idea that ethical curriculum decisions must focus on "events and actions within the school system rather than the ethical implications of our plans for contexts outside the schools"⁵ seems to be a restatement of Dewey's definition of education (one of his

³ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁵ James B. Macdonald. "Domains of Curriculum." Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Conference, New York City, 1971. p. 11.

Among Change, Research

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platform components) as "a process of living and not a preparation for future living."⁶ Similarly, Broudy argues for attention to philosophical foundations (platforms), pointing out that "these ideas about life have been woven into the fabric of the human mind and consequently become operative when men set about formulating the objectives of education."⁷

Recommendations such as those of Macdonald and Broudy about the fundamental platform issues in curriculum development comprise a substantial portion of the literature in the field. Some treatments of these issues are simply expressions of personal conviction while others seem to be part of well developed ideologies based on sound disciplinary and conjunctive knowledge. The results of formal inquiry are slow to effect change in the practice of the field. Short discusses a variety of reasons for the failure

⁶ John Dewey. "My Pedagogic Creed." *Journal of the National Education Association* 18 (9): 292; December 1929.

⁷ Harry S. Broudy. "The Philosophical Foundations of Educational Objectives." *Educational Theory* 20: 17; Winter 1970.

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of the link between knowledge production and utilization and the need for research of that transfer.⁸

To examine the apparent dysfunction of curriculum platform components, it is helpful to look at what Willers terms the "social value bases for curriculum decisions."⁹ He describes the deterioration of our value foundations in Toffler's words as a "cracked consensus" and "diversification" of values.¹⁰ He shows that curriculum decisions based on these changing and diverse values have adverse effects upon individual students. Willers also relates the sociological interpretations of societal change offered by Slater, Reich, and Glasser.

According to Willers, Philip Slater describes as "counterpriorities" the differences between the old culture and the new "counterculture." In essence, the old culture viewed scarcity as the major concern and the counterculture argues "that fears of scarcity and the necessity of competition are spurious, that the need to postpone gratification is man-made, existing now only to maintain the established, indefensible system."¹¹ Willers suggests that the implication for education of this sociological interpretation is that,

Traditional self-restraint and self-discipline, therefore, should give way to stimulation and self-expression as educational and social ideals. According to these arguments, the curriculum of the old culture, defined primarily as restrictions imposed from without, must give way to a curriculum providing opportunities to express one's self, to unfold and develop freely and naturally from within.¹²

Willers describes Charles Reich's interpretation of social upheaval as a "conflict of consciousness." He describes three levels or

⁸ Edmund C. Short. "Knowledge Production and Utilization in Curriculum." *Review of Educational Research* 43: 237-301; Summer 1973.

⁹ Jack Conrad Willers. "Value Bases for Curriculum Decisions." *Peabody Journal of Education* 51 (1): 57; October 1973.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 58-59.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 59.

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types of conflicting consciousness. The first, labeled Consciousness I, is characterized by the rugged individualism of the 19th century. Consciousness II is characterized by "reliance upon organizational hierarchies and institutional rewards. . . ." ¹³ Consciousness III, the most recent development, which Willers feels reflects much existentialist philosophy, stresses (in Reich's words) freedom from "automatic acceptance of the imperatives of society and the false consciousness which society imposes." ¹⁴

New Foundations for Curriculum

According to Willers, William Glasser sees the past "survival society" as "goal-oriented" and characterized by "conquest and aggression." In contrast, the new identity society

. . . concerns itself with the role of being human—the rediscovery, redefinition, or reverification of what it means to the individual to be free, to enjoy the company of others, and to cooperate with them to feel pleasures and personal satisfaction. ¹⁵

Willers summarizes the common characteristics of the three interpretations of "contemporary discommunity" to suggest new foundations for curriculum decisions:

First there is a *rejection* of the need and necessity of a hierarchial groupism which submerges the individual in competitive, aggressive struggle for limited resources and survival, and controls him through institutional rewards; concomitantly, there is in each of these perspectives an *affirmation* of community togetherness and cooperation that does not stunt individual integrity or inhibit honest, straightforward, individual self-expression. Secondly, there is an opening and freeing reliance on process, method, style, and means rather than on stratifying and stultifying substantive goals, standards, products, achievements, rewards, possessions, and successes. Activity, effort, and expression are valuable—if at all—in themselves and do not

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Charles A. Reich. *The Greening of America*. New York: Random House, Inc., 1970. p. 214.

¹⁵ Willers, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

require certification or justification according to external criteria or the ends achieved. Accordingly, in the third place, the novel elements of contemporary culture and consciousness place little value on social consensus and reasoning which justify or defend or rationalize such social processes as work, formal learning, economic competition, and institutional loyalty.¹⁶

With this perspective on the new *social* foundations for curriculum decisions, Willers goes on to show how they and the popular *psychological* curriculum influences, Skinner's neo-behaviorism and "the concept of accountability based on student achievement of behavioral objectives and competency-based instruction" conflict. He explains that behavioral technology removes the individual prerogatives for life style choice, choice of "human needs over technological requirements," and "the goal-independent pursuit of human role in the identity society." And, though he sees that accountability and behavioral objectives are supported by "high ideals to give the public its money's worth, and to both the teacher and the student a fair and honest evaluation" (what Walker would call implicit *procedural* elements of the curriculum platform), he feels they are useless with respect to affective and aesthetic development.¹⁷

Willers proposes that a humanistic psychology value base would be more compatible with contemporary social platform elements. He describes Carl Rogers' suggestions for schooling which he feels would

. . . instead of directing behavior for the student, allow him to sense the dignity and worth of his own individual being as the ground of freely, openly choosing values in common with others who retain the locus of evaluation within themselves.¹⁸

Macdonald's arguments for change parallel Willers' rationale and similarly suggest that the *platforms* of curricula need attention. In a recent article, Macdonald explains how society creates a "concomitant

consciousness in individuals which then acts back upon society."¹⁹ He shows how the fundamental characteristics of modern society, "technology and bureaucracy with an economically consumer-oriented ethic,"²⁰ pervade the school and create "contradictions between things deemed important in the schools and the quality of living in the schools."²¹

Environment of Everyday Life

It is the concomitant consciousness created within the school, the environment of students' everyday life, that Macdonald feels must receive more attention. He explains the effects of contradictions in schooling which create a false consciousness. In essence, the changes suggested in the activity of schooling call for attention to curriculum platform elements.

In another article, Macdonald mentions the effect of national curriculum projects as another broad social effect which, in combination with mass media, serve to diminish the influence of the local community.

In essence, what is being said is that the cultural content of the curriculum should reflect a pluralistic cultural value position, and that local cultural variation is a relevant consideration in the selection and organization of content in the curriculum.²²

The desirability of local cultural variation seems to fit what Walker describes as a *conception* in the curriculum platform.²³

With respect to the matter of cultural pluralism, Broudy comments on problems of changing social roles:

¹⁹ James B. Macdonald. "The Quality of Everyday Life in School." In: James B. Macdonald and Esther Zaret, editors. *Schools in Search of Meaning*. Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1975. p. 79.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

²² James B. Macdonald. "Curriculum Development in Relation to Social and Intellectual Systems." In: Robert M. McClure, editor. *The Curriculum: Retrospect and Prospect*. Chicago: National Society for the Study of Education, 1971. p. 109.

²³ Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 61-62.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

The rate of social change has produced an ever greater number of individual differentiations in life needs, but at the same time has made it more and more difficult to anticipate these needs by differentiated instruction. Paradoxically, the greater the variety of social roles and tasks, the greater may be the premium on general education, the sort that really is generalizable.²⁴

The point here seems to be that platform elements must respond not only to changes in society, but also to the increased complexity of roles.

Though it is true that the problems described here involve more than just platform elements and encompass matters of the deliberation and design of curricula, it seems clear that fundamental values and beliefs are at issue. The responsibility for resolution of such issues, through the adoption of policy relating to the curriculum platform, lies in part with the school board. Gross discusses sociological research findings that "a crucial, but frequently neglected, variable influencing the operation of the school is the behavior of the small group of laymen who are its official policy makers."²⁵

A recent publication of New Mexico State University, under contract from the National Institute of Education, is entitled *How Well Do They Represent You? A Handbook on Local School Boards for Parents and Other Citizens*. The general thrust of the *Handbook* is to relate disenchantment on the part of students, taxpayers, and parents to a loss of public control of education. The publication describes the workings and lists common criticisms of school boards, with suggestions for ways of influencing and improving the board.

The publication of the *Handbook* can be construed to illustrate the failure of school boards to reflect accurately social change in adoption of goals. An article related to com-

munity surveys in the *American School Board Journal*, entitled, "How To Conduct a Solid Community Survey on a Shoestring," emphasizes economy. The article describes a board which administered 40 questions to a 6 percent sample of its constituents. The items reportedly sought attitudes toward (a) year-round school, split-shifts, and rental of buildings, (b) bond issues, (c) an innovative tax plan, (d) existing programs, and (e) the "social characteristics of the informants." The author emphasized that the survey cost was a modest \$4,500, which represented a \$10,000 saving over the estimated cost "to canvass a true random sample of community members" using professional interviewers.²⁶

How can the Walker empirical research model affect the adoption of curriculum platforms which reflect social change? Walker suggests a number of questions which such research could examine:

Do curriculum development groups in fact share a greater body of common beliefs than one would expect of groups of similar composition? Do the curriculum developer's justifications appeal to this body of shared beliefs? Do curriculum making groups with similar platforms conduct similar deliberations and produce similar curriculum designs?

In what ways have the platforms of the different groups operating within a subject matter area differed? How have the platforms of groups in one subject field differed from those in other fields? What platform elements are common to most contemporary curriculum projects?²⁷

Further research could also attempt to improve upon the methods by which curriculum planners gather data about society. Saylor and Alexander list recommended sources for such data and suggest data gathering techniques.²⁸ Formal empirical research is needed however to determine the most useful sources and methods. □

²⁶ Paul S. Anderson. "How To Conduct a Solid Community Survey on a Shoestring." *The American School Board Journal* 160 (10):24-25; October 1973.

²⁷ Walker, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-12.

²⁸ J. Galen Saylor and William M. Alexander. *Planning Curriculum for Schools*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1974. pp. 124-26.

²⁴ Broudy, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

²⁵ Neal Gross. "Some Contributions of Sociology to the Field of Education." In: Alfred Lightfoot, editor. *Inquiries Into the Social Foundations of Education*. Chicago: Rand McNally and Co., 1972. p. 43.

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