Curriculum: The Continuing Revolution

What program, what content, what method, what form of control can be successful with children and youth who come to school with poverty-stricken experience acquired from the street and the culture of their peers? ... The curriculum can be effective, no matter what changes are made in it, only if it is reinforced by active engagement of the children and youth with adults in the functions by which society is sustained.

As we approach the nation's Bicentennial celebration there are many accomplishments for which we can feel justly proud. Among these is the educational system. The dream of universal schooling has become a reality without decreasing the quality of education; the achievements of our students can be compared with pride to those of any nation; public confidence in the schools is higher than its confidence in almost any other institution; and the competence of school personnel is enviable.

A powerful force in this educational progress has been, and continues to be, the curriculum movement. The fundamental premise of this movement is that the content and modes of instruction are effective when adjusted to the nature and development of the learner. Curriculum reconstruction has been the quest for new and better ways of utilizing this principle. The search has led to new curriculum approaches and to new types of classroom organization, daily programs, materials and modes of instruction, administrative structures and procedures, and evaluation of student progress. In this sense, the curriculum movement has been the revolutionary force propelling the school forward in this century.

The battle cry today, as it has been for decades, is freedom, openness, activity, self-expression, and creativity. From these nebulous concepts have sprung now one variation and then another in the search for ways of adjusting the school to children and youth. Their vagueness and ambiguity is their fertility. A succession of innovations—the child-centered school, project method, activity curriculum, core curriculum, open school, and alternative school—attests their vitality.

These concepts stimulate those who seek a better curriculum, and although the concepts are too often lost in the search, they will not be downed. But there are times when their opposites—formality, compulsion, passivity, and mastery—need to be redressed. While the tendency is from formality to openness, from compulsion to freedom, from passivity to activity, from absorption to self-
expression, each of these is a reciprocating adjustment, redressing the balance between the components.

To Provide Fundamental Socialization . . .

We are now in such a time. The young of all social classes are being denied associations with adults in the activities by which society is sustained. The professions, business and industrial enterprises, labor, and even the farm deny the young any part in their activities. In addition, the home, under the impact of technology and the changing status of women, is rapidly losing the capacity to influence its children. Consequently almost the total burden of socializing the young is now falling upon the school. This is a task for which the teaching profession has neither the financial resources nor the political power to perform.

In increasing numbers children and youth come to school without the fundamental socialization essential to their success. This condition challenges the principle of adjustment and the concepts by which it has from time to time been exploited for good. How can adjustment of the curriculum and all it entails be advanced further toward freedom, activity, self-expression, and the like without loss of the school's identity? What program, what content, what method, what form of control can be successful with children and youth who come to school with poverty-stricken experience acquired from the street and the culture of their peers? That is the profound question to which the profession and nation have been driven by adult society's repudiation of its children and youth. Make no mistake about it, the curriculum can be effective, no matter what changes are made in it, only if it is reinforced by active engagement of children and youth with adults in the functions by which society is sustained.

If the adult society can restore and enrich its educative influence by once again involving children and youth in its social functions, curriculum development so far in this century will pale by the side of the progress that can be made in the years ahead. We are at the threshold of a new era in which exploration of the human mind and educational potential now within our grasp can lead to changes hardly imaginable. Issues about conditioning and reinforcement, about behavioral objectives and pedagogical methods, about the philosophies of humanism, and about curriculum design and evaluation will in all likelihood become peripheral in the years ahead.

The impact of new developments will spell an entirely different orientation for the curriculum. Many of the problems of learning and teaching will have been solved or bypassed because in the newer orientation they will lose their claim to genuineness. The knowledge and know-how that are now expressed through nondiscursive symbols will likely become prominent in the new curriculum. The management and organization of the instructional program may develop to the point that learning for most individuals will be self-induced and teachers will serve individuals who have genuine problems of learning. Class size will have ceased to be a matter of concern, for teachers will reckon their teaching loads in terms of the number of cases they can handle. The problem of curriculum development may come to be that of providing materials for diagnosing and learning in all areas of knowledge, only a fraction of which is now represented in the school curriculum, and for optional experiences in the full range of human activities.

Curriculum development is at the heart of the school. As long as its problems continue to be identified, defined, and solved just so long will the curriculum movement be a seminal force in the evolution of the process of schooling.

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