Curriculum Inquiry: Toward What End?

Philip L. Hosford

Four procedures are described here that should place curriculum workers in the leadership role they are uniquely qualified to play.

CURRICULUM INQUIRY seems a proud and most appropriate theme for our journal. I have often thought the two words neatly describe the primary responsibility of Curriculum Directors and Directors of Instruction. But they are of prime concern to *anyone* responsible for curriculum development, supervision, and improvement.

Job descriptions for such roles should begin with the demand for continuous curriculum inquiry. People in such responsible positions should always ask questions about the curriculum; they should probe and examine; they should determine the best possible community-state consensus regarding the goals of the curriculum; they should evaluate the effectiveness of the current curriculum in regard to the established goals; and, finally, they should exercise leadership to reduce the discrepancy between the goals and the curriculum results achieved.

For some time now I have stated my belief that curriculum workers have been culturally deprived and as a result we have failed to examine curriculum in a completely reasonable manner. Our culture has taught us to react to pressures—to groups who ask questions about some segment of the curriculum. They inquire about the bias of our textbooks and we examine our textbooks. They inquire about our grading procedures and we dutifully examine the grading procedures.

The list is endless. We have been forced by our culture to react to any and all curriculum inquiries made by others. That is not a leadership role. The time has come for us to modify our culture so that we may assume the proper leadership role implied in the listing of our professional responsibilities.

In this editorial, I shall suggest four procedures to place us in the leadership role we are uniquely qualified to play:

First: We must stand upon our strong knowledge base and refuse to do anything which we know is a waste of time, talent, and resources.

Second: We must develop procedures for announcing the community-state consensus regarding the goals of education and then provide for the continuous, documented verification of that consensus.

Third: We must insist that the experts in evaluation break through their current restraining parameters and provide the instrumentation for assessing that which we find must be assessed.

Fourth: We must move beyond the constraining view of either current stereotype of the behaviorist or the humanist. As the child of these two parents, we must move out and on to our own view of reality.

Our Knowledge Base

After developing the Referent Theory of Instruction,[1] I found two of the obvious conclusions to be reached from our current knowledge base to be (a) Attempts to evaluate teachers on the basis of scores from present-day achievement tests administered to their students are a waste of time; and (b) Attempts to demonstrate the superiority of one organization technique for instruction compared to another on the basis of present-day achievement test scores will continue to produce conflicting conclusions or findings of "no significant difference."

Curriculum workers throughout our country should refuse to participate in such activities today, simply on the basis of what we *know*. The two conclusions are not just current exhortations of a threatened teacher or principal, but emerged four years ago from a careful analysis of empirical data.

[1] Philip L. Hosford. *An Instructional Theory: A Beginning.* Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1973. 195 pp.

They are two things we know we can count on. And they are only two of the many important elements of our knowledge base that we *should* act upon.

The evidence is available to give us confidence in announcing much more that is known within our disciplines of curriculum, instruction, and supervision. Our knowledge base is stronger and broader than many of us have had time to discover. It not only provides guidelines for avoiding blind alley activities, but it points to many important, success-oriented activities to which we should be devoting our time, talent, and resources.

Community-State Consensus

If the purpose of curriculum inquiry is the ultimate improvement of our instructional programs then much of the problem lies in evaluation procedures. We spend too much time evaluating bits and pieces that make little difference. Even worse, we have contributed to the promulgation of results through local and national media for the past

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Educational Leadership Announces Themes for 1976-1977

Manuscripts and/or photographs relevant to the proposed themes for the 1976-1977 issues of *Educational Leadership* are requested. Topics and deadlines for receipt of manuscripts are as follows:

October: "Who Is Involved in Curriculum Development?" (July 1, 1976)

November: "Politics and Education—New Challenges, New Problems" (August 1, 1976)

December: "Emphasis on Staff Development" (September 1, 1976)

January: "Determining the Quality of Education" (October 1, 1976)

February: "Individualized Instruction: Another Look" (November 1, 1976)

March: "Providing for Disaffected Youth" (December 1, 1976)

April: No theme (January 1, 1977)

May: "Instructional Supervision: Trends and Issues" (February 1, 1977)

Length of manuscripts should be approximately 1800 words typed, double-spaced (about six pages). General style should conform to that of the journal. More detailed information on the technical requirements of manuscripts is available upon request from the editorial office.

Photographs and other illustrative materials, whether directly related to an article or not, are especially requested.

Manuscripts should be submitted in duplicate and materials to be returned *must* be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope adequate to return material. Decisions on materials will be made as promptly as possible.

Materials should be addressed to Robert R. Leeper, Editor, *Educational Leadership*, Suite 1100, 1701 K St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006. Phone: (202) 467-6480.

30 years. We have measured with the instruments available and then failed to ensure that the results were published within the clear context that what had been measured was only one small part of the program. An analogy comes to mind: we should not conclude that a used car is a good used car simply because the performance of its radio has been tested and the results published.

Efficient improvement of instructional programs ultimately depends on sound evaluation of how well they accomplish what they are supposed to accomplish. Many groups have examined and devised lists defining the goals of education. These lists have, historically, included such goals as wise use of leisure time, skill in the use of the three R's, preparation for employment, improved physical and mental health, and so on. But most of our formal published evaluations have dealt only with one of those goals. If we are to evaluate to find clear direction for improvement, we must *evaluate* all the goals most cherished by our community/state.

In the Q-sorts I have run with over 400 teachers, aides, administrators, and students from urban to rural schools, four objectives of public school education consistently are selected out as the most important objectives. They are: (a) desire for learning; (b) achievement in the 3R's; (c) healthy self-concepts; and (d) respect for others. I have labeled three of these areas as the "silent curriculum" because we do not often plan for them overtly as we do the 3R's and we seldom attempt their evaluation.

Developing Assessment Procedures

Our instructional programs include human interaction processes which affect learners in the silent curriculum areas. Much of the silent curriculum influence is created in the process of instruction and as such, must be included as a dominant element in any curriculum inquiry. It is often omitted because it can seldom be defined in advance. *How* teachers do what they do is the heart of the silent curriculum and it is created only as teachers teach. However, many of the results of the silent curriculum can be defined in advance and are highly valued by professionals in the field. In short, we must evaluate all the areas in which we affect learners during the periods of time they live with us in our schools.

Most of us are concerned about the lowering test scores of high school students throughout our country. But, we are also concerned about a curriculum which overtly

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ignores areas of moral behavior, respect for others, and a desire for learning. Such curricula deserve honest inquiry and we need procedures to evaluate the silent curriculum areas now.

We must demand that evaluation experts live with us in the schools and diagnose the real instructional objectives in our community-state. And, on those bases, they must design an assessment-evaluation procedure to cover all of the major curriculum areas. Traditionally, most such experts are behavioristic in approach because quantification and statistical procedures fit their pattern best. Consequently, they are not motivated toward new procedures and pathways. Judgments, perceptions, and feelings do not readily lend themselves to their typical research style or instrumentation. But there are some beginnings.

Lawrence Kohlberg has indicated procedures and methodology for assessing moral education.[2] ASCD has sponsored National Curriculum Study Institutes in the moral educational curriculum area. Several of my colleagues and I are presently conducting studies to test the concept that: Significant

[2] Lawrence Kohlberg. "Moral Education for a Society in Transition." *Educational Leadership* 33 (1): 46-54; October 1975.

portions of learner differences in the silent curriculum areas can be explained by differences in instructional process, and the processes which discriminate between good and poor teaching can be observed in the human interaction commonly recorded in a microteaching situation.

We are making slow progress—but progress, nonetheless. Some of the anticipated difficulties have failed to materialize. For example, most of us felt that others would be unwilling to render judgments regarding a teaching incident viewed via videotape. But that intuitive fear was wrong. We ask the same question: "Would you want this teacher for your own child or loved one next year?" Viewers check their response as "yes," "maybe," or "no."

We have yet to find one single teacher, lay person, administrator, or student (fifth grade through graduate school) who has refused or indicated discomfort in rendering such judgments. Findings are tentative and we have drawn no conclusions save one: *experienced teachers achieve a significantly high degree of consensus in their judgments when viewing tapes of teachers unknown to them.* We call these "objectively gained judgments." Our single conclusion to date encourages further research to try to find out what it all may mean. Our general knowledge base also urges us forward.

Behavioristic Humanism

I would think that staunch advocates of behaviorism and humanism would shudder at the marriage of the two words. But if we are to make a major breakthrough in curriculum inquiry beginning the first year of our third century of education in these United States, we must take the best from each and break free of their traditional conflict. Perhaps the purists have widely overdrawn the conflict. Perhaps neither will shudder if we begin to speak of being "humanistically accountable." In either case, we cannot afford to wait.

Most of us in ASCD like to view ourselves as humanists, almost traditionally so. As such, we need to listen attentively to what others have to say. The behaviorists offer us many techniques and methods which can be used without modification in a humanistic way. A few in our ranks are well under way toward achieving a self-concept of behavioristic humanism. They are ignoring old debates. They proceed with their work. They are the true linkers of theory to practice and are helping us perceive a new reality of curriculum, instruction, and supervision.

Educational Leadership Readers

Readers of *Educational Leadership* commonly have some responsibilities in curriculum inquiry. Whether we are classroom teachers, central staff members, or college professors, each of us has a vested interest in the total process of curriculum inquiry. My thesis is that we must become more aware of the strength of the knowledge base of our discipline; that we must develop ways of announcing and verifying our community-state consensus regarding the goals of education; that we must break the barriers of traditional assessment procedures and insist on efforts to evaluate instructional programs in light of the total mission; and finally, we must leave the nests of Behaviorism and Humanism and chart our own course toward total curriculum inquiry.

To follow such a course will require new procedures, new skills, and new attitudes. Which skills and attitudes may be improved through this issue of *Educational Leadership* will depend on what each reader brings to the particular articles read. I firmly believe we are on the threshold of a major breakthrough in education and that the people in leadership positions commonly held by members of ASCD will be the people who lead the way into the new century of U.S. education. And through our performances—we will not be elected by default!

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