

When Mandated Courses, Mandated Programs Control the Curriculum

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Society will increasingly rely on legislative action at state and federal levels to direct education. Since the curriculum leader is unlikely to reverse that trend, two courses of action seem to be available. These courses are indicated here.

A few years ago, it may have been easier to find the curriculum director who sat smugly in the office, surrounded by giant schematics of long-range curriculum plans. When asked for an explanation, this person could tell precisely when certain curriculum decisions would be made, when textbooks would be adopted, when pilot projects or research would be started. The process was well defined, sources of input were identified, and a sense of control was in evidence. In such surroundings, the words to "Invictus" seemed to come to mind as if to subliminally complete the picture. Admittedly, things were never quite that neat for most curriculum workers, but there was enough of that occurring to create anxiety for the less well organized.

But what of the current scene? It is still the goal to bring control to the program, to organize the forces affecting the curriculum. Yet, while curriculum workers of yore might have aspired to the image of the "captain of the ship," it may be more productive for today's educator to be a skillful juggler!

A broad view of the sources of the curriculum is helpful in maintaining a perspective on what is happening to curriculum decision making today. By holding the four major sources—the time-tested disciplines, society and its institutions, the individual student needs, and the

classroom teacher—in mind, the curriculum worker has been able to adjust process to accommodate each of these sources as changes occur. By including teachers in curriculum decision making, we acknowledge both what they know about their discipline and their need to be committed to the resulting curriculum. By improving our ability to assess the needs of students, we are able to adapt the delivery of the curriculum to students. By using the assistance of experts and by encouraging the continued professional development of teachers, we are able to maintain pace with the development of new insights in the disciplines.

But we do have difficulty keeping up with that other source of the curriculum—our own society and its current concerns. There have been scholarly contributions to the understanding of these phenomena,¹ but this article will merely express the frustration of the curriculum worker at the effect of changes in this curriculum "source."

The word "mandate" has been used in the title of this article precisely because it should be interpreted by the reader as an authoritative com-

¹ Gerald R. Firth and Richard D. Kimpston. *The Curriculum Continuum in Perspective*. Itasca, Illinois: F. E. Peacock Publishers, Inc., 1973.

mand. The greater society expresses its authoritative commands through state and federal legislation. That must mean, then, that the universally-held beliefs on the direction of our society are to be found in the laws on education in the various states and in those emanating from Washington. Not so, for legislation is accomplished through the political process, through compromise, through an accommodation of differences in opinion. It is very seldom that the resulting "mandate" is a universally-held value in the local community school district where the actual implementation must occur.

Quandaries

1. Career education can be looked upon in one community as an antiacademic move, while in another it will be accused of blunting the sharp vocational focus of the schools. The mandate is the same, but not the application. And where does career education fit in the structure of curriculum committees organized around the "time-tested disciplines?" Oh, multi-discipline? Fine, under whose leadership? Completely restructure, you say? You mean that teachers will be completely reprogrammed to focus on this concern, and departmental lines at the university will be removed so that new teachers coming to us will be prepared in this manner? Many elementary and secondary schools reacted quickly to the mandate with some belief that it did meet a need. But the massive superstructure of education has not moved to alter teacher preparation programs or other curriculum expectations.

2. Title IX became the vehicle for expressing the mandate relative to our society's concern for reducing sexism, sex-role stereotyping, and for providing true equality regardless of sex. This is the strongest federal mandate of recent years, but even U.S.O.E. had great difficulty in developing the guidelines, and when this mandate is applied in the local school system the lack of universal interest in the topic is evident, as is the realization of the need for broadening the curriculum decision-making structures.

But the matter is even more complicated than that. The application of the equal opportunity concept is not exclusively a male/female concern. Black members of our society have been

at this a long time, and other ethnic groups are demanding attention. Sure, we have had civil rights legislation and affirmative action programs, but cannot all this be accommodated in some organized, coherent manner? The Department of Public Instruction in Iowa said "yes" to this question and developed guidelines for a multicultural, nonsexist curriculum. While this now appears to be a well coordinated approach to this concern, the series of mandates leading to this point was not so neat and clean.

In 1974, the Iowa legislature passed a school bill that had this mandate for the "social studies" curriculum at elementary, junior high, and senior high:

... with attention given to the role in history played by all persons, and a positive effort shall be made to reflect the achievements of women, minorities, and any others who, in the past, may have been ignored or overlooked by reason of race, sex, religion, physical disability, or ethnic background.

Thus, elementary teachers and secondary teachers of social studies became involved in sensitization efforts, in materials search and development, and in general program development.

During the school year 1975/76, a state advisory committee developed *Guidelines for a Multicultural, Non-Sexist Curriculum in Iowa*. Discussions of this committee led to a State Board of Public Instruction mandate that educators coming into the field by 1980 and those requesting certificate renewals after that time complete forty-five hours of human relations training. Guidelines from DPI Committee on Certification Standards provided for both local and university-based programs to meet this requirement.

The 1976/77 legislative session saw the aforementioned section removed from the three social studies curriculum sections, and the following statement was added to Section 1 of the School Code, thereby becoming a precursor for all education efforts:

Where applicable, the education program shall be taught with attention given to all persons who have made significant contributions to a given area of study, and a positive effort shall be made to reflect the achievements of women, minorities, and any other persons, organizations or groups of persons who, in the past, may have been overlooked by reason of race, sex, religion, physical disability, occupation, or ethnic background.

Hence, in three years, schools received three different sets of directives, all focused on the same problem, each with a slightly different focus. Is it any wonder that most educators breathe a sigh of relief when the legislators finally retire for the season? The most recent and comprehensive revision of laws pertaining to school programs in Iowa in 1974 had sixteen new sections . . . this in a bill with only eighteen sections!

3. Probably no other curriculum/instructional concern has come in for more change through state and federal legislation in recent years than special education. The mandates here have required an effort to educate all youth, regardless of handicapping condition, and to do it in the "least restrictive environment." This has forced general educators and special educators to collaborate and cooperate as never before. Certainly, all educators are facing the mandate of Public Law 94-142, The All Handicapped Children Act, but many states have legislative mandates predating that federal action. The federal regulations obviously differ from what each state is currently doing despite a common goal. Another effort will have to be made to accommodate the new definitions and program requirements.

The Iowa plan for special education was imbedded in legislation establishing sixteen area education agencies. These AEA's were given full responsibility for implementing the special education requirements, hence mandating a completely new level of bureaucracy with its attendant increase in human interactions. At least in Iowa, this was accompanied with significant increases in the foundation finance formula through the use of a weighted enrollment factor. Reports from other parts of the country seem to indicate that legislators don't always provide increased funds for increased services!

4. The lag between legislative mandates and the publication of guidelines or regulations from the appropriate education agency is a problem of process for the local curriculum leader. Interested people read about legislative action, interpret its application in the local community to their own satisfaction, and demand immediate action.

The following is taken from the first part of a memo written by the author to a group of principals regarding a meeting on the new Fed-

eral Education Bill held at Drake University on September 7, 1974:

The Legislative Officer for the U.S. Office of Education and the Counsel for the Senate Labor and Public Welfare Committee (Education) spent a great deal of time at this meeting attempting to give us an overview of this most recent education legislation. This memo will attempt to summarize some of that information.

It should be noted that despite the action of the legislators and the President, much of what is involved will not be operative for some time. We were reminded that the U.S.O.E. has sixty days to submit plans for developing regulations and guidelines for this legislation. Within that time the plan must be submitted to the legislative branch for approval. The U.S.O.E. then has 180 days in which to actually develop the regulations and guidelines. Following that, Congress has forty-five days to review and approve said regulations and guidelines. You should have figured out by now that we will probably receive the regulations next school year.

There followed three pages of changes and additions that would be affecting our schools, but it would take considerable time before we could even begin operating under the mandate.

If the curriculum leader is truly attuned to society as a source of the curriculum, that person may be able to move program development along smoothly in areas of major concern without giving the impression of hopscotching around the currently fashionable topics and without a series of false starts.

How, in fact, are these mandates controlling our schools? By making the curriculum worker's task more difficult? by creating confusion relative to the specific paths to follow? While there is an aspect of truth in the last two questions, these are merely controlling factors that tend to drain off energy that might be more productively spent. No, the effect is much more important than the inconvenience created for some curriculum leaders. We find, in a report of some recent research on "Responsiveness of Schools to Their Clientele" headed by Dr. Harmon Zeigler, a series of succinct statements that provide a view of shifting federal demands on schools:

The major problem of educational planners in the early 1900s, Zeigler points out, was to "homogenize" an immigrant population, infuse it with a consistent set of values, and reduce conflict—in short, to "manufacture a cohesive society." The goal was sta-

bility, not social change; and schools as transmitters of knowledge, culture, and social norms became conservative in their role of maintaining the social order.

But beginning with the Supreme Court decision in the *Brown* case in 1954 and continuing with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, that situation was almost wholly reversed. The Federal government decided to use schools as instruments to achieve social and economic equality, "a transformation of the primary goal of public education."

By becoming the spokesman for the underprivileged, the Federal government was responding to demands which local schools could not meet, Zeigler says. . . . Hence the Federal government, the traditional defender of the downtrodden against the conservatism of local community power structures, took the role of advocacy for the underdog.

The *Brown* decision and subsequent Federally mandated desegregation "shifted the arena of conflict and decision from local to national government. . . ." Further, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, with its influx of Federal funds, "created a new pattern of interaction which made the notion of lay control through school boards obsolete."²

The true focus of this project, conducted through the University of Oregon's Center for Educational Policy and Management, was the concern over the eroded power of local school boards and administrators, and this is manifest in many areas outside the actual school curriculum. But the point to be made here is that these federal mandates, to a greater extent all the time, are prescribing the local curriculum.

What is the overall effect of the various mandates that have been discussed here? In every case, the mandate indicates what schools should do, what should be taught, or in what manner something should be taught. In no instance does it say, "Accomplish this mandate by reducing or eliminating your efforts in some other, more traditional area." So the requirements of the curriculum change, and the classroom teacher loses a bit of autonomy for curriculum choice. Oh, the choice is there, but it now relates to how well the traditional curriculum can be compacted in order to add the new requirement.

We prepare teachers with a strong background in their discipline, recognize that as a source of the curriculum, and then expect them to make choices to reduce the content their discipline has valued in order to accommodate new demands from state or national level mandates.

So, the mandate gets added in some fashion, but probably not at the expense of dropping something else. Is it any wonder that the most universal theme heard in teachers' complaints is the need for more "time to teach"? And who do the teachers perceive as pushing these "unreasonable" demands on them? Legislators and special interest groups are too far removed to feel the frustration of teachers, but the principal or the curriculum director or other curriculum leaders are not.

Many mandates are not so much concerned with new content for the curriculum as they are the process of education. Now, however, when the concern is the "delivery" of the curriculum, the time involvement is not one of accommodating new content but the crowding of the teacher's time through in-service courses or other staff development efforts. The response is the same—a natural human reticence to change, to give the time, to make the effort.

In conclusion the trend would lead us to believe that society will increasingly rely on legislative action at the state and federal level to direct the institution of public education. The curriculum leader is not likely to reverse that trend, so at least two avenues lie open, both of which must be traveled.

First, the curriculum leader is challenged to make the need for change so essential and so personal that inertia is overcome and the teacher as a "source of the curriculum" is accommodated along with the "mandate."

Second, curriculum leaders must become so well organized and so politically aware that they have some effect on the content of legislative mandates before such action is taken. [E]

² *Report on Education Research*. Washington, D.C.: Capitol Publications, June 1, 1977. p. 9.



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