

Do We Educate Teachers for a "Patchwork" Curriculum?

Donald R. Cruickshank and Linda L. Thompson

According to these authors, "most pre-service and in-service teachers claim that they are not prepared to teach the elements of the patchwork curriculum," and "institutions of higher learning admit that they are not preparing teachers for the patchwork. . . ." Some suggestions for remedying this situation are presented here.

Part of every elementary and secondary curriculum is an everchanging jumble or hodgepodge of units and courses. Among the most recent additions are those entitled bilingual education, career education, consumer education, death education, moral education, and multicultural education. The introduction of these new curricula comes about mostly because society-at-large and local communities confront present-day challenges and problems, and viewing schools as a primary agency for socialization, call upon them to focus the attention of youth on these matters.

Teachers claim that they are unprepared to teach the everchanging hodgepodge—the patchwork curriculum. They say that their preservice program did not give attention to such topics. They also feel that quickly assembled in-service education programs are not very much help.

Teacher educators usually agree with teachers. More often than not, colleges, schools, and departments of education are not the genesis of the newer curricula, and consequently they are not prepared or perhaps even anxious to ready teachers for it. However, some teacher preparation units do try to accommodate the newer needs of their teacher clients. Two recent studies lend some support to this contention.

Sherwin¹ surveyed colleges, schools, and departments of education belonging to the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. One of her findings was that institutions of higher

¹ Susan Sherwin. *Teacher Education: A Status Report*. Washington, D.C.: American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. Princeton, New Jersey: Educational Testing Services, 1974. 64 pp.

education (IHEs) were providing elective offerings in at least some areas of societal concern, specifically human relations, drug and alcohol abuse, and black culture. Sherwin's report also noted that a fairly large percentage of IHEs now have full programs in Urban Education (40 percent) and Bilingual Education (24 percent).

A study by Joyce and others² also showed

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evidence that IHEs were beginning to respond to the need to prepare teachers for some newer topics. When preservice teachers were asked whether they had been prepared for teaching environmental education, consumer education, human relations, and multicultural education, they responded affirmatively with the following percentages respectively: 44, 24, 58 and 47.

Of course, the results of self-reports such as those asked for in both the Sherwin and Joyce and others reports can be misleading. Among other problems there is a tendency for institutions and individuals to report that they are "with-it," whatever the innovation is.

While both reports provided some support for the contention that IHEs are responding to teacher needs to be prepared for the patchwork curriculum, the Joyce and others report also provides other, less optimistic findings. For example, over 50 percent of both faculty members and students surveyed felt that preparation for multicultural education was not adequate. Relatedly, 37 percent of faculty members felt that preparation for teaching the poor was not adequate. Further, Joyce and others found that almost no students are being prepared to work in bilingual education:

... it appears that the student and faculty populations [in bilingual programs] are relatively mono-

lingual and probably do not have the capacity to respond to the need for bilingual education.³

Joyce and others conclude that:

Overall there is little evidence that institutions have developed powerful training programs to prepare large quantities of students to work in these areas of social need. Unless we assume that the normal teacher training programs are adequate for that purpose (both students and faculty appear to be telling us that they are not), then there has not been a discernible attempt throughout teacher education as a whole to meet those needs.⁴

Thus the limited evidence seems to indicate that although IHEs are making efforts to prepare teachers to teach the patchwork curriculum, that effort is not reaching the majority, and in some instances the vast majority of students seeking degrees in education. What do teachers do who are either completely or relatively unprepared for teaching the patchwork curriculum? How do they and their schools handle new curriculum demands? Do they add another course? Add a unit to an already existing course? Does the new topic get attached to a specific department? To a specific grade level? Does a special time get set aside for it (Black History Week)? What *do* schools and teachers do?

Several central Ohio teachers were asked these questions. When they spoke about consumer education, they said it was an example of an interdisciplinary subject and as such posed a special problem. Where did it belong? After finding that several departments taught elements of consumer education, social studies teachers reported that they felt they should drop it from their courses. "Secondary schools departmentalize every curricular demand. Departments and teachers don't work well across either departmental lines or grade levels."

Teachers reacted similarly about programs of drug education that were to involve everyone. These programs failed because both teachers and administrators lack both knowledge of drug edu-

² Bruce R. Joyce, Sam J. Yarger, Kenneth R. Howey, Karen M. Harbeck, and Thomas N. Kluwin. *Preservice Teacher Education*. Washington, D.C.: Office of Education, Department of Health, Education and Welfare, 1977. pp. 85-86.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

cation and the ability to work across disciplines. "The major solution was to departmentalize it, so we gave it to the health teachers."

After talking with these teachers about the attendant problems of teaching the patchwork curriculum, it can be tentatively said that:

1. Teachers seem to prefer to work in their own classes. Consequently, curriculum requiring an interdisciplinary approach will have difficulty making it.

2. Teachers are disturbed that many things find their way into the curriculum without regard to whether or not they are related to the school philosophy or purpose.

3. Often because the new demands are not explained or not accepted, teachers subvert the system. Teachers generally do this by giving new topics only passing, if any, attention.

4. Some teachers sought university help either in the form of workshops or further course work.

Summarizing to this point, most pre-service and in-service teachers claim that they are not prepared to teach the elements of the patchwork curriculum. Furthermore, when forced to do so they confront problems and harbor reservations that can cause them to subvert attempts toward curriculum change. Meanwhile, institutions of higher education admit that they are not preparing teachers for the patchwork, but there is evidence that some colleges, schools, and departments are trying. The overall result appears to be less than adequate.

Looking backward historically, these problems are not new. There has always been a patchwork curriculum, and quite likely teachers felt as ill-prepared to teach it. Looking forward, what might be done by schools, teachers, and IHEs to reduce the bothersomeness of the problem?

Suggestion 1. All parties to education must realize that teachers are caught in a revolving door. Nearly everyone associated with schools keeps the teachers in a whirl. The patchwork curriculum is only part of that whirl. In addition to teaching the patchwork curriculum, teachers are expected to try new patterns of organization, new instructional methodologies, new forms of evaluation, and so forth. Teachers count too!

Without their influence and assistance, there is no curriculum change. They must be considered or included in curriculum planning for they need time and the opportunity to prepare effectively for change.

Suggestion 2. Colleges, schools, and departments of education must find ways to identify

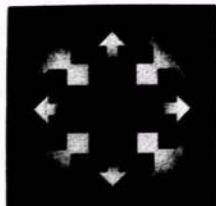
"Looking back historically, these problems are not new. There has always been a patchwork curriculum, and quite likely teachers felt as ill-prepared to teach it."

their teacher-clients' needs more effectively and to respond to them quickly and usefully. The undergraduate teacher education curriculum suffers from benign neglect. That neglect could be eliminated if and when serious, ongoing attention was paid to the professional education of teachers. The present state of affairs causes IHEs to pay attention to the curriculum only every five or ten years when state education department program approval is sought or when national accreditation is desired. In between those periods, the curriculum generally languishes. Perhaps there should be an associate dean for teacher education curriculum who is responsible for engaging significant persons in ongoing curriculum development tasks.

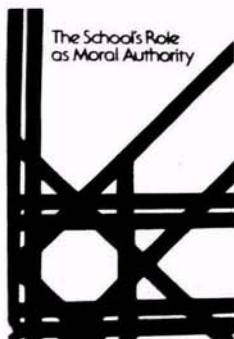
Suggestion 3. State education department regulations are often the genesis of the patchwork curriculum. It is blatantly unfair to require new curricula in schools and not provide the resources necessary for school districts to respond adequately. Money is required if a school and teacher are to know about, accept, and successfully implement new program components. Local educational agencies (LEAs) must be wary of establishing local curriculum requirements for the same reasons. Schools and teachers cannot implement one new idea after another without adequate resources. Consequently, LEAs must be judicious in expanding programs unless clear support is provided.

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Suggestion 4. Teacher organizations must find ways to orchestrate what is going on in schools. No one else does it effectively, and teachers are the most interested in and the most affected by what happens to the curriculum. Teacher organizations, as IHEs, must have persons who give fulltime, ongoing attention to the matter of school curriculum. To do this, teacher organizations must take leadership in bringing together representatives from IHEs, state education departments, and local education agencies in order to focus their attention seriously on the topic of the elementary and secondary school curriculum and the pre-service and in-service preparation of teachers for it.

One outcome seems predictable. The patchwork curriculum will evolve into a mosaic—the parts contributing to a recognizable pattern for the education of American youth.

The response of teacher education to the patchwork curriculum is not so easily predicted. Given that both Sherwin and Joyce and others report that pre-service education programs have not changed significantly over the past 20 years, how will (or even how can) such programs deal with teachers' needs in the curriculum area? Pre-service teachers are able to learn about patchwork curriculum, but will they see it as having priority in their education? Perhaps only those teachers in the field perceive the need to deal with such a problem. Without change—altering programs, modifying requirements, or extending the length of pre-service education—it does not seem that the patchwork curriculum will receive much attention in the pre-service program. [E]



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