



Where Have All the Disciplines Gone?

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There is an attitude approaching anti-intellectualism which permeates the public school community, building artificial walls between schools and scholars in the subject areas taught in schools. This distance between the college or university community and the public school has widened in recent years. The nearly universal complaint of the university professor that the incoming first-year student does not know the subject area, whether it be history, English, science, mathematics, or foreign language, is symptomatic. The professor explains that there is little emphasis on the content of these disciplines in the elementary or secondary schools, and this does seem to be the case.

Curriculum over the last 20 years has systematically divorced itself from subject matter. The idea that process is more important than content has touched practically every field of study. A good example is the teaching of art where process is paramount rather than the art object, the artist, or the cultural context. In social studies we are overly concerned about political processes and social and environmental issues. A student can come through eight or ten years of social studies and never have a comprehensive course in world history. Students can explore the process of social studies for that length of time and emerge without knowledge of the geography of their own country, much less any kind of global perspective. The disciplines have been swallowed up by process never to emerge again. Even if we accept that process in many subjects is part of the content and by no means useless, it should not replace subject matter.

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Decline in Teaching of Disciplines

The teacher, not the subject matter specialist or the scholar in the field, has become the curriculum developer, and while this trend has some very positive effects on schooling, there are also some very negative ones. Teachers, for the most part, do not have much time for curriculum development. The demands on teachers have increased while their negotiated contracts have put time restrictions on the school day and after-school activities, leaving little time for activities such as curriculum development. Meanwhile, the information base needed to design curriculum has dramatically increased, and many teachers cannot keep up with the new knowledge. The decreased emphasis on discipline-based studies for teachers in the late 60s and 70s gave the newer teacher less rather than more knowledge about the disciplines.

In no way do I want to denigrate the importance of the teacher in curriculum development, but I argue that teachers need a collegial relationship with the scholars representing the subject areas for the purpose of curriculum design, development, and revision. Curriculums should be designed and reviewed not only by the individual teacher or teachers within a school but also by those who have in-depth knowledge of the disciplines.

Two other factors contribute to the decline in the teaching of the disciplines. First, at the governmental level the discipline orientations of 20 years ago have disappeared from most agencies with responsibility for curriculum design and development in schools. State departments of education and federal agencies such as the Department of Education have divested themselves of subject matter

specialists in favor of generalists in education, just as in local school systems art, English, and mathematics supervisors have been replaced by general curriculum specialists. As a result, one mechanism for bringing the public school curriculum closer to university scholars has been eliminated. Consequently, many of the problems facing the schools in the "back to basics" movement can be attributed to the lack of attention to substance in curriculum brought about by the absence of discipline advocates at every level.

Second, the trend has been to less rather than more curricular responsibility for most state departments of education. The criteria for design of curriculum are left up to the school systems. State departments develop guides or frameworks for subject areas, but for the most part they have no way of making these a part of any school curriculum. Other than at the minimum competency level, these agencies have few effective ways to maintain standards and evaluate course content. Their reviews and evaluations concern, for the most part, school organization, facilities, and course offerings rather than what is being taught, how it is being taught, and how effectively the students are learning.

Review of schools by outside agencies is a two-edged sword. State departments may have relinquished their role in curriculum partly because the process in the past was often superficial and bureaucratic and many schools ignored the state directions. Now, however, there is no agency to take responsibility for academic quality control of schooling. The individual school and its faculty make the scholarly determinations. Fortunately, many of them have very high standards. Yet others do not, and there is no mechanism external to the school to provide for scholarly review and revision of the curriculum. Lack of outside review of

Students can explore the process of social studies for years without learning the geography of their own country. By involving the scholarly community in curriculum development, we can return to a proper balance between process and content.

schools' academic standards and curriculum content has been detrimental to the disciplines.

Room for the Scholar

I think it is time to reverse these trends and emphasize subject matter and disciplines. I am not calling for "back to basics," in spite of how it sounds. I am not saying that in mathematics, for example, we should be concerned with only the computational skills of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. I believe the student should understand cognitively what mathematics is and should comprehend some of the conceptual frameworks governing mathematics as a discipline. Similarly, we need not reduce history to the memorization of facts and dates; students should have knowledge of the chronology of Western Civilization and understanding of the effect of key events and individuals on the course of human development.

Although schools spend enormous amounts of time, energy, and money on the development of curriculum, the work is done in a vacuum. Rarely do curriculum teams include people other than those actively teaching the subject. Historians are rarely involved in developing social studies curriculum, and how often are art historians involved in the development of art curriculum? There are many ways to involve the scholarly community in the curriculum development process. It may be at the federal level developing nationwide projects, it may be at the state level designing curriculum guidelines or recommendations for schools, or at the local level with direct involvement in school-based curriculum. Moreover, including scholars in curriculum development does not remove teachers from the process. Teachers and scholars can work in a collegial relationship developing substantively based programs which reaffirm the disciplines' role in the curriculum. How can we accomplish this? Several methods and techniques used at CEMREL have been successful in the past.

How to Use the Disciplines

Scholars were an integral part of the Aesthetic Education Program curriculum development effort, a project to develop a basic or general education in all of the arts for the elementary student. The overall curricular design is based on modular units that can be arranged into courses of study for each grade level K-6 (Madeja and Onuska, 1978). The underlying premise of the program was that the organizing ideas for all the arts lay in concepts drawn from the philosophy of aesthetics. Further, the substantive or discipline base for the program lay in the arts themselves; that is, in music, dance, film, theater, literature, and the visual arts. Each discipline had a content base in three general areas: the processes and techniques for creating the art form, the historical background of the art form, and the critical or analytical aspects of the art form. So, in developing the curriculum, we had two specific content areas to deal with—philosophical aesthetics and the individual disciplines.

A National Advisory Committee representing scholars from the arts disciplines and aesthetics guided the conceptual, philosophical, and content development. The committee identified the leading concepts in each of the disciplines and in aesthetics which became the organizing structure for the curriculum and the content base for the students' activities. Teams of National Advisory Committee members and other scholars in each of the fields then laid out content outlines for each of the grade levels containing the leading concepts or ideas, in-depth analysis of these concepts, suggested activities for students, and bibliographic resources. The result was a conceptual framework with a strong base in the disciplines which guided the initial design and later development of the curriculum—*Guidelines: Curriculum Development for Aesthetic Education* (Barkan, Chapman, and Kern, 1970). The second part of the process began when a team of artist/teachers

worked with the scholars to design activities and units of study for each grade level of instruction.

Many of the individual ideas and all of the units were then tested with teachers in classroom settings at the appropriate level, and teams of scholars and artist/teachers reviewed the classroom feedback. Thus the curriculum was evaluated and reviewed from three points of view: the artist/teacher who was the curriculum writer, the scholar who validated the content, and the teacher who made it work in the school. By using this process we were able to gain acceptance for and validation of the content from the scholarly community, we were able to verify that the content worked for the audience it was trying to reach, and we were able to design exciting and innovative learning strategies and activities for students.

A slightly different model is used in CEMREL's Comprehensive School Mathematics Program, which is still in development. The goal of this program is to bring knowledge of the discipline of mathematics into the elementary school curriculum. Traditionally, the elementary curriculum has been based on skill development or general knowledge of numbers and has only touched on parts of the discipline of mathematics. CSMP teaches not only those skills and numerical concepts necessary for a student to be able to compute, but also gives the student an understanding of the total discipline including probability and statistics, geometry and measurement, relations and functions, and classification. It was very important for the project planners to draw on the best scholarly expertise in the field and to engage professional mathematicians in the process of curriculum development.

Like the Aesthetic Education Program, they chose an advisory committee of scholars and experts who defined the content. The development team members were mathematicians first, with advanced degrees in mathematics and experience in translating content into pedagogy. Unlike the aesthetic education model, the mathematicians served in residence for varying lengths of time to participate in the curriculum development process. They worked with the permanent staff and with teachers in the field to develop the leading concepts and content for each grade

level. CSMP uses a spiral curriculum design in which each of the content areas is expanded on throughout the curriculum (Sterling, Haag, Kaufman, and Papy, 1975).

The scholars' role here was to work on their ideas in a classroom setting with a group of students, carrying out the preliminary or hothouse trial for the materials. The results were brought back and reviewed by the staff and also critiqued by the classroom teachers who either observed or participated in the teaching. After revisions, the curriculum was taught in a variety of school settings and thoroughly evaluated (Herbert, 1974-present).

In this model, scholars participate in laying out the conceptual framework for the program; in joint development of the curriculum with mathematics teachers, schools, and specialists in curriculum design and development; in teaching the materials and in revising them. There is a collegial relationship between the scholar and the schools; the scholar teaches in the same environment as the teachers with the same immediate feedback about whether or not the students understood the concepts and content presented. This collaboration demonstrates another way in which scholars can be engaged in the curriculum development process as part of the design team and as a quality control to ensure that what is being taught is conceptually and substantively sound.

Although the third model is not based on as comprehensive a program as either the Aesthetic Education Program or the Comprehensive School Mathematics Program, it does exemplify in yet another way how scholars can contribute to development of a single unit of study, in this case translating classical literature into an exciting presentation technique for students. *Storytelling: Classics of the Oral Tradition* is a humanities project using storytelling as a technique to teach classical literature. Classicists, linguists, theologians, and literature specialists from local universities worked with two teachers with experience in storytelling as an art form. The premise was that younger students could understand stories better through oral language than through the written word. Scholars helped identify suitable myths from Sumer, Anglo-Saxon Britain,

Africa, and Greece that retained the essence of the works. The scholars came into the classroom, saw students' reactions to the stories, and reviewed the process with the curriculum developers. The end product was a guide for teachers and a unit of study on classical literature based on storytelling (Thach, 1980). Again, the interaction among the scholar, the schools, and the curriculum developers was the key to success.

A fourth possible model is not so much a process as an approach to subject matter. Here, because much of the content in the disciplines is based on how people interact with the concepts involved, a scholar in the discipline to be studied becomes the subject matter. The life and work of such people as historians, musicologists, anthropologists, artists, writers, and physicists can become appropriate subject matter for the curriculum and can serve as another link between curriculum developers and the disciplines.

A specific example of how such curriculum can work is found in the year-long series of units on artists in the Aesthetic Education Program (Madeja and Onuska, pp. 62-74). In brief, the units present the individual artist as the subject matter. The way the artist works and the artist as a person are two major themes that are emphasized by studying the sculptor, the painter, and the graphic artist; the actor; the choreographer and the dancer; the filmmaker and the cinematographer; the poet, the storyteller, and the playwright; the composer; and the critic. Each of the artists is shown as an individual with the everyday concerns of the rest of humanity.

In a student-centered view of the artist, the curriculum provides information about how artists work, where they get their ideas, what shapes their ideas, and how these factors affect what the artist produces. Also, the student becomes aware of how the artist as an individual feels about the arts and how the arts influence the way artists live. The arts as a way of life is an appropriate subtitle; most artists do not distinguish between their art form and the way they live.

Students learn to perceive, analyze, and describe the process that artists use to create their works of art. They are able to distinguish

between the way the visual artist solves problems in a sculpture or painting, and how a composer solves problems in music and a choreographer in dance. Students begin to understand how the artist as an individual has an effect on the form and content of the art work itself. To gain this understanding, students engage in activities which are similar to those artists use in creating their works of art. Students simulate the process that the artist uses, introducing their own aesthetic criteria into making a work of art. In addition, students develop language skills as they describe and critique their own works of art and those of the artist. Using individual scholars from any of the disciplines as subject matter for curriculum development can be another means of inserting content into the curriculum and bringing scholars into the classroom.

These four models exemplify satisfying and successful working relationships between the scholarly community and the curriculum development process. Curriculum is a continually changing phenomenon that should be periodically reviewed and redesigned to remain current and relevant to the students in our schools. However, the search for relevance and exciting presentation techniques should not discount the disciplines. While techniques or strategies for engaging students are the province of the teacher in the school, the content of the disciplines must be the foundation for the curriculum. Both teaching and learning can benefit from returning the disciplines to the curriculum development process. ■

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