

# The Inside-Out Curriculum

Teachers appreciate help from a curriculum developer on the staff of their school.



The first goal of curriculum development is to produce a usable guide to learning. A guide that isn't used is unlikely to achieve its goals.

It is discouraging to think of all the curriculum materials now resting on shelves gathering dust, a waste of time and money. Rather than asking teachers why they don't use the curriculum, we often just assume that the curriculum has failed and not the system that produced it. The solution is to write more curriculum, which, in turn, is relegated to the dusty shelf. The primary reason for the failure of curriculum guides is that the teachers who are to use them are not directly involved in their de-

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velopment ("National Groups . . .," 1980).

### Personalized Curriculum Development

The "inside-out" curriculum development method involves the entire faculty working with a curriculum developer housed permanently in the school to write curriculum based on the philosophy, purpose, and needs of the school. Conversely, using the "outside-in" method, curriculum is produced outside the school by various committees of teachers, resource personnel, and administrators who have little knowledge of the day-to-day operations of the school.

It is the inside-out method that we can blame for producing curriculum guides that are dirty, dog-eared,

underlined—and taken seriously by teachers and students. In other words, they are used as real, living guides to continuous learning.

From the inception of its career education program in 1971, the Dallas Independent School District made a commitment to the idea of written curriculum guides developed by teachers working directly with a curriculum specialist. The district made provisions for the production and printing of the curriculum—an absolute must for a school planning to use written curriculum of any type. The district also established requirements and policies for curriculum materials. Curriculums were based on behavioral objectives with related activities and criterion-referenced evaluations. For every course taught, each student was given a curriculum guide. A package of evaluation instruments and a teacher implementa-

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tion plan accompanied each student plan. Career curriculum reflected the opinions and needs of groups such as community advisors, career experts, and parents. The programs used individualized, self-paced methods of instruction with a computerized system of reporting student progress by the objectives completed. The emphasis was on how well students learned rather than how fast, unless speed was a requirement of job success.

This framework was already present when the Magnet Center for Public Services: Government and Law was established in Dallas by the desegregation order of 1976. Career magnet programs in the areas of health, business, transportation, and the arts began in September 1976. Magnet programs in law and government and human services began in September 1977. Each magnet had

a curriculum writer to help develop specific programs unique to each career school. These schools were separate facilities located near the downtown area of Dallas to be accessible for students from all parts of the city. In March 1977, I was hired as the curriculum developer for the Magnet for Public Services: Government and Law, usually called "the Law Magnet."

It was an experience few people in education have: the opportunity to help develop a new school from the ground up. Everyone became directly involved. Many decisions had to be made and many directly affected curriculum development. The principal had already set a positive tone for curriculum development by providing a few ground rules:

1. The curriculum was to be the main learning guide for all entering students.
2. All teachers would participate in curriculum development.
3. The curriculum writer would function as a member of the faculty with the responsibility of developing and producing the curriculum desired by the teachers.
4. The administration would support efforts to develop the curriculum and provide instructional leadership when needed.

Thus, the main guidelines for "Inside-Out" curriculum development were set.

Our half-day program included two teachers who would teach ninth-grade world history which, as required, would occupy one of our three allotted hours. In addition, there were six cluster, or career, teachers. It was a diverse group—a lawyer, an ex-FBI agent, two teachers with wide knowledge of city government and politics, and two with experience in law-oriented public school programs. During sessions held twice a week, the cluster teachers decided to develop two courses for all incoming students, regardless of age or grade: *Legal Systems* for those interested in law and criminal justice, and *Urban Studies* stressing government and politics. World history began to emerge as a unique study of world cultures based on each student's cultural experience. In the beginning, everyone, including the principal, met together to learn how the parts of

the curriculum worked and to understand the philosophy behind it. We knew it would be a radical change from the methods of a traditional school. Our meetings devoted much time, attention, and lung power to the question of what to teach students. This was necessary since the problem of content lies at the heart of defining the purpose of a program, which must be done before content can fully be identified. Accomplishing this step, however, does not always proceed the way it is shown on curriculum development charts.<sup>1</sup>

With the coming of summer, preparations were made for the teachers to write curriculum in half-day sessions. (Summer writing projects produce the bulk of career curriculum used in the Dallas school district.) As a new curriculum developer, I began to learn that much of my job would involve working with others, encouraging teachers, listening to their complaints and fears, and praising their successes. Because I shared in the building of the school, I was never considered by teachers to be an "outsider," the role of many curriculum writers who are not part of a school (Blumberg, 1974).

We opened the school in the fall of 1977 with two complete modules of the student plan for each of the three courses we offered—our original goal. The year that followed was a continuous learning experience for everyone. Trying to write curriculum to keep ahead of progressing students was a task in itself. It was complicated by a lack of time for writing, adjustments to the new methodology of self-paced instruction, few resources, and doubts about the content of the courses.

### Curriculum Writing Is Political

Since I had not come from the field of public education, I had a lot to learn about teachers. Unfortunately, I found out how to make them angry; but, I also gradually discovered what made them happy. I soon understood that curriculum writing is a political process; that is, it involves the making of decisions by certain groups to accomplish certain goals (Steller, 1980). Generally this requires compromise since all groups do not have the same goals. It was my responsibility to organize content in certain, specified ways, to impose an order on the substance of ideas. When the ex-

ternals of form intruded on the ideas conveyed by the teacher, there was no hesitation about telling me I had gone too far with pressing the needs of curriculum. The interplay between form and substance has continued to be a part of curriculum development at our school.

During the first two years, we developed our "inside-out" system of producing curriculum. I would meet with a teacher or group of teachers once or twice a week or even more often, depending on how rapidly the curriculum needed to be produced. The teacher provided the content for the course. As the writer, I probed the teacher's ideas and began to organize the content into a logical sequence of thoughts. For teachers who did not like to write, I would take notes and turn it into the curriculum they wanted in the required form. Others preferred to write it themselves and give it to me to edit and revise. Some preferred to meet infrequently while working on their own curriculum. Others worked better with frequent meetings.

The situation was flexible depending on the wishes of the teacher. I learned to keep the atmosphere one of give-and-take. Without this, I found that teachers, from long years of mistrust of any one from outside the classroom, tended to put down only what sounded good, not what they really intended to do.

There is always a normal gap between the ideals of the curriculum and the realities of teaching. However, the bigger the gap, the more likely the curriculum will not be used. As the teachers began to trust me, they told me what they really wanted the curriculum to do, and I would try to find the ways curriculum could do it. I also found out that curriculum could not do everything.

Work on the basic course, *Introduction to Public Service*, is now complete. Curriculum materials also have been developed for a successful internship program offered by the school as well as a process-product curriculum for social science projects. *World History: World Cultures* will be finished this year. As these programs reached stability, new specialized courses in law, criminal justice, and law enforcement were proposed in the spring of 1980. The writing of these courses will be continuing during the next two years. While curricu-

lum production of this type had been confined in the past to career programs, the school was given permission to experiment in writing sets of basic goals and objectives for the ninth- and tenth-grade academic courses added to the school. Again, with teachers writing during the summer, objectives were finished for 12 different courses in math, science, history, and English. By producing curriculum for both academic and career courses, all the teachers of our school share in the experience of developing curriculum. It also brings a united focus to instruction and evaluation in the school.

With the exception of the new academic teachers that were added, most of the faculty remains the same. Curriculum writing has become quite simple. Both writer and teacher know the territory and the rules of the game. Familiarity and experience have formed a basis of trust even when there are disagreements. Like a love affair, our first waves of enthusiasm have been replaced by a realistic eye for what works. The tedious steps recommended by methodologies such as curriculum mapping are followed but in a shortened, informal process (English, 1980). Few organized meetings occur and few are needed. Yet development continues and new ideas keep bubbling up.

The concept of "inside-out" curriculum development—assessment, design, implementation, evaluation, and revision—can be a genuine cycle, a continuous process that adapts to the needs of the school. When curriculum is sent in from the outside, the cycle atrophies and eventually the curriculum finds its way to the closet. The only cost-efficient curriculum is one that is used. Yet, administrators continue to judge curriculum by factors other than use, and teachers keep finding ways to avoid using them.

Most teachers do not have the time, energy, or interest to spend actually writing curriculum (Young, 1979). They do want workable learning guides that are flexible, stimulating, and helpful without taking on more paperwork. A curriculum specialist can produce curriculum that contains the personal ideas of the teacher while still meeting the requirements of format, design, and basic content. Outside directives are adapted to the goals of the teacher.

When primary emphasis is placed on the needs of the teacher, workable curriculum can be developed. If the teacher is not at the center of the process, curriculum guides have little effect on instruction.

Almost all curriculum written at the Law Magnet has been actively used by teachers and students. It is the instructional foundation of our school both for career and academic courses. The curriculum is not something students and teachers drag out if the principal walks by. It meets all state and district guidelines while allowing for teacher individuality. If the first criteria for curriculum success is usability, the Law Magnet has more than met the standards.

The future of the magnet system in Dallas is uncertain. It has been judged by many as an educational success but less than effective as a tool of desegregation, one of the main reasons it was established.<sup>2</sup> Whatever its fate, the experience has provided ample evidence of the merits of the "inside-out" system of curriculum development. ■

<sup>1</sup> These types of charts analyzing the instructional design process can be found in *The Systematic Design of Instruction* by Walter Dick and Lou Carey (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman, 1978).

<sup>2</sup> See "DISD Unable to Meet Ethnic Quotas," *Dallas Morning News* (June 25, 1980). There are numerous articles describing the difficulties of using magnet schools as tools of desegregation; for instance, "1000 Await Entry to Magnet Schools," *Milwaukee Journal* (2 July 1980), and "Magnet Schools Offer Choice in Desegregation," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* (June 25, 1980). The courts have yet to rule on the future of magnet schools in Dallas.

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