

International Collaboration in Curriculum Development

Recent curriculum work among Western nations may signal a reawakening to the role schools play in the promotion of global understanding and harmony.



Illustration by Donald Gates

Last March, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development passed a resolution that read:

ASCD, as an international organization, should strive to collaborate with agencies and organizations engaged in curriculum and supervision in other countries that encourage the sharing of information and research. ASCD should also lend its organizational expertise and resources to individuals interested in forming curriculum study organizations in their own countries.

In fact, ASCD had already participated in such a collaborative effort. In November 1985, the Association had cosponsored with the Dutch National Institute for Curriculum Development (SLO) in Enschede, the Netherlands, an international conference to help clarify the concept of core curriculum. Curriculum specialists from 12 nations, mostly western European, prepared written descriptions of the core curriculum of schools in their countries. An analysis of the papers (Jozefzoon and Gorter 1985) provides data on the content, development, and implementation of core curriculum in those countries. With publication of the conference proceedings (Gorter 1986), a start has been made on exchanging information internationally about curriculum and its development.

My primary interest is in the integration of the international dimension in national curriculums. By international dimension, I do not mean that which seems common in all curriculums, but the goals and content that enhance our mutual understandings about the social, cultural, economic, political, and other aspects of international society. Exchange of information about each other's curriculums and how they are developed is a first step toward cooperation—a step that is being taken today by both the Organization for Economic and Cultural Development (OECD) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Knowing How Curriculum Is Developed in Other Countries

One aspect of international understanding is recognizing the great variety in curriculum development processes. For instance, even the way the term "core curriculum" is used varies widely, as does the way in which schools are involved in curriculum development. In many countries (Japan, Sweden, France, some states in the Federal Republic of Germany and the U.S., and Finland), the core curriculum is a prescriptive document determined by the government. In other countries, it is seen rather as an innovative guideline, developed by a more or less independent institution (as in Denmark and the Netherlands). Opinions also differ as to whether "core" refers to a part of the entire curriculum (the so-called basics) or to the whole of the body of knowledge and experience to which all pupils have a right to be exposed. I favor the latter view.

Schools play various roles in the development of the core curriculum. Sometimes school representatives act as advisors to a higher authority (district, state, or national). In other cases, development of the core curriculum is

based on results of experiments conducted by schools. Researchers (by reports on the state of affairs in education) and textbook authors (via analyses of their books by curriculum specialists) also take part in determining the content and aims of the curriculum. In all countries, the role of laymen is weakest, although it is stronger in the U.S. than in most, and in many countries business has more and more influence.

Once the curriculum has been developed, it is implemented in different ways in different countries, typically via guidelines for educational publishers (in some states of the U.S., West Germany, and France); supervisors or inspectors; the organization of local institutions (such as the Local Education Agencies in the U.K.); and by refresher courses and inservice training (in particular, Scotland and certain Canadian provinces are very advanced in this area). In some countries schools are obliged, as they design their local curriculums, to take the core curriculum into account. This policy is in accord with the tendency to seek a new balance between centralized and decentralized development by making schools responsible

Toward a World Core Curriculum

The long-term goal of a universal or world core curriculum is to assure peaceful and cooperative existence among human species on this planet. To accomplish this goal, the curriculum elements originally proposed by United Nations Assistant Secretary-General Robert Muller provide a useful model.

• *Our Planetary Home*, including an understanding of the universe, the biosphere, and earth's ecosystem;

• *The Human Family*, centering on the world population, human migration, geography, health, human migration, geography, health, and living standards;

• *Our Place in Time*, interpreting past, present, and future events; and

• *The Miracle of Human Life*, transmitting knowledge and attitudes needed for clear thinking and communication as well as good physical, mental, moral, and spiritual health.

Such a curriculum would begin to address issues about which Albert Einstein wrote: "Modern education is competitive, nationalistic, and separative. It has trained the child to regard material values as of major importance, to believe that his nation is . . . superior to other nations and people. The general level of world information is high but usually biased, influenced by national prejudices, serving to make us citizens of our nation but not of the world."

—By Gordon Cawelti, ASCD Executive Director



Photograph courtesy of SLO

for the organization of education but also accountable to higher authorities for the choices they make.

All these differences can be explained by the diversity among cultures (including religious denominations), governments, political relations, and school systems. Knowledge of this diversity is clearly a prerequisite to international cooperation.

Knowing Each Other's Core Curriculums

The other condition for promoting the international dimension in education is knowing one another's curriculums. At one of the sessions of the Enschede conference, ASCD Executive Director Gordon Cawelti called for a "world curriculum," declaring that although each nation should continue to promote its own culture, economic system, and values, students everywhere need to learn a common core of knowledge and skills that would contribute to global harmony. Our analysis of existing curriculums shows several useful points of departure.

International education is based on the awareness of five factors (Jozef-zoon and Gorter 1985).

- *Interdependence.* Despite tensions between developed and developing countries and between capitalist and communist societies, the world situation makes all nations interdependent.

- *Moral responsibility.* As world citizens, we are jointly responsible for a livable future.

- *Multicultural and multicultural society.* Racism, discrimination, and prejudice are unacceptable in a just world.

- *Pedagogical standards and values.* Children develop from an ego-centric perspective toward the ability to empathize with others. International understanding requires cultivation of this natural tendency.

- *Protectionism and isolationism.* Economic conditions often contribute to national chauvinism, which impedes the growth of global consciousness.

From this background, we begin to have a perspective for looking at the international dimension of existing national core curriculums. For instance:

- In Ontario, Canada, values and personal responsibility in society at the international level are taught in relation to religious beliefs.

- England and Wales emphasize respect for religious and moral values, tolerance of other races and ways of life, an understanding of the world in which others live and of the interdependence of nations, and knowledge of human achievements and aspirations.

- Japanese students are expected to grow up as citizens who love people everywhere in the world and who will obtain the trust and respect of international society.

- The goals of public schools in the U.S. include appreciation of differing value systems, cultures, and the interdependent nature of the world community.

That similar goals are reflected in the core curriculums of other nations is borne out by results of a survey taken by the European Development Education Curriculum Network:

The Swedish *grundskola* curriculum explicitly stresses the importance of international knowledge and perspectives. Educational authorities in France have recently shown much interest in development education. West German curricula devote considerable time to the EEC and to international economic relations. A multidisciplinary teaching area such as "Gemeinschaftskunde" seeks to provide knowledge and understanding of current global problems. International politics is one of its subject areas. Most other European states have incorporated the international dimension to a greater or lesser degree in the total curriculum or in selected subject areas (EDECN 1985).

Of course, a closer analysis would be necessary to determine whether these goals are actually incorporated in curriculum materials, and we could well be disappointed in this respect. At a recent conference on the content of Dutch and German textbooks, the West German ambassador to the Netherlands remarked:

An elderly economist once told me that economists today now think those things that they learned at university 25 years ago. The same goes for school textbooks. The road to new conflicts in Europe is paved with bad textbooks, and good textbooks can prevent conflicts (Dwarshuis 1986).

Papers on Core Curriculum Published

The papers delivered at a 1985 international seminar on core curriculum sponsored by ASCD have been published by the Netherlands' National Institute for Curriculum Development (SLO).

Views on Core Curriculum includes papers by John Goodlad, Gordon Cawelti, and nine other scholars including Dennis Kallen of France, Karl Frey of Germany, Malcolm Skilbeck of Australia, and Kenneth Leithwood of Canada. It also contains brief descriptions of core curriculum in 11 European and American countries.

The 224-page report is available from ASCD for \$12.00 per copy, the actual cost to ASCD. Send orders to Order Processing Dept., ASCD, 125 N. West St., Alexandria, VA 22314-2798. Payment must accompany orders under \$20.

In analyzing attention devoted to the international perspective in curriculums from the various countries, we must also take into account concern for pupils' attitudes and values. Learning about factual aspects of life in other countries is not enough. Students should also develop insight into the similarities and differences among peoples and to the origins of cultural differences. Here we must not shrink from relating the main thematic fields relevant to the international dimension (global interdependence, ecology, and disarmament, for example) to use of thinking skills, and to students' emotional and attitudinal development. In this connection we refer to Gordon Cawelti's (1986) paper, "What Are the Elements of a Universal Core?"

International Collaboration for Global Understanding

A number of positive beginnings in the direction of international collaboration have occurred in the Netherlands, which is sometimes called "the doorway to Europe." For instance:

• *International schools.* Teachers in international schools of various nationalities (U.K., U.S., West Germany,

Canada) have met to plan a series of lessons on environment, health, politics, peace, and security. As they have tried to reach consensus on subject matter content, the learning process, and school organization, and later in back-home discussions with parents of various nationalities, there have been many critical moments: at times an observer would have detected traces of stereotypical images that have long ceased to exist. Nevertheless, the process has been productive.

• *Textbook study projects.* With American colleagues (including James Becker of the University of Indiana), Dutch social studies specialists have launched a comparative study of Dutch and American textbooks, focusing on authors' perceptions of aspects of both societies. The resulting report will include suggestions for improving content and methods. A similar project will focus on Dutch and German textbooks.

• *Lessons that contrast international regions.* A Dutch curriculum team, advised by Italian experts from the Superiore Europeo di Studi Politici institute, have developed a lesson series ("Calabria Mia, Go or Stay?") about Italy, a nation that strongly contrasts with Dutch society, historically, culturally, and socioeconomically. The lessons compare the leisure, employment, and other opportunities of young people in Calabria (southern Italy) and the Netherlands in order to make the pupils more aware of the differences. This series serves as a model of the "contrastive method" (Hooghoff and Zwaga 1985), which is also expected to be used in Israeli-Arab schools, and which can be used in other areas of the social studies as well.

• *Translation and adaptation of textbooks.* Various European institutes for curriculum development have found that material can sometimes be translated and adapted for use in other countries. A successful example is the adaptation for the Netherlands of material developed in Germany to be used to teach English in primary education.

• *Curriculum library and goal catalog.* At the end of the conference in Enschede, our institute offered to set up a library of curriculums from all countries: a place where materials

could be stored, translated, examined, and perhaps adapted for use elsewhere. With support of the U.S. Information Agency and the Social Studies Development Center of the University of Indiana, SLO has now become the central library for social studies curriculum materials in Europe. This will enable us, among other things, to analyze these curriculums to determine the extent to which they include the international dimension, and to provide the results of our evaluations, and lesson suggestions, to future curriculum developers.

A Worthwhile Investment

It seems especially appropriate that the theme of ASCD's annual conference in New Orleans in March 1987 is "Collaboration for Productive Learning: A Global Investment." International cooperation is indeed an investment in world harmony and prosperity. □

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