THE LOCUS OF CURRICULUM DECISION MAKING AND TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR OWN ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS TOWARD CURRICULUM PLANNING

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Curriculum decisions are made by various individuals and groups, in a variety of educational settings, and at several levels in the educational hierarchy. One such group is classroom teachers. There are frequent questions, however, regarding the role teachers should play in curriculum decision making and whether control of decisions should lie with them or with individuals far removed from the classroom.

This article presents the results of a study to determine teachers' perceptions of their own attitudes and behaviors toward the curriculum and curriculum decisions and the relationships between these attitudes and behaviors and the locus of curriculum decision making in their districts. Our investigation sought to determine if the context in which curriculum decisions are made in school districts relates to teachers' perceptions of their own behaviors with respect to the formal curriculum and attitudes regarding its planning and use. Such information is critical for establishing curriculum decision-making policy in school systems.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A review of the literature helped to bring into sharper focus the research pertinent to settings, products, levels, and contexts of curriculum decision making. In conducting our study, we selected a definition of curriculum that would be easy to communicate to the participants in order to help them make a sharp distinction between what is to be taught (curriculum) and how it is to be taught (instruction). We specified curriculum decisions as those relating to what is to be taught, to which students, for what period of time, and in what particular order or sequence. This definition is consistent with those formulated by Beauchamp, Johnson, and Taba.


We also made a distinction between curriculum policy making and curriculum development, because curriculum policy and curriculum development decisions were used to categorize school districts by locus of curriculum decision making. This distinction has been described by Short, who stipulated curriculum policy making as primarily a controlling activity that involves specification of such things as the kind, structure, and intent of the curriculum deemed desirable to be developed, enacted, and realized. He defines curriculum development as a technical process involving translation of curriculum policy into educational programs.

What are the distinctions among types of curriculum development and decision settings? Short indicates that final responsibility for the curriculum still rests with the local district, but that districts exercise their powers within changed structures of authority and governance. These changed structures include federal court actions and legislation, state courts, and contracts with professional employees. Settings for curriculum development may be user-based or externally based, with respect to locus of decision making. Externally based decisions and development are exemplified by large-scale curriculum projects that are national, regional, or statewide in scope. User-based curriculum development and decisions relate to those activities occurring at the local district level, such as the work of writing teams and textbook selection committees.

Resulting products of curriculum development can be either site-specific or generic. Site-specific curriculum development refers to development done locally for a particular school setting, generic development involves preparation of curriculum for educational systems. User-based, site-specific curriculum development exists where development is organized and conducted under the direction of the local district and where the resulting curriculum is to be used within the district. Curriculums developed by this means and for this purpose were the focus of the research presented here.

Levels of decision making were classified by Goodlad as (1) societal (local/state boards of education, state departments of education, and federal agencies), (2) institutional (school faculties, central office personnel, curriculum committees), and (3) instructional (individual teachers and teams of teachers). Loucks and Lieberman indicated that some educational systems

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prefer districtwide or schoolwide curriculums, while others encourage teachers to make their own curriculum decisions. Two of the levels (institutional and instructional) and the three contexts (district, school, and classroom) of curriculum decisions served to focus our research.

Do teachers want to be involved in curriculum decisions? If so, at what level within the system? Studies pertinent to these questions are comparatively scarce, especially research regarding teachers’ beliefs and attitudes about the locus of curriculum decision making. An exception is the study by Young in which Canadian teachers identified the kinds of curriculum work in which they wished to participate and the level at which they believed the work should be performed. They chose the school district more frequently than any other level (province, region, school, or classroom). Teachers also indicated that the school district was the preferred level for six out of seven kinds of curriculum work related to individual subjects: selecting a curriculum, adapting a curriculum, winning support for a curriculum, evaluating curriculum decision making, creating a curriculum, and translating a curriculum into instruction. The research of Peterson and Griffin supports these findings. It is noteworthy that in a study conducted in a suburban Detroit school district, teachers expressed the belief that they have little influence on curriculum decision making, but that they, rather than district-level personnel, should have the major influence on curriculum decisions. A report to the United States National Institute of Education indicated that teachers have a strong interest in being involved in all levels of decision making.

The dearth of research regarding teacher beliefs and attitudes in relation to locus of curriculum decision making has been somewhat offset by the number of studies about teacher involvement in curriculum decisions. This research suggests that teachers’ practices may not be consistent with the attitudes they express. Young reported that increased participation in curriculum decision making holds little or no attraction for teachers. Olson and

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Kitto stated that teachers give lip service to the importance of curriculum development but devote little time to it.15 In still other research teachers were found to be oriented toward instruction, not curriculum.16 Likewise, Lortie reported that teachers are oriented toward short-run planning.17 Young concluded that teachers are far more interested in how to teach than what to teach and that curriculum concerns are not an integral part of their day-to-day functioning.18 Connolly and Ben-Peretz are among those who indicate that teachers are willing to participate in curriculum development decisions, although pre-service and inservice education programs have not prepared them for this role.19

Although there is a body of research regarding teacher attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs regarding curriculum decisions, no known research has focused specifically on these dimensions of teacher values and behaviors where the locus of curriculum decisions in school districts differs. Here we report research designed to determine whether there is a relationship between the locus of curriculum decision making in school districts and teachers' self-perceptions of their own attitudes and behaviors toward the districts' curriculum processes and products. Our research was conducted in settings where curriculum development is user-based, rather than externally based, and where the resulting curriculum product is site-specific, rather than generic. The district, school, and classroom, as levels of curriculum decision making, were the contexts for measuring teacher attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs about the resulting curriculum and its use in relation to the locus of curriculum decision making.

PROCEDURES

Because of budget and time limitations, we selected six school districts for study from among 57 districts that were categorized by locus of decision making. We used the Curriculum Decision-Making Inventory (CDI)20 to determine the context (district, school, or classroom) in which these processes occur. The items in this instrument were designed, in part, on the basis of the literature review of curriculum policy and processes. We included additional...
items in the CDI based on our experience in curriculum development and questionnaire construction (Figure 1). The respondents were district central office staff members, and their responses were phrased in terms of who advises, deliberates, decides, and approves each of the curriculum policies and development processes.

Our study has some limitations. First, the results of a study involving teachers from only six districts may be difficult to generalize to a larger population. A second limitation concerns the potential inaccuracies in responses from self-reporting data. Although we conducted numerous interviews with teachers and principals in all six districts and at all grade levels, more confirming information may still be needed.

The categorization of 57 school districts by locus of decision making resulted in nine districts being placed in the classroom decision category; 25 were categorized as having within-school decision making, and 23 as district-wide curriculum decision making. We used a stratified random sample in selecting the six school districts, with two school districts selected from each of the three categories where all curriculum development decisions (items 7-15, Figure 1) were reported to be exclusively made in one of the three identified contexts (district, school, or classroom). Our purpose was to prevent overlap in locus of curriculum decision making among the three sample groups. We next conducted structured interviews with the superintendents; curriculum personnel (if such individuals were employed in the districts); elementary, junior high, and high school principals, and teachers to verify the accuracy of the categorization of the six districts. We selected the teachers, who represented various grade levels and subject areas, at random from lists supplied by the school districts. These formal interviews were conducted with

Figure 1. Curriculum Policy and Development Processes

1. Who determines the budget requirements for curriculum development?
2. Who determines the curriculum areas in need of revision and/or improvement?
3. Who determines who will participate in curriculum planning?
4. Who participates in formulating the school district philosophy?
5. Who participates in formulating the school district goals?
6. Who determines what priority will be given to the school district goals?
7. Who decides which goals are to be developed/selected for the various subject areas taught in the school district?
8. Who participates in formulating a rationale for each subject area taught in the school district?
9. Who decides which terminal objectives are to be developed/selected for each subject area taught in the school district?
10. Who decides what the sequence will be for the terminal objectives that are developed/selected for each subject area?
11. Who decides what body of content will be taught in each subject area in the school district?
12. Who decides in what sequence the body of content identified will be taught?
13. Who decides about allocating objectives to content in each subject area taught in the school district?
14. Who decides what textbooks and other resources will be utilized in subject fields taught in the school district?
15. Who decides what minimum level of competence students will be required to demonstrate in each subject area taught?
three teachers in the primary, intermediate, junior high, and senior high school levels for a total of 12 teachers in each of the six school districts. In addition, we conducted interviews at random with other teachers in each of the 23 schools in the six districts. In all cases the responses during the interviews in the 11 elementary, six junior high, and six senior high schools were consistent with the previous survey results, indicating that the prior classification of school districts by locus of decision making had been accurate. The interview questions were formulated to elicit responses that would characterize a district's curriculum development processes. Questions focused on elements of a system. (1) tasks (What curriculum development tasks are subscribed to in this school district?), (2) positions (Who are the participants in which curriculum development tasks?), (3) expectations (What are the expectations of the participants in the various curriculum development tasks?), (4) time (When and in what sequence are the various curriculum development tasks accomplished?), (5) space (Where are the tasks completed?), and (6) materials/resources (What resources are available for curriculum development?).

Two standard instruments were then administered in person to all K-12 classroom teachers at general faculty meetings called for this purpose. Although 488 teachers in the six school districts were given the instruments to complete, there were some missing data, resulting in a reduction in the size of the sample on different variables. Some teachers had chosen not to participate in the study, and some responses to the questionnaire were too incomplete to use.

The two instruments were:

1. The Teacher Self-Analysis Inventory (TSAI). This instrument was designed by Beauchamp specifically to measure teachers' perceptions of their behavior toward their schools' curriculums. It requires respondents to indicate the accuracy of a list of statements. Typical questions from this instrument are:
   • The curriculum has been a useful reference for me in explaining educational objectives to parents (instrument item number 1).
   • I refer to the curriculum frequently in planning ongoing classroom activities (instrument item number 33).

In our study, Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficient was 0.85. The standard error of measurement was 7.6.

2. The Curriculum Attitude Inventory (CAI). Developed by Langenbach, this instrument was designed to measure teacher attitudes toward curriculum.

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use and planning. Teachers are asked to indicate the extent to which they agree with various statements such as:

- *Teacher creativity is bound to be stifled if a curriculum is used as a point of departure for teaching* (instrument item number 18).
- *The decision to use or ignore a planned curriculum should rest with the classroom teacher* (instrument item number 44)

The measure of reliability for this instrument was .79. The standard error of measurement was 6.6.

**METHOD**

The 488 participating teachers were categorized on two independent variables: locus of curriculum decision making and level of schooling taught. The three loci of curriculum decision making (district, school, and classroom) were determined through the use of the CDI and verified through personal interviews. The three levels of schooling were elementary, junior high, and high school. These nine groups (3 × 3) were treated descriptively because they were identified with a specific locus of curriculum decision making needed for this study and were not a random sample from their respective populations. The teachers were then measured on two variables: (1) teacher behavior regarding their schools' curriculums as measured by the TSAI, and (2) teacher attitudes toward curriculum use and planning as determined by the CAI.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

We determined means and standard deviations, as well as marginal unweighted means, for each group on the two independent variables. The means and standard deviations resulting from an analysis of the teachers' responses to the TSAI are shown in Figure 2. The results can be most clearly understood by examining Figure 3, which shows that the mean scores of junior high teachers in districts in which the locus of curriculum decision making is the district are different from the scores of junior high teachers in districts in which the school or classroom is the curriculum decision context. There are also differences between mean scores of junior high teachers in districts in which the locus of curriculum decision making is the district and the scores of elementary teachers in districts in which the school and classroom are the curriculum decision contexts. The scores of junior high teachers in districts that employ district curriculum decision-making processes are different from the scores of high school teachers in districts in which the locus of curriculum decision making is the classroom. In addition, the mean scores of elementary teachers in districts in which the classroom is the curriculum decision context are different from the scores of high school teachers in districts in which the school and district are the loci of curriculum decision making. Finally, the mean scores of elementary teachers in districts in which
Means and Standard Deviations for Teacher Self-Analysis Inventory

<table>
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<th>Levels of Schooling</th>
<th>Locus of Decision Making</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Classroom</td>
<td>School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
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<td>(50)</td>
</tr>
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<td>N</td>
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<td>128.8</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>12.8</td>
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<td>(30)</td>
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<td>126.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>X</td>
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<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>(6)</td>
<td>(34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
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<tr>
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<td>11.5</td>
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<td>(114)</td>
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<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>119.4</td>
<td>129.8</td>
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</table>

The mean scores and standard deviations resulting from an analysis of the teachers' responses to the CAI are shown in Figure 4. The mean scores for teacher attitude regarding curriculum planning and use are lower in districts in which the school is the level of decision making than the attitude scores of teachers in those educational settings in which the school district is the locus of decision making.

**DISCUSSION**

In this study it was first necessary to identify school districts with different contexts of curriculum decision making. Then our purpose was to determine whether teachers' self-perceptions about their schools' curriculums, as well as curriculum use and planning, differed depending on the locus of curriculum decisions within districts. For the 488 study participants, curriculum development decisions about what will be taught, to whom, and in what order or sequence are made at either the district, school, or classroom level. For those teachers in districts in which the decisions were made at the school and classroom level, all teachers were directly involved in those decisions. In the two districts with a centralized process—curriculum decisions made by councils and committees—teachers were either directly involved in those decisions or had their views represented on a curriculum council and/or committee(s).

Our purpose was to determine whether teachers' self-perceptions regarding their behavior toward the formal curriculum and their attitudes toward curriculum use and planning differed depending on the locus of curriculum decision making within the school district.
The most striking results were that teachers' self-reported inclination to follow or attend to curriculums formulated for their district, as measured by the TSAI, are highest when the district is the locus of decision making; next highest in districts in which the school is the decision context, and lowest when the classroom is the locus of curriculum decisions. Moreover, teachers' self-reported inclination to follow curriculums formulated for their district is markedly higher at all three grade levels—elementary, junior high, and senior high—when the district, rather than the classroom, is the curriculum decision-making context. When comparisons are made between the school and district decision context, teachers' scores are higher at the junior high level when the district is the decision context and only slightly higher for elementary
and slightly lower for high school teachers. Interviews with teachers to verify the context in which curriculum decisions were made in their districts also revealed that junior high teachers had more intense concerns about the need for a planned curriculum than did teachers at other school levels. Elementary teachers tended to rely somewhat on adopted textbook series for direction, senior high teachers preferred to rely on their specialized knowledge.

The results of administering the CAI to measure teacher attitudes toward curriculum use and planning in their districts indicated a higher total mean score for teachers when the district is the locus of curriculum decisions, followed by a classroom and then school locus of decision making. Grade-level results showed that the mean scores of teachers are highest when the district is the locus of decisions for elementary and junior high teachers. High school teachers’ self-perceptions of attitudes are more positive when the classroom is the decision context.

Our study results indicate that teachers’ self-reported behaviors (and attitudes, although less so) regarding use of the formal district curriculums are associated with the context in which decisions are made. Reported behaviors had stronger, more consistent patterns than attitudes.

Previous research results indicate that there is a contradiction in teachers’ desires to participate in curriculum decisions and their beliefs regarding the locus of these decisions. Our results indicate, however, that teachers have a greater inclination to attend to, and a more favorable attitude toward, formal curriculums when these decisions are made at the district level. For these teachers it appears that the district would be the appropriate locus of curriculum decision making and that their direct participation in these decisions is not a requisite for their attending to the curriculums that result from these decisions.

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**Figure 4.**

**Means and Standard Deviations for Curriculum Attitude Inventory**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels of Schooling</th>
<th>Locus of Decision Making</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>School</td>
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<td>188.5</td>
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<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
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<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \bar{X} )</td>
<td>193.1</td>
<td>186.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
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<td>19.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>6</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \bar{X} )</td>
<td>199.7</td>
<td>189.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \bar{X} )</td>
<td>194.2</td>
<td>187.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The reasons for these contradictions are difficult to explain. Our results may also be attributable to approaches to curriculum planning used in these school settings. For example, in those settings where the district was the locus of decision making, the centralized process employed was under the direction of a curriculum coordinator. In the four other districts curriculum leadership was provided by building principals and department heads. In addition, it was very evident during the teacher interviews to verify the locus of curriculum decision making in the six districts that, in those districts with a centralized development process, curriculum concerns were raised to a greater level of importance and visibility than was the case in the remaining four districts. The curriculum leadership that was provided, the greater visibility that curriculum decision making received, and expectations for uniformity in implementation in the two districts that employ a centralized process may influence teachers' self-perceptions regarding their attitudes and behaviors toward curriculum decision making.

These results indicate that teachers value curriculum decision making to different degrees depending on the context in which decisions are made within districts. More research needs to be done to separate out other factors, such as the quality of curriculum leadership and pre-service and inservice programs provided teachers. Factors such as these need to be considered before the generalizability of the results of this study can be determined.

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Critiques five programs—GEMS (Goal-Based Educational Management System), IGE (Individually Guided Education), AIE (Arts Is Elementary), EBCE (Experience Based Career Education), and SLSDSP (Salt Lake City's Democratic School Project)—in terms of their taken-for-granted orientations to show the constricting effect their “technocratic-mindedness” has upon the educational meaning available through the programs. The final chapter on “Education for Emancipation” projects an alternative vision.
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