Are You Doing Inquiry Along These Lines?

STUDY OF THE "OUTSIDE CURRICULUM" OF STUDENTS' LIVES

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Despite the fact that students live in a multiplicity of contexts outside of school, surprisingly little attention is given to what they learn from life in these contexts. We contend that natural curriculums exist in the variety of contexts of students' lives: peer groups, families, mass media, nonschool organizations, hobbies or avocations, vocations, and other relationships and associations. In order to gain a comprehensive picture (or "ecological" perspective, to use a scientific metaphor) of the complex curricular influences on students' daily lives, it is imperative that we know more about the configuration of outside (of school) curriculums that shape students' outlooks.

Prior to the twentieth century, before curriculum served universal schooling, most of the prominent educators (from Plato and Lao-tzu to Froebel, Herbart, and Tolstoy) treated curriculum as a broad contextual problem that stretched across the whole of society and culture. With the specialized society of the twentieth century, however, curriculum became a technical enterprise geared to facilitate learning in schools. Throughout the twentieth century, critics of this tendency (e.g., John Dewey, Harold Rugg, Boyd Bode, and L. Thomas Hopkins) emerged to argue for the unification of learning and all of...
life. Knowing the whole child was not just a catchword; rather, it symbolized the need to know well the persons we educate. Today, a time when schools are blamed for perceived inadequacies in the growth of children and youth, an ecological perspective is needed more than ever. It is imperative that a complex culture realize that the school curriculum is not the only curriculum that forges student skills, knowledge, appreciations, values, and general outlooks on life. All of the extant curricular domains (the outside curriculums and that of schools) must share in the criticisms and achievements alike. All must cooperatively contribute to the growth of individuals and society.

If this collaborative effort is to have a chance of occurring, a new kind of knowledge base is required, one that recognizes fully that the study of curriculum is more than a school problem. It is a systemic problem of the society as a whole. Thus, we need knowledge of at least five kinds about the outside curriculum.\(^4\) (1) general background knowledge about the effects of non-

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school experience on what students know; (2) specific strategies for teachers to acquire knowledge about outside curricular domains that have impact on the outlook of their own students; (3) insights from curriculum knowledge that could illuminate the efforts of nonschool educators, (4) insights of nonschool educators and nonschool educational situations that could illuminate the work of schools, and (5) strategies for school and nonschool educators to share their expertise as they pursue together one of the most central problems of our age, namely, how to develop curriculums for and with children and youth to enhance the ability and outlook of subsequent generations of human beings.

We are engaged in inquiry along these lines and seek to learn of others similarly engaged or interested in this topic. Those who write us will be put in touch with one another.

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"Are You Doing Inquiry Along These Lines?" is a regular column that describes proposed or current scholarly work around which networks of researchers might be formed. Those interested in specific research paradigms, problems or questions, inquiry approaches, or other related aspects of curriculum and/or supervision may use this Journal as a contact point for communicating informally. Anyone wishing to suggest a focus for such a network should prepare a brief sketch of the particular research interest (in 600 words or less, double-spaced) and submit it, along with the name and address of the contact person, to the editors for consideration.
