

CURRICULUM IN AND OUT OF CONTEXT

CATHERINE CORNBLETH, *State University of New York at Buffalo*¹

The disappointments of curriculum theory in practice mostly come from treating curriculum out of context—both conceptually and operationally. Conceptual decontextualization has meant separating curriculum as product (e.g., a document such as a syllabus or course of study, a package of materials accompanied by directions for their use) from curriculum policy-making, design, and use. Operational decontextualization has meant treating curriculum, however defined, apart from its structural and sociocultural contexts as if it were independent of its location in an educational system, society, and history. When confronted, the isolation of curriculum from its multiple, interacting contexts is an absurdity, yet isolation remains another commonplace in curriculum discourse and practice.

In this essay, I briefly examine the decontextualization of curriculum—curriculum out of context—and then consider the possibilities of an alternative—curriculum in context. My purpose is to sketch an alternative theoretical framework that might inform empirical studies and reform efforts as well as more general analysis and understanding of curriculum phenomena.

CURRICULUM OUT OF CONTEXT

Conceptual Separation

How we conceive of curriculum is important because our conceptions and ways of reasoning about curriculum reflect and shape how we think and talk about, study, and act on the education made available to students. Concern with conceptions is not "merely theoretical." Conceptions grow out of and enter into practice.

The prevailing technocratic conception views curriculum as a tangible product, usually a document or plan for instruction in a particular subject. The detail of the curriculum product ranges from a brief outline of topics to be taught and learned to an elaborate outline accompanied by teacher and

student materials (e.g., readings, worksheets, transparencies) and a teacher guide including directions for teaching and testing.

In the technocratic view, curriculum construction is a presumably objective development project separate from policy-making and implementation. A set of procedures or steps to be followed guides the project—for example, specifying learning objectives to be obtained by students; selecting or creating and arranging the subject-matter content, activities, and materials; devising means of assessing students' attainment of the specified objectives; and providing directions for the intended use of the curriculum product. This development task typically is undertaken by curriculum specialists outside the schools or by teacher committees guided by specialists. The curriculum product produced is then disseminated for teachers to implement.¹

The procedural steps of curriculum development suggest that curriculum is composed of discrete components (e.g., objectives, subject matter, materials) that can be constructed separately, often in a linear sequence, and then assembled to make a coherent curriculum. The procedures are intended to efficiently manage and control development resources and activities once others have made curriculum policy decisions (e.g., legislatures, school boards). Thus, the procedures are assumed to be value-neutral, and the curriculum developers are assumed to be disinterested specialists.²

Additional assumptions underlying a technocratic conception of curriculum and its construction concern change and rationality. If curriculum is a tangible product, then changing the curriculum means constructing and implementing a different document or package. Change is a function of the curriculum product. Rationality, of the means-end variety, assumes that ends are set, that means are known or knowable, and that the path between them is direct. We therefore follow step-by-step procedures to obtain the predetermined end state (i.e., finished curriculum product). This rational approach provides precision and control over the otherwise disorderly nature of cur-

¹To make the presentation manageable, I have synthesized particular instances to present a composite that reflects the spirit and substance if not the particulars of individual cases. Also, while acknowledging differences in the form and substance of curriculum activities (e.g., at national, state or province, and local district, school, and classroom levels), I do not believe that considering these differences is germane to exploring the broader question of curriculum meanings and implications; conceptions span organizational levels.

²The mechanization of curriculum construction and the separation of curriculum policy-making and development inherent in the technocratic view contrast with a craft view of curriculum construction. A craft view implies a holistic conception of curriculum products as well as an appreciation of creativity in their construction. Craftsmanship acknowledges both technical skill and personal preference in curriculum construction. The values and particular aims of the curriculum developer as artisan guide the imaginative use of procedure and technique. Procedure is thus subordinated to purpose, and the curriculum artisan is personally involved in determining both. From a craft perspective, curriculum construction as technical project is not unlike painting by number. The craft view, however, still views curriculum as a tangible product.

riculum and teaching.³ Curriculum construction, thus conceived as a technocratic project of efficiently managing resources to produce a tangible product, gives the appearance of being scientific, which tends to enhance its appeal to administrators, funding agencies, and the general public as well as specialists. It conveys images of scientific efficiency, effectiveness, and benevolence.⁴

Although substantial questions remain about the viability of the technocratic conception of curriculum and its construction,⁵ more serious concerns are that it tends to obscure critical questions of responsibility, value, and interest. With respect to value and interest, a technocratic approach seems to be apolitical and non-ideological. Curriculum is developed according to presumably neutral procedures or decision steps. In effect, we are offered a curious form of problem solving with predetermined problems and solutions. The problem is usually taken to be that not enough students are learning enough of whatever is considered desirable for them to learn (e.g., calculus, computer programming, commitment to national principles and policies). The solution is to change the curriculum to include or emphasize whatever students are to learn. The technocratic model simply specifies the procedures to use to obtain this solution. Major curriculum decisions fall to others.⁶

Attention to the values that a curriculum conveys (e.g., in its selection, organization, and treatment of knowledge) and the social groups and interests those values serve allows a critical evaluation of curricular appropriateness and an examination of alternatives and their implications.⁷ By ignoring questions of value as well as the conservative values inherent in the technocratic model itself, the technocratic conception of curriculum and its construction tends to perpetuate myths of curriculum neutrality and benevolence.⁸

Denial of responsibility is evident not only in the technocratic emphasis on procedure but also in the separation of curriculum policy-making, construction, and implementation. Curriculum developers do not see themselves (nor are they usually seen by others) as responsible for curriculum policy or

³Michael W. Apple, "Curricular Form and the Logic of Technical Control," in *Cultural and Economic Reproduction in Education*, ed. Michael W. Apple (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), pp. 247-274; William A. Reid, *Thinking about the Curriculum* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978).

⁴Thomas S. Popkewitz, "Educational Reform as the Organization of Ritual: Stability as Change," *Journal of Education* 164 (Winter 1982): 5-29.

⁵Catherine Cornbleth, "Reconsidering Social Studies Curriculum," *Theory and Research in Social Education* 13 (Summer 1985): 31-45.

⁶Herbert M. Kliebard, "Systemic Curriculum Development, 1890-1959," in *Value Conflicts and Curriculum Issues*, ed. Jon Schaffarzick and Gary Sykes (Berkeley, Calif.: McCutcheon, 1979); William A. Reid, *Thinking about the Curriculum* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978).

⁷Herbert M. Kliebard and Barry M. Franklin, "The Course of the Course of Study: History of Curriculum," in *Historical Inquiry in Education*, ed. John H. Best (Washington, D.C.: American Educational Research Association, 1983), pp. 138-157.

⁸Other models of curriculum and its construction, such as a craft model (see note 2) or Walker's naturalistic model, address normative assumptions and implications. But they still view curriculum construction largely as a product-development task. See Decker F. Walker, "A Naturalistic Model for Curriculum Development," *School Review* 80 (November 1971): 51-65.

implementation. Someone else decides curricular goals and uses. The curriculum developer is thus absolved from responsibility for curriculum purposes and practices.

Therefore, technocratic models conceptually decontextualize curriculum in at least two related ways. Curriculum as product and its construction are arbitrarily separated from curriculum policy-making and use. Also, curriculum and its construction are seen as apolitical or neutral, apart from or above competing social values and interests. Ironically, curriculum developers are not responsible for the education made available to students, and the curriculum document rather than the curriculum use in classroom practice receives attention.

Structural and Sociocultural Isolation

Isolating curriculum and curriculum construction processes from their structural (i.e., systemic) and sociocultural (i.e., extrasystemic, societal) contexts is especially evident in national curriculum projects.⁹ Curriculums produced in national centers, such as the new math and social studies projects of the 1960s, were assumed to be appropriate for students and teachers, schools, and school systems across the country. Curriculum developers largely ignored the features of the U.S. education system and local variations, while sociocultural influences on the shape and substance of the new curriculums remained unexamined at least until others raised critical questions.

Structural and sociocultural decontextualization follows from the technocratic conception of curriculum and its construction. The predetermination of curricular problems and solutions limits sensitivity and responsiveness to context, as does the presumed nature of curriculum change. Separating curriculum products and their development from policy-making and implementation discourages attention to structural conditions, and assuming value neutrality deflects attention from sociocultural influences. The curriculum developer's role is to question neither the curriculum product's feasibility nor its desirability.

A technocratic curriculum model could address the contexts in which its products are formed and used. Decisions about objectives and subject matter could be made with explicit reference to structural constraints and sociocultural pressures. But these considerations would complicate matters and compromise rationality. In response to criticism and resistance to top-down models, some have advocated local, bottom-up models of curriculum construction. Here, the technocratic procedures are largely unchanged, except that local actors make the decisions. Although local actors might be expected to be

⁹Even more dramatic examples are found in cases of international transfer of curriculum products. See, for example, Jong J. Lee, Don Adams, and Catherine Cornbleth, "Transnational Transfer of Curriculum Knowledge: A Korean Case Study," *Journal of Curriculum Studies* (in press).

more sensitive and responsive to immediate structural conditions and socio-cultural influences, their sensitivity and responsiveness are likely to remain limited, tacit, and unexamined. Curriculum still is conceived as a tangible product.

Because of the widespread decontextualization of curriculum both conceptually and operationally, continuing discrepancies between curriculum documents and curriculum practice or repeated disappointments with the effects of curriculum change efforts should not surprise us. Neither the promised efficiency nor the benefits have been obtained. Rather than attempt to refurbish unworkable and inappropriate models, we might well consider alternatives. One such alternative would contextualize and thus redefine curriculum. It would treat curriculum critically rather than technically, as a contextualized social process.

CURRICULUM IN CONTEXT

Conceptual Integration

Here, curriculum construction is an ongoing social activity shaped by various contextual influences within and beyond the classroom and accomplished interactively, primarily by teachers and students. Curriculum is not a tangible product but the actual, day-to-day interactions of students, teachers, knowledge, and milieu. The curriculum is what others have called the curriculum in use. Curriculum as product or object, the conventional view, is seen as one aspect of the context that shapes curriculum in use.¹⁰ This alternative conception shifts attention from intention to realization, from plan to practice. The focus is on what knowledge and learning opportunities actually are made available to students, how they are created, and what values they reflect and sustain. Viewing curriculum as a contextualized social process explicitly recognizes critical philosophical, social, and political questions about what is taught, how, and to whom. This view does not merely celebrate practice.¹¹

Curriculum as contextualized social process encompasses both subject matter and social organization and their interrelations. Social organization,

¹⁰I do not mean to discount planning and product development but to suggest modifications of their purpose and perceived relation to curriculum. Planning involves crucial choices about the nature, selection and organization, distribution, treatment, and evaluation of knowledge made available to students. But prior planning, regardless of how it is undertaken, at best provides an inert curriculum skeleton. Curriculum comes to life as it is enacted.

¹¹A contextualized social process view of curriculum and its construction reflects a critical rather than a technical rationality. Critical rationality is characterized by wide-ranging skepticism as well as a grounding in logical argument and empirical data. It entails probing beneath surface appearances and questioning claims, evidence, and proposals, such as those for technocratic models of curriculum. Technical concerns do not become ends in themselves, instead, they serve both debunking and generative purposes, for example, in questioning data on curriculum change.

including teacher and student roles (and their rights and obligations) and patterns of interaction, provides a setting for academic activities that can extend or constrain students' learning opportunities. Recitation activities, for example, reflect the super- and subordinate roles of teachers and students and the limited communication patterns found in many classrooms. The recitation organization constrains the learning opportunities because students are discouraged from pursuing ideas, raising questions, or offering personal observations. Social organization and academic activities also communicate normative messages, including the meaning of knowledge, authority, responsibility, work, and success.¹²

Where the technocratic model is analytic, the contextualized social process conception of curriculum and its construction is synthetic. It does not separate curriculum policy-making, construction, and implementation as a linear sequence of events. Instead, it posits dynamic interaction among policy, planning, enactment, and their structural and sociocultural contexts.¹³ Curriculum is constructed and reconstructed in situated practice. In a technocratic view, curriculum is instrumental to classroom practice, in a social view, curriculum exists in practice and is not independent of it. A technocratic view tends to be prescriptive of practice, a social view is interpretive and critical.

From a contextualized social process perspective, curriculum causality and change are complex and problematic. Causality and change (or stability) involve the interplay of biographical (personal and professional), structural, and sociocultural factors over time. Curriculum construction and reconstruction reflect and respond to their immediate more distant contexts.¹⁴

*Structural and Sociocultural Contextualization*¹⁵

Contextualization is inherent in the alternative conception of curriculum and its construction just offered. Context situates and shapes curriculum; thus,

¹²See, for example, Catherine Cornbleth and Willard Korth, "Doing the Work: Teacher Perspectives and Meanings of Responsibility," *Educational Forum* 48 (Summer 1984) 413-420.

¹³Compare William A. Reid, "The Changing Curriculum: Theory and Practice," in *Case Studies in Curriculum Change*, ed. William A. Reid and Decker F. Walker (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), pp. 240-259.

¹⁴Catherine Cornbleth, "Socioecology of Critical Thinking" (Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, April 1985), Catherine Cornbleth, Willard Korth, and Ernest B. Dorow, "Creating the Curriculum: Beginning the Year at a Middle School" (Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association, Montreal, 1983); Linda M. McNeil, *Contradictions of Control. School Structure and School Knowledge* (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986); Thomas S. Popkewitz, B. Robert Tabachnick, and Gary Wehlage, *The Myth of Educational Reform* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982).

¹⁵This and the following sections draw from prior work on the contexts of U.S. teacher education policy change and of educational planning. See Catherine Cornbleth and Don Adams, "The Drunkard's Streetlamp? Contexts of Policy Change in U.S. Teacher Education," in Higher Education Group, Governments and Higher Education: The Legitimacy of Intervention (Toronto: OISE Higher Education Group, 1987); Don Adams and Catherine Cornbleth, "Contexts of Educational Planning" (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, International and Development Education Program, February 1987).

changing a curriculum involves changing its context. We still need to elaborate the nature of relevant contextual settings and influences. Recognizing that context is widely acknowledged but largely uncharted territory—not unlike the “new world” of fifteenth-century European maps and perhaps for good reason—I proceed with caution. The complexity and elusiveness of context make pinning it down and linking it empirically to a particular curriculum difficult. What follows, then, is a tentative sketch, these outlines are yet to be worked out theoretically and empirically.

First, the nominal context is not necessarily the relevant context of curriculum. Nominal context refers to what is “out there” that might influence curriculum, in other words, the environment at large. That environment includes social, political, economic, and demographic conditions that are translated into constraints, demands, and priorities by groups with diverse and often conflicting interests. Also, events within and outside the schools are potential contexts for subsequent curricular activity, and within the education system, each organizational layer (e.g., state department of education, school) is a potential context for curricular activity nested within it. Relevant context, in contrast, refers to aspects of the nominal context that can be shown to influence curriculum in a particular instance, directly or indirectly. Compared to other education sectors such as teacher education, the relevant context of school curriculums is extensive.

Distinguishing between structural or systemic and sociocultural or societal contexts is in part an attempt to make context more manageable. Also, the distinction calls attention to the education system context of curriculum, which we tend to overlook in curriculum discourse and take for granted in curriculum practice. Critical theoretical work, for example, typically treats curriculum in relation to larger sociocultural dynamics, such as economic and gender relations, but neglects its more immediate setting, in effect leapfrogging the intervening structural context of curriculums. Education systems are not simply conduits that reflect and thus reproduce larger societal patterns. The structural context is important because it both mediates extrasystemic sociocultural influences and generates curriculum experience.

Another feature of the relevant curriculum context is its variability or fluidity. It varies over time and with the curriculum of interest and the local situation within the national milieu. Variability can be seen in the presence of particular context factors, their relative strength or intensity, and their interaction (e.g., aggregation, conflict). For example, recent decades have witnessed alternating demands for “basic skills” and “higher order thinking.” Differences in the numerical strength and activism of extremist religious groups from one community to the next provides another example.¹⁶

¹⁶How context is identified is another source of its variation. For example, are relevant contextual factors those perceived and reported by curriculum participants or those that appear to an observer to have influenced curriculum activity? Empirically linking curriculum and context is neither simple nor straightforward.

Therefore, the relevant structural and sociocultural contexts of curriculum are multifaceted and fluid. While nested one within another, they also overlap and interact. So no generic curriculum context, no fixed set of parameters or invariant grid, exists that can be imposed on any curriculum. Instead, potential aspects of curriculum context can be identified, and their relevance to a particular curriculum can be illustrated.

The System as Structural Context

Social (as distinguished from natural, e.g., biological) systems are typically described in terms of their form and their process or mode of operation. I treat the form and mode of operation as structure, defined as the established roles and relationships, including operating procedures, shared beliefs, and norms (i.e., tradition, culture). The structure of an education system conditions outsiders' interaction with it and participants' interaction within it.¹⁷

A system consists of two or more interrelated components (e.g., legislature and judiciary in political system, school and state department of education in education system) and associated roles and patterns of interaction, which can be simple or complex, complex components often constitute subsystems. For example, classrooms and the elementary and secondary schools that house

¹⁷Margaret S. Archer, *Social Origins of Educational Systems* (London: Sage, 1984). Although the literature on systems and systems analysis is extensive, little theoretical or empirical work exists on education systems as systems. The conventional distinction in organizational and systems theory between formal structure and process obscures the dynamic nature of structure in action. Like Katz and Kahn, among others, I believe that "a social system is a structure of events or happenings rather than of physical parts and it therefore has no structure apart from its functioning," see Daniel Katz and Robert L. Kahn, *The Social Psychology of Organizations* (New York: Wiley, 1966), p. 31. Also, see Anthony Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979). The conceptualization of systems presented here is compatible with Gouldner's portrayal of natural (non-organic) as opposed to a rational systems and Scott and Meyer's societal sectors. See Alvin W. Gouldner, "Organizational Tensions," in *Sociology Today*, ed. R. K. Merton, L. Bloom, and L. S. Cottrell, Jr. (New York: Basic Books, 1959). W. Richard Scott and John W. Meyer, "The Organization of Societal Sectors," in *Organizational Environments*, ed. John W. Meyer and W. Richard Scott (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1983), pp. 129-153.

Also, the conception of education system offered here is non-organismic. That is, while education systems are treated as real (i.e., having an independent existence that is observable, analyzable, and perhaps measurable), I do not endow them with purpose or action apart from the people who occupy roles in the system or influence it from outside. Individuals and groups have purposes and take action; systems do not. Social systems do not have lives of their own. See Michael Keeley, "Realism in Organizational Theory: A Reassessment," *Symbolic Interaction* 6 (No. 2, 1983): 279-290. Thus, I reject, as overly deterministic, conceptions of structure as external, controlling "'objective' features of social organization that exist apart from culture and the consciousness of participating actors" or apart from the intentions and actions of participants; see David Rubenstein, "The Concept of Structure in Sociology," in *Sociological Theory in Transition*, ed. Mark L. Wardell and Stephen P. Turner (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1986), pp. 80-94. At the same time that structural factors are recognized and respected, so too is human agency. I am assuming a dynamic interaction between structure and agency in time and place that is compatible with Mills's macro conceptualization of the interaction of history, biography, and social structure; see C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959).

them constitute subsystems of most national education systems. As subsystems of a national education system, elementary and secondary education and their curriculums are subject to the structural conditioning and social interaction of the larger system as well as their own internal dynamics. Viewing the education system as the structural context of curriculum thus directs attention to the roles, relationships, patterns of activity, and culture of interacting system components.¹⁸

The historical experience of national systems of formal, mass education is one of (1) expansion and extension to serve more people for longer periods of time and (2) more specialized and differentiated educational provisions, accompanied by (3) increasing complexity, bureaucratization, and standardization. Another historically rooted feature of education systems with major consequences for curriculum is conservatism. Because of the purposes of national education systems, it is not surprising that their structure fosters cultural transmission and societal continuity. Once a national identity and tradition have been established, with the help of the education system, a major function of the education system is to perpetuate that way of life.

Education systems also tend toward self-perpetuation. System participants and beneficiaries have a stake in its maintenance and perhaps also its expansion. Curriculum change efforts that are seen as strengthening or extending the education system (or one of its subsystems) are more likely to be embraced than those that appear to weaken or reduce it or that otherwise challenge its operation or underlying values.

Curriculum relevant differences across education systems include the nature and extent of bureaucratic coordination and control, decentralization, and boundary clarity and permeability. These and other features of education systems are made reasonable by their cultural traditions. Culture means operating procedures, shared meanings and beliefs, and norms, including goals and priorities. It is not uncommon to find shifting priorities or simultaneous pursuit of a multiplicity of seemingly conflicting goals within an education system or subsystem (e.g., efficiency, equity, quality), especially within large systems in heterogeneous societies.

Understanding a curriculum and how it might be changed requires understanding the culture of the education system, which may involve several subcultures associated with occupational groups (e.g., teachers, administrators), subsystems (e.g., elementary education, teacher education), or regions (e.g., urban, rural). As several studies have documented, change efforts that

¹⁸My focus here is on the national rather than classroom, school, or other level of the education system. For illustrations of the nature and influence of school-level structural context, see Linda M. McNeil, *Contradictions of Control: School Structure and School Knowledge* (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986); on the classroom and school district levels, see Catherine Cornbleth, "The Social Nature of Social Studies," in *Locating Learning across the Curriculum*, ed. Catherine Emihovich (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, in press)

'do not consider the underlying patterns of school belief and conduct . . . may only rearrange the technological surface."¹⁹

Because education systems tend to be open rather than closed, the context of curriculum is not solely structural. Unlike self-sufficient or closed systems, education systems depend on their environment and thus are sensitive to environmental influences. Dependence on government funding, for example, usually means government influence, if not control of how its funds are used. The U.S. education system is highly permeable, providing relatively easy access to interested groups. The tradition if not the practice of local, public control of elementary and secondary education encourages efforts of external groups to influence the contours and course of schooling, including and often especially curriculum. The permeable character of the U.S. education system makes it highly susceptible to external influences (i.e., sociocultural context).

Sociocultural Context

The relevant sociocultural context of curriculum consists of extrasystemic demographic, social, political, and economic conditions; traditions and ideologies; and events that influence curriculum and curriculum change. Influence can be direct or indirect, and indirect influence may involve the education system as mediator.

The sociocultural context often provides the impetus for curriculum change (e.g., computer literacy). At times, education systems seem more responsive to sociocultural expectations and demands than to those of their clients or participants (e.g., students, teachers). This response may be a function of "the external legitimation, definition, and control of their internal processes,"²⁰ stemming from what Meyer and Rowan describe as widespread acceptance of "the schooling rule," which defines education as "a certified teacher teaching a standardized curricular topic to a registered student in an accredited school." Referring primarily to the U.S. experience, they conclude: Schooling is thus socially defined by reference to a set of standardized categories, the legitimacy of which is publicly shared. As the categories and credentials of schooling gain importance in allocation and membership processes, the public comes to expect that they will be controlled and standardized. The large scale public bureaucracy created to achieve this standardization is now normatively constrained by the expectations of the schooling rule. To a large degree, then, education is coordinated by shared social understandings. The legitimacy of schools and their ability to mobilize resources depend on maintaining congruence between their structure and these socially shared categorical understandings of education.²¹

¹⁹Thomas S. Popkewitz, "Educational Reform and the Problem of Institutional Life," *Educational Researcher* 8 (May 1979): 8

²⁰John W. Meyer, "Conclusion: Institutionalization, and the Rationality of Formal Organizational Structure," in *Organizational Environments*, ed. John W. Meyer and W. Richard Scott (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1983), p. 269

²¹John W. Meyer and Brian Rowan, "The Structure of Educational Organizations," in *Organizational Environments*, ed. John W. Meyer and W. Richard Scott (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1983), p. 84.

With a few notable exceptions, the sociocultural context is less conservative (or at least more heterogeneous and turbulent) than the structural context.²² External demands for change are often moderated within the system. Acknowledged problems or desirable but difficult to attain goals are likely to be redefined and acted on in ways that maintain the education system rather than reform it.

CURRICULUM CHANGE AS CONTEXTUAL CHANGE

If curriculum is a contextualized social process, then curriculum change is a function of contextual change. Curriculum is unlikely to change in the absence of supportive structural changes, which are unlikely to be initiated in the absence of external pressures. This line of reasoning indicates the futility of trying to bring about curriculum reform by substituting one curriculum document for another. Instead, we should answer questions such as the following to inform curriculum change efforts:

- What are the demographic, social, political, and economic conditions and trends that seem to shape the existing curriculum and seem likely to affect the desired changes? How is the desired curriculum change compatible or at odds with cultural traditions and prevailing ideologies? What influential groups are affected? (What are the potential sources of support and opposition?) What historical, recent, or continuing events are apt to influence the curriculum change effort?
- Which education system components or subsystems could mediate (supporting or oppositional) sociocultural influences? How are past experiences with curriculum change likely to influence the present effort?
- What system components are affected? (What roles, relationships, and patterns of activity? At which levels?) How is the desired curriculum change compatible or at odds with the prevailing culture of the education system? What are the bureaucratic operating procedures and the channels of formal and informal control of the affected system components? (Who controls what, to what extent, and how?) What and where are the tensions or contradictions within the system that might become loci for curriculum change?

To put curriculum in context, we must reformulate curriculum conceptions and reconstruct curriculum practice, including the practice of curriculum theorizing, research, design, and change. Contextualization avoids the reductionism and impotence of technocratic models of curriculum and curriculum construction. But contextualization has problems, such as complexity and situational contingency. These human, social-structural problems are not ame-

²²See, for example, Ronald G. Corwin, "Models of Educational Organizations," in *Review of Research in Education* (Vol. 2), ed. Fred N. Kerlinger and John B. Carroll (Itasca, Ill.: Peacock, 1974), pp. 249-295.

nable to technical solutions. We may not be able to resolve them. Coping with complexity and contingency requires tolerance of ambiguity, flexibility and responsiveness, imagination and persistence, as well as further understanding of the interaction of curriculum and context.²³

CATHERINE CORNBLETH is Professor of Education, Faculty of Educational Studies, State University of New York at Buffalo, 593 Baldy Hall, Buffalo, New York 14260.

Duke, Daniel L. *School Leadership and Instructional Improvement* New York: Random House, 1987. 320 pp. \$15.00.

This text advances the view that school leaders bear the primary responsibility for the continuous improvement of instruction and that the quality of this leadership is the key to effective schools. The book provides a practical resource for school leaders who share this belief and who wish to increase their understanding of the issues directly related to supervising instruction, helping teachers grow professionally, and creating a productive environment for student learning. Duke presents a model of instructional leadership that specifies seven leadership goals and seven competencies to attain these goals. The book is organized into four sections. "Thinking about School Leadership," "Visions of Effectiveness," "Dimensions of Leadership for Instructional Improvement," and "The Personal Dimension of School Leadership." In the section on leadership for instructional improvement, Duke provides diagnostic questions in each chapter to help instructional leaders assess their own performance and that of their school. The final chapter of the book addresses issues that confront veteran school leaders

—Gregory J. Nolan

Hill, John C. *Curriculum Evaluation for School Improvement* Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas, 1986. 231 pp. \$32.75

This authoritative book examines theoretical perspectives and practical applications for curriculum evaluation. By presenting perspectives, procedures, and case studies in curriculum evaluation, the text helps curriculum students and practitioners to bridge the gap between the theoretical perspectives and practical applications of curriculum evaluation. Evaluation is presented as a meaning-gathering process that provides curriculum students and workers with a greater understanding of the teaching and learning environment and not just accountability. According to Hill, the potential for school improvement lies in increased understanding of the school. The text avoids a "cookbook approach" to curriculum evaluation; rather, it provides practical knowledge on the design and implementation of site-specific curriculum evaluations. This book presents a distinctive approach to curriculum evaluation and should prove useful to students and practitioners in the curriculum field

—Michele Tellep

²³An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 1987 annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Washington, D.C. I will further explore the issues raised here in *Curriculum in Context* (London and Philadelphia. Falmer Press, in progress)

Copyright © 1988 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.