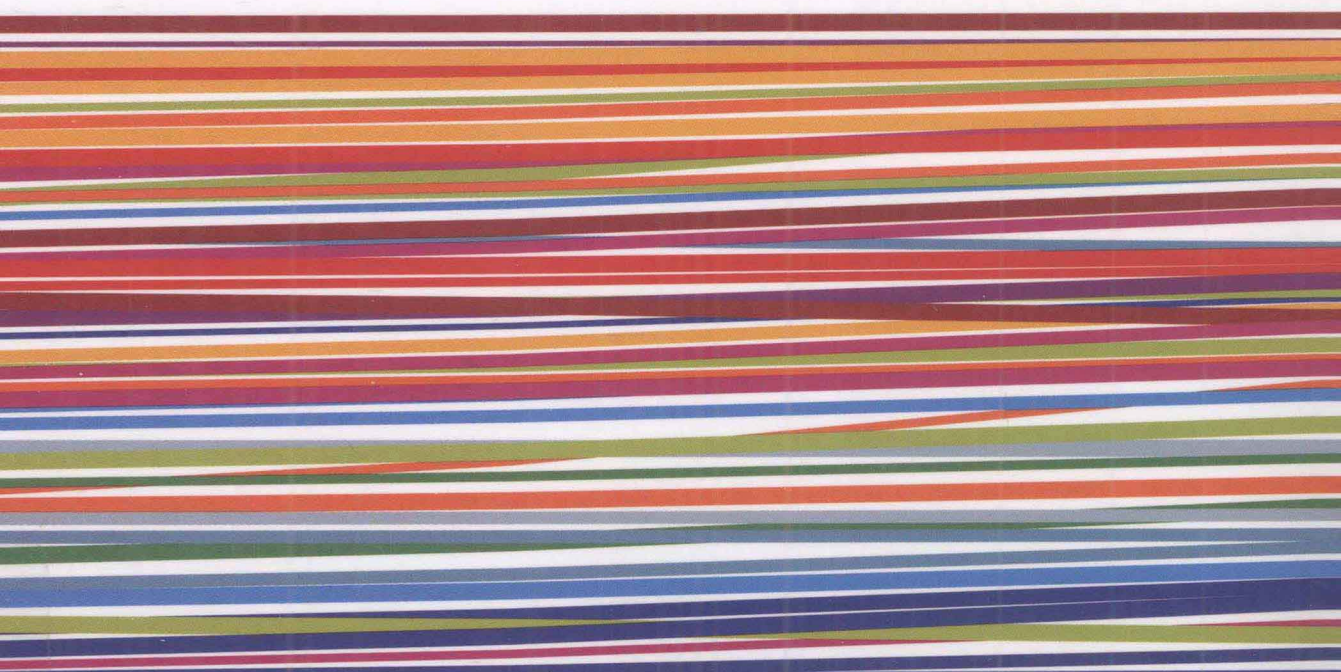


Case Studies in _____

Elementary and **Secondary** **Curriculum**

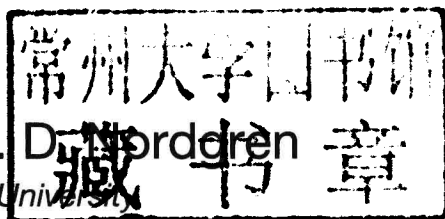
Marius Boboc | R. D. Nordgren



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Marius Boboc | R. D. Borden
Cleveland State University



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For information:



SAGE Publications, Inc.
2455 Teller Road
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Preface

RATIONALE

On a daily basis, educators are faced with challenging situations that call for the implementation of problem-solving strategies that will help them overcome the situation at hand as well as possibly permanently change their practice. *Case Studies in Elementary and Secondary Curriculum* provides the reader with 21 cases in which educators from a variety of settings and representing different content areas are faced with a variety of curricular dilemmas. In some cases, they are able to solve the problem, while in others, they describe particular plans of action that they would implement. Some of the writers do not yet know the results of their responses for reasons that will become clear to the reader.

Over the years, our graduate students made us aware of a need for real-world examples that clarify the concept and relevance of curriculum—how it comes to life as a complex *process* or what *curriculum is and does* (Hyun, 2006). We see this process implying a continuum that ranges from design to implementation and evaluation. We should also note that this process needs constant analysis and change representing the essence of curriculum negotiations (Hyun, 2006). It is exactly that the implications of this process on one's student-centered professional practice were deemed a nagging concern by our graduate students, most of whom were practicing teachers. With this concern in mind, we have structured the book as a collection of case studies authored by individuals who, by day, teach students of all ages in a wide variety of settings and who, by night, are responsive and reflective graduate students. We are confident that you will relate to several aspects discussed in the case studies included for your analysis. The 21 qualitative case studies included in this text are particularistic in that each one of them places an emphasis on an individual “situation, event, program, or phenomenon”

(Merriam, 1998, p. 29). As you will see from the table of contents and the matrix provided later in this section, these case studies can be selected for your consideration by several criteria: (a) level—ranging from preschool to secondary; (b) most academic content areas; (c) setting—rural, suburban, and urban; and (d) emphasis—ranging from the level of individual classrooms to that of the school district. Additionally, we have included a set of elements—also called “spotlight on”—to be found across all educational settings as demonstrating “attributes of education” (Hewitt, 2006, p. 89). In this light, the selected case studies pose questions related to the interplay among pedagogy, instruction, curriculum, accountability, school reform, support, and leadership, with a myriad of correlations that could be made to discrete components of what defines teaching and learning in today’s increasingly complex educational settings.

CASE STUDY TOPICS

In our contemporary schools, finding a curricular problem along the stage of design, implementation, or evaluation is not a difficult task. The case study authors had to go through a reflective process in order to identify relevant curricular issues impacting their professional practice and propose manageable solutions to them. For instance, Case Study 2 relates to the proactive role a teacher has to play as a way to address the current issue of school financing by means of community engagement. In comparison, Case Study 5 grounds curriculum adaptations and skill-building remedial work in the context of standards-based education.

We are well aware of the great range of changes to what curriculum is and what it does at any level of educational settings. This constitutes the main reason for which we have included case studies developed around whole-school and districtwide curricular problems. In this light, of special concern to our students are the mandates that accompany the accountability movement: standards, testing, and curriculum alignment. Often they challenge a teacher’s ability to implement his or her curriculum based on creativity and a genuine focus on what each student should actually be learning. At the same time, we want to promote meaningful conversations about curricular design and decision making that lead to “new knowledge construction that empowers learners, teachers, and others” (Hyun, 2006, p. 22). We hope that the inclusion of case studies addressing a wide range of curricular issues will give you hope and inspire you to make changes that you feel are practical, ethical, and participatory to all those involved.

THE USE OF CASE STUDIES

Most of us are aware that college textbooks—chock full of philosophies, theories, and strategies organized and described in varying degrees of clarity—cannot provide us with all the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful practitioners. While supplying us with a great amount of information, they too often lack the personal voices that are necessary for connections between theory and practice to occur. By using authentic voices, consumers of such specialized texts can establish a connection to the practical side of teaching where we are encouraged to tap into our personal teaching philosophies, examine the theories learned in our various coursework, and apply the strategies we have gained from a myriad of sources: textbooks, workshops, observations, or our own schooling experiences. Encompassing this process we use reflection and responsiveness as guiding principles for effective teaching.

We believe the voices heard in this book will place the reader into the shoes of each of these teacher authors, allowing for an immersion in “the complexities, ambiguities, and uncertainties” (Golic, Boyer, Franko, & Lamy, 2000, p. 1) of their situation while finding a personal response to the problem that is directly or indirectly inhibiting their teaching and, consequently, their students’ learning. The rationale behind the particularistic case selection proposed by the current text aims at providing the audience with opportunities to “achieve competence” (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 222) in deconstructing issues affecting curriculum as it is negotiated by teachers in “its real-life context” (Yin, 1994, p. 13) of their “local schools and communities” (Koballa & Tippins, 2000, p. 3).

Traditionally speaking, the structure of a case study introduces the reader to a context within which a particular problem occurs, followed by the actual description of the problem in question, and, finally, by a set of questions for the audience. The purpose of this set of questions is to attempt to resolve the problem at hand by asking for someone else’s opinion on the matter. While readers are left with an almost endless array of solutions that may or may not address the problem described in the case study, there is no actual manner in which to check on the validity of any of these reader-generated solutions. This can be disconcerting to those of us who are analytical in nature, but we must come to understand what can be gained by gathering a great number of possible solutions: One of these can, with a little adaptation, become the key to a serious curricular problem.

Many of us have spent a great deal of time in graduate classes using case studies as a discussion anchor. While the tool itself provides us with a wealth of information correlated to both theories and practical applications we bring to such classes, we may take away a rather convenient solution to the problem

elaborated in a case study. This is the turning point in our thinking about the format of the case studies included in this book. In addition to the elements of our standard case study format (background information, curriculum information, exposition of the associated problem or problems, and probing questions), these case studies allow you to confront real-life curricular concerns that require you to *tie theory to practice*. The extra elements that strengthen such connections focus on having each author propose a solution to his or her own curricular problem. In several instances, the practitioners are able to analyze the validity of their proposal by outlining a set of “observed outcomes” as a result of the implementation of the “actual solution.” In other instances, we are dealing with proposals aimed at resolving the given problem. Along the same lines, each proposed solution is followed by a set of expected outcomes. The ensuing reflection makes a stronger case for the connection between theory and practice, mediated through each case study.

Despite a mandated format, the voices differ from study to study as each author has his or her own story to tell and his or her own way of telling it. Personalization is clear. We know that the most compelling information is often supplied to us through narrative, and it is our intent that the lessons learned by these teachers will indeed be compelling to you. It is our hope that these studies will persuade you to make changes in your practice and how you think about the science and art of teaching.

While we would expect that all teachers reading this book will have already gained the experience necessary to chip away at the “several thousand” cases Flyvbjerg (2006, p. 222) says are necessary to become an expert practitioner, we believe it to be quite valuable for all to begin thinking like researchers, especially case study researchers. These case studies will allow you to do just that. Rather than exposing you to theories of curriculum and instruction in your textbooks and coursework and then asking you to correctly identify their need or use on a test or paper, we prompt you to shift to “application mode.” Our “points to ponder” pertaining to each case will engage you into synthesis and analysis modes. One example of such prompts is provided by the following questions pertinent to one of our case studies: “How should teachers within the same school tackle the task of creating a curriculum revision team? Would you use Walker’s deliberative approach? What procedural steps would you want to see in place as a result of this forming process?” Questions such as these address the call for teachers to do more than apply techniques in their classroom but allow them to “reason through dilemmas, investigate problems, and analyze student learning to develop appropriate curriculum for a diverse group of learners” as advocated by Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, Grossman, Rust, and Shulman (2005, p. 392) in their call to redesign teacher education programs. We must

profoundly believe and continually demonstrate that we are reflective and responsive practitioners who can and do identify problems, collect data, analyze those data, and change our practice to rectify those problems.

ORGANIZATION AND FEATURES

Each study uses the following format by describing these components:

- **Background Information About the Teacher**
- **Background Information About the Curriculum**
- **Problem** (emphasizing any combination of the “attributes of education” mentioned earlier)
- **Probing Questions**

You’ll find that each author has a unique background and set of experiences, yet we’re confident you’ll be able to relate to each of them even if your current situation and future teaching plans don’t coincide with theirs.

Although “curriculum” seems to mean different things to different people, we would like you to define it by connecting your previous knowledge with the curricular “episodes” described by the case studies included in this book. Once you have identified what curriculum *is*, you can focus your attention on what curriculum *does*, as a way to deconstruct the various factors influencing its negotiations in the professional practice of our teacher authors. To that end, we offer 21 different curricular problems and nearly as many curricula. These allow you to make connections between the curriculum and instruction theory learned in your coursework and “reality,” which is what can happen across all contexts of practice.

We would also like to emphasize the use of *text boxes* in the body of several case studies as an effective way to provide the readers with some brief background information related to an important element in the analysis of the given case study.

In addition to the five sections listed and described above, we offer two more features:

- **Proposed/Actual Solution**
- **Expected/Observed Outcomes**

The reason for which some of the solutions are “proposed” is that often the teachers/authors don’t have the resources to implement their solutions to the

problems. This is quite problematic but common for teachers, as you're well aware, as we are often disempowered by the administration, school, and/or system to make the changes necessary for success. Nevertheless, these solutions are informed attempts at solving their respective curricular problems—think of them as action research projects undertaken to improve one's pedagogical practice. The “expected” outcomes represent opportunities to evaluate the decisions made by our practitioners. In cases where our authors had a chance to implement an actual solution, the latter section focuses on “observed” outcomes.

These two sections of each study allow you to “check in” with the authors in an attempt to validate the solutions discussed in your college classroom or as a home assignment. We have designed the presentation of each study so that you are left with probing questions, to determine for yourself how best to solve the dilemma or dilemmas presented. You can then, as an individual or as part of a community of learners, compare your answer to what actually did happen or what the authors determined would work (and is supported by the editors). We acknowledge that most problems have more than one viable solution, so the ones provided by the authors are not necessarily the best or only ways to resolution. We invite you to adapt these situations to the specificities of your practice. By changing the environment, the solution may need to be altered. We believe this to be self-evident as we take you through these 21 case studies.

The last section in the structure of our collection of practitioner-written, particularistic case studies offers the audience opportunities to meta-analyze their curriculum knowledge and skills, as demonstrated by the following features:

POINTS TO PONDER . . .

Each case study concludes with a set of open-ended questions representing an invitation for readers to elaborate further on how the solution proposed by the case study author may unfold or on how it may impact other curricular levels than the one representing the base for the case study in question.

QUESTIONS FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

As we strongly believe in the complex responsibility of being an effective instructional leader in today's schools, we want to include such professionals in any curriculum-based conversations generated by each case study. Reviewing these questions by both administrators and teachers would open up communication channels designed to “lead” schools into meeting the 21st-century requirements.

IN-CLASS EXERCISE

In an attempt to provide our audience with opportunities for synthesis, each case study incorporates a suggested collaborative exercise aimed at applying analytical skills to situations that are familiar to teachers and administrators alike. Under these circumstances, the in-class exercise is a logical continuation of the focus on a particular curricular problem described in the case study.

SUGGESTED READINGS

All case studies include several recommended readings, which help contextualize particular curricular problems and their solutions representing the core of our collaborative work.

THE CASE STUDIES' AUTHORS

As noted earlier, the authors are all practicing teachers in various graduate programs at a state university with an explicit focus on increasingly diverse educational settings. Despite the latter, many of these authors do not practice in cities but are oftentimes in affluent suburban enclaves, far from the problems and concerns specific to city schools. However, their problems are just as serious to their practice as those that confront their urban colleagues. Undoubtedly, you will notice these differences and will likely relate to each author based on your own schooling experiences.

We consulted each author after the initial submission of a study, asking him or her to provide further details of different aspects of the study, especially updates on the implementation of the solution. These updates and, on some occasions, revisions were made and added to the study.

THE CASE STUDY MATRIX (p. xvii)

The book is arranged so that you can easily access case studies that pertain to a wide range of content areas (English-language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, modern languages, art, special education, etc.), grade levels (preschool to high school), educational settings (rural, suburban, and urban), and topics that relate your interest in curriculum theory in your graduate-level coursework. A case study matrix has been provided to help you select cases for analysis and

discussion. We're confident, however, that you will also enjoy and benefit from reading the book from cover to cover because, as we mentioned earlier, you will no doubt make personal connections to the authors of all our studies.

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Case Study Matrix

Title	Brief Description	Spotlight on . . .	Level	Content Area	Setting	Page Number
1. Bringing Diversity Into a Less Diverse Environment	Investigating possible ways to enhance the planned/ designed curriculum by incorporating multicultural themes/topics, leading to increased awareness of multiculturalism in the larger, less diverse community	Inclusion of multicultural themes/topics into the planned/ designed curriculum	High school	Social studies	Rural	1
2. Bringing Calculus to Life: Hands-on Learning in a New Sequence of Courses	Identifying means by which to incorporate more hands-on instructional methods into the taught curriculum, while considering the latter's selection of scope and sequence based on students' prior knowledge and experience	a) Incorporation of hands-on instructional strategies into the taught curriculum b) Selection of scope and sequence of planned curriculum	High school	Mathematics	Suburban	7
3. Meeting the Individual Needs of Each Student at an Alternative High School	Enhancing the planned curriculum by making decisions based on data coming from three sources of information—context, content, and students—designed to restructure a set of independent learning packets	Enhancement and restructuring of planned curriculum	High school	English-language arts	Urban	15

(Continued)

Title	Brief Description	Spotlight on . . .	Level	Content Area	Setting	Page Number
4. Using Assessment and Student Interest Data to Inform Differentiated Instruction in an Inclusive Classroom	Bridging the gap between students' aptitudes and standards-based instruction by means of preassessment and differentiation interdisciplinary	a) Quantification of students' knowledge and skills in the content area b) Identification and provision of support to meet students' needs based on enhanced awareness of their background	Middle school	Mathematics	Urban	23
5. Motivating Students to Learn in a Peer-Supported School Environment	Identifying appropriate means to motivate students by going beyond peer observations and constructive criticism in an environment adhering to principles of differentiated instruction	a) Student choices in learning b) Sustainable student engagement in learning activities	Kindergarten	English-language arts (reading)	Urban	31
6. Authentic Audience and Affective Learning in a Gifted and Talented Middle School Program	Engaging in interdisciplinary planning as way to integrate content in a middle school gifted and talented program by connecting the affective domain and "authentic audiences"	a) Gifted and talented learners b) Affective learning c) Teachable moments d) Authentic learning e) Content integration	Middle school	All core subjects	Suburban	39
7. "Discovery Math": From Professional Development to Classroom Practice	Improving the implementation and feedback loop of districtwide professional development opportunities designed to disseminate information about new content-area pedagogies	Professional development	School district	Mathematics	Urban, suburban, and rural	47

Title	Brief Description	Spotlight on . . .	Level	Content Area	Setting	Page Number
8. Student Understandings as a Basis for Motivation and Participation in a Severe Emotional Disturbance/Severe Behavioral Handicap High School Classroom	Balancing effective solutions designed to decrease off-task behavior while increasing student participation in a self-contained high school classroom with no formal curriculum	a) Special education b) Off-task behavior c) Student motivation	High school	Social studies	Urban	53
9. Meeting Student Learning Requirements by Means of an Improved Writing-Across-Curriculum Program	Focusing on writing as a particular set of skills to support an interdisciplinary program intended to use authentic assessment and differentiation to motivate learners and evidence their continuous improvement	a) Authentic assessment b) Writing across curriculum c) Differentiation	Middle school	English-language arts	Urban	61
10. Student Portfolios and Authentic Assessment in a Diverse Multiage Preschool Classroom	Meeting the developmental needs of students in a diverse multiage preschool classroom that has been challenging the teacher in terms of adapting the planned curriculum to accommodate students' actual performance levels	a) Developmentally appropriate instruction b) Authentic assessment c) Cooperative learning	Preschool	English-language arts	Urban	69
11. Skill Building in Elementary Math: Between Remediation and Academic Promotion	Accurately evaluating students' prior knowledge as a way to design effective remedial work by adapting the planned curriculum to emphasize content-area skill building	a) Standards-based education b) Curriculum adaptations c) Skill-building remedial work	Elementary school	Mathematics	Rural	77

(Continued)

(Continued)

Title	Brief Description	Spotlight on . . .	Level	Content Area	Setting	Page Number
12. Prevention Programs as Means to Teach Social Skills in Elementary School	Integrating social skills into the planned curriculum by implementing a schoolwide program engaging students in regular interactions designed to increase their awareness of a particular set of skills	a) Social skills b) Hidden curriculum c) Special education	Elementary school	N/A	Suburban	85
13. Educating the Community About a Needed Levy Increase: The Teacher as a Political Activist	Articulating a teacher's emerging leadership skills beyond the classroom to engage the larger community in supporting the school by means of a levy	a) Engaging community b) Role of teacher beyond the classroom	Districtwide	N/A	Inner-ring suburban	93
14. The Mandated Curriculum Meeting the Needs of Teachers and Their Favored Practices	Finding a balance between a newly mandated curriculum and the existing curriculum practices emphasizes a gradual implementation accompanied by frequent evaluation of effectiveness based on student engagement and performance levels	a) Mandated curriculum b) Teacher autonomy c) Accountability	Elementary school	English-language arts	Suburban	99
15. Balancing Data-Driven Decision Making and Shifting Paradigms in a New Elementary Math Curriculum	Providing teachers with appropriate resources to ensure an effective implementation of a new curriculum designed to address deficiencies in student performance indicated by previous assessment data	a) Implementation of a districtwide curriculum b) Accountability requirements	Elementary school	Mathematics	Urban/suburban	107
16. Professional Development That Works, Please!	Designing districtwide professional development opportunities given a tougher fiscal environment and an apparent lack of interest from potential participating teachers	Professional development	School district	All core subjects	Urban/suburban	115