Changing the Curriculum

A SOCIAL PROCESS

by

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Preface

No one can trace the development of the school curriculum down through the centuries without noting that important changes have occurred. Whether all of those changes have resulted in progress will not be discussed in these pages. The plain facts of the matter are that not enough progress has been made. Changes have not occurred with sufficient rapidity nor in sufficient amount to meet a situation which all students of the culture today recognize: that cultural maladjustments within this industrial civilization are increasing at a frightening rate. Harry Elmer Barnes' declaration that we stand today with our mechanical foot in an airplane and our social foot on an oxcart remains the most graphic description to date of our predicament.

In all thinking about the problem, however, the danger of oversimplification must be avoided. Sociologists for some time have been pointing out that we moderns are not dealing merely with an enormous lag of social arrangements behind technological advances. There are great variations in the rate of change among our social institutions themselves. It is not nearly so difficult, for example, to change an institution like the school as it is to make a change in a social arrangement like marriage. Then, too, science has not made an even advance on all fronts. This is another source of maladjustment within the culture. Nor is scientific advance always ahead of social invention, as some take for granted in the case. Russia is an excellent example of the reverse process.

This newer view of *maladjustments within the culture*, a refinement of the older concept of the "social lag," is accepted for the purposes of this book. Almost all persons see in education our only means of correcting the worst of these maladjust-

ments. Organized education through the medium of the school curriculum must be depended upon to do its share of this task, whatever that share may be.

In contrast to the great need is the fact still remaining that changes in the curriculum of American schools have not kept pace with developments in the surrounding society. "Not once in a century and a half of national history," wrote Rugg [1] in 1926, "has the curriculum of the school caught up with the dynamic content of American life."

Since 1926, and especially since the depression of the '30's, increasing numbers of educational leaders have written on this theme. Representative examples from the literature are *The Educational Frontier,* edited by William Heard Kilpatrick [2]; *Democracy and the Curriculum* [3] and other yearbooks of the John Dewey Society; George S. Counts' *Dare the Schools Build a New Social Order?* [4]; Pickens Harris' *The Curriculum and Cultural Change* [5]; and *The Changing Curriculum* edited by Henry Harap,[6] and, most recently, Counts' *Education and the Promise of America.*[7] These books were designed not only to establish the need for drastic changes in the curriculum but also to point out desirable directions of change.

It is not the purpose of this volume to repeat the work of those individuals and groups. It may be assumed that the case for more thorough-going curriculum change has been well made, and the proposed character of that change may be accepted as reasonable. Our concern may then be with the process of bringing about the changes which seem desirable.

The first step in studying the process of curriculum change might well be to examine the process as it now commonly

[1] Harold Rugg in *Curriculum-Making: Past and Present.* Part I of the Twenty-Sixth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education (Bloomington, Ill., Public School Publishing Company, 1926), p. 3.
[2] New York, D. Appleton–Century Company, Inc., 1933.
[3] Third Yearbook (New York, D. Appleton–Century Company, Inc., 1939).
[4] New York, John Day Company, 1932.
[5] New York, D. Appleton–Century Company, Inc., 1937.
[6] New York, D. Appleton–Century Company, Inc., 1937.
[7] New York, The Macmillan Company, 1945.

operates in American schools. Once the weaknesses of the present approach are analyzed, it should be useful to turn to the students of social change in the larger culture. Their findings should be helpful in acquiring some understanding of the basic process of influencing social change.

The task then remaining will be to apply the lessons learned from various kinds of experiences with curriculum-making and from the conclusions of social scientists, in order that curriculum change may be understood as a social process over which members of our society can have more intelligent control. The imperatives of the current world situation make it either unintelligent or immoral, as the case may be, to continue to operate in the field of curriculum development in many of the ways commonly employed at present.

This book is addressed, primarily, to members of the administrative and supervisory staffs in schools, although there are many implications for teachers as well as for community adults and learners. It is not that superintendents, principals, supervisors, and curriculum directors are more important than any other group. But their positions as status leaders in terms of the rest of the school system put them in a position to facilitate or to impede wise curriculum development, as the case may be. Sins of omission and sins of commission can both be so great, as far as this group is concerned, that curriculum change may turn out to be no social process at all. On the other hand, the zeal and skill of a superintendent of schools or of other administrative and supervisory agents may offset many other unfavorable factors that promise to operate against change in a particular school system.

The present volume is limited to curriculum change at the local community level. It is recognized that local educational leaders will find it desirable to utilize resources outside their own communities and to help local personnel and constituents to feel themselves a part of a larger enterprise. Such considerations are within the limits of this work. It is not proposed, however, to discuss state programs of curriculum change.

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It is always difficult to give proper credit to the many individuals whose ideas and experience become embodied in a book of this type. I am indebted to teachers and other educational leaders throughout the country with whom I have worked and talked, singly and in groups, to professors in whose classes I have received inspiration, and to colleagues at Teachers College from whom I have learned much.

Special credit is due Hollis L. Caswell of Teachers College, Columbia University, whose idea it was that a more fundamental analysis of the process of curriculum change was needed. His advice has been depended upon throughout the writing of this volume.

Florence B. Stratemeyer and George S. Counts, also of Teachers College; William H. Burton of the Graduate School of Education, Harvard University; Charles E. Prall, director of the Commission on Education of the American College of Hospital Administrators and the American Hospital Association; and Dorothy Gray of Queens College, New York City, all read the manuscript critically and gave valuable suggestions.

I appreciate also the courtesy of publishers who granted permission to quote copyrighted materials and of those who contributed the documents that form the Appendix of this book—William H. Burton; C. Leslie Cushman, associate superintendent of the Philadelphia schools; J. Cecil Parker, coördinator of curriculum of the San Francisco schools; Margaret L. Gordon, principal of the J. J. Smallwood School, Norfolk, Virginia; Hazel A. Kier, intermediate supervisor, Kansas City, Kansas schools; and members of my college classes.

Finally, I am indebted to G. Robert Koopman and Paul J. Misner, who collaborated with me on an earlier work, *Democracy in School Administration.* The basic line of thinking developed with those individuals has been extended and applied to the process of curriculum change in the present volume.

A. M.

Foreword

The gap between theory and practice in American education is a characteristic frequently remarked and commonly regretted. The difference also between superior and average practice is very great. How to close these gaps is the problem of curriculum improvement. It is this important matter that is the central concern of this book.

During the past twenty-five years organized curriculum programs in cities and states have been one of the principal means relied upon to move educational practice ahead. A large majority of the states and most cities of size provide for curriculum programs. Viewed in the large, organized curriculum work has approached the problem of change as a simple matter. Great reliance has commonly been placed on courses of study. In fact, in many cases the writing and official authorization of courses of study have been considered the principal and adequate means of curriculum change.

However, during recent years it has become increasingly evident that curriculum improvement is by no means as simple a process as implied by the typical curriculum program. This process is, in fact, most complex, partaking of all the intricacies and difficulties of any effort to achieve directed social change. It is evident that a much more fundamental approach is required.

In this book Dr. Miel has made an important contribution to understanding the basic factors involved in modifying the curriculum. Her critical analysis of procedures of curriculum development and appraisal of these procedures in terms of broader conceptions and factors in processes of social change will be found of great value by anyone concerned with improving the curriculum. The work of students of society is

utilized most effectively in deriving generalizations which should guide the curriculum worker. Applications are made in clear and illuminating fashion to practical problems of curriculum improvement.

It goes without saying that this book will be of major interest to curriculum directors and directors of instruction, but it should have a much wider appeal. Superintendents, principals, and supervisors will find it a source of first importance in setting their sights for curriculum improvement. Classroom teachers who are involved in organized curriculum work should also find it of value in providing an orientation which will make their work most fruitful.

HOLLIS L. CASWELL

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CHAPTER I

Crystallization in Education

Somewhere in South America there is a tribe of primitive people who, though living on perfectly dry ground today, nevertheless persist in building pile dwellings for themselves.

It has been the problem always of those who would help to bring about curriculum change to persuade people to give up their pile-dwellings-on-dry-ground. This clinging to what was once a good arrangement long after it has ceased to serve any useful purpose whatsoever is the commonest form of *crystallization.* Crystallization has been described as a good beginning that has turned in upon itself. Or it may be defined as the point reached when an idea or habit is accepted uncritically so that it limits the integrity, autonomy, and opportunities for self-expression of individuals and groups.

Crystallization of curriculum practice is a recurrent phenomenon in American education. It is also a complex one. It is not always easy to determine when a constellation of habits in an educational institution is making for a desirable economy of effort and providing a useful basis of continuity to individual and group living, or when it represents an area concerning which all thinking has stopped and which is serving as a deterrent to constructive action. Therefore, it should be rewarding to students of curriculum change to learn something of the nature of this phenomenon of crystallization in order to gain the ability to deal with it. In this chapter, accordingly, we shall examine some of the manifestations of crystallization in the curriculum of American schools.

THE GRADED SCHOOL AS A CONTRIBUTOR TO CRYSTALLIZATION

One good example of the way in which crystallization works in education is the development of the graded school. Before the Civil War, education was expanding at a rapid rate. As schools began having to accommodate large numbers of children, various systems of classification were experimented with. Finally the scheme of grading the school was discovered. It spread rapidly, not only among city schools where such a plan was a real boon in the early days of organizing mass education, but also to one-room rural schools where it could never have been appropriate. This method of classification started a whole chain of events, each of which helped to fix the pattern more securely than before. Textbooks began to be graded, and there appeared first readers, fourth-grade arithmetics, eighth-grade spellers, and so on. At first by trial and error, later by "scientific experimentation," "proper" grade placement of subjects and subject-matter was determined. The college relieved its crowded curriculum by forcing some subjects into the high-school curriculum; congestion at that level was reduced by passing on a number of courses to the elementary school. Algebra became fixed in the ninth grade, long division in the fourth grade, beginning reading in the first.

Since the system began with grade one, the kindergarten had a hard time establishing a place for itself in the free public school. As the elementary school terminated traditionally with grade eight, rural schools still find it difficult to make what should be a simple reform, the sending of seventh and eighth graders to a central secondary school. The 8–4 plan was finally broken in many city schools by the junior-high-school movement. But that change had chiefly the disappointing result of moving departmentalization farther down into the grades.

With the grade pattern so firmly established, most attempts at curriculum change have been at the level of juggling within the system. Few persons have had the vision to try to break the pattern itself, much less had success in doing so.

This one example illustrates the chief characteristics of crystallization: (1) a commendable beginning turned inward; (2) the shutting off of thinking in a certain area; (3) the tendency to spread to all kinds of schools; (4) the tendency to become interlocked with other aspects of the curriculum; (5) the tendency to persist stubbornly (especially if written into state laws); and (6) the tendency, if once broken, to be replaced rapidly by another crystallization (in this case, departmentalization).

CRYSTALLIZATION THROUGH THE TEXTBOOK AND SCHOOL SUBJECTS

Another interesting illustration of the operation of crystallization in curriculum matters is the development of the American textbook and the related development of school subjects during the nineteenth century. New instructional materials were badly needed at that time, for the curriculum was being enriched by the rapid addition of new courses.

Rugg [1] gives some interesting figures in this connection. Between the years 1787 and 1870 no fewer than 149 new titles of subjects or courses found their way into the printed programs of the secondary schools, 75 of them being interposed in the three years between 1825 and 1828. Three hundred and sixty different histories had been published in America before 1860.

From the middle of the century on, textbooks were prepared largely by college professors who were narrowly specialized. Gradually the curriculum became oriented around those subjects of specialization. "Furthermore," says Rugg [2] in commenting on this development, "the professors because of their . . . grounding in cautious research methods . . . tended to concentrate their attention upon the past. . . . Having a fear of unsound generalization, hence a fear of the contemporary in

[1] Harold Rugg, *Curriculum-Making: Past and Present.* Part I of the Twenty-Sixth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education (Public School Publishing Company, Bloomington, Ill., 1926), Chap. II, pp. 20–21. Quoted by permission of the Society.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 31.

history, the new, the unauthenticated in science, they more and more neglected the vital affairs of current life."

Even though some of those weaknesses of textbook writing have been corrected in more recent years, the subjects which textbooks helped to entrench in the curriculum remain with us. It is only in the past two decades that any considerable number of persons have been able to think outside the subject frame at all. Another result of the "textbook movement" is a group of publishing houses and authors with large financial interests in curriculum.

THE ACTIVITY PROGRAM AS A MANIFESTATION OF CRYSTALLIZATION

A third example from our own day is perhaps the best illustration to be found of the replacement of one crystallization by another. It all came about when educators began to take seriously the principle that children learn by doing. Pioneer individuals and groups started to experiment with ways of utilizing this principle in curriculum-building. Many of the experiments were so successful that numbers of other educators became convinced that here was something they should be trying out in their own schools. Gradually a new pattern crystallized. It went by different names, but in the early 1930's *the activity program* was the current favorite.

A whole dictionary full of new terms and a great body of educational literature grew up around the *unit of work* as the central feature of the activity program. Things reached the point where an elementary teacher viewed the playground as the place where children might learn a colonial dance when they were studying their "Colonial Unit"; a music teacher offered, as her contribution to the children's study of the city water supply, to teach "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" and "Flow Gently, Sweet Afton"; while a third teacher claimed room on the bandwagon because she used the activity, flashcards.[3]

[3] To be fair to a commendable curriculum innovation and to the many educators who made creative use of the newly popular curriculum prin-

Distortions and counterfeits of the original idea behind the activity movement made thoughtful people everywhere begin to question some of the newly crystallized practices. Heads of certain large city school systems, however, saw in the procedures, now routinized and mechanized almost beyond recognition, hope of accomplishing the prodigious task of modernizing their elementary curriculum in a relatively short time. In some cases the activity program was installed at once by administrative *fiat*. In others, it was tried out experimentally in selected schools for a time, then installed in all schools with exact procedures indicated to teachers for beginning specified units of work and carrying them through to a "culminating activity." Of course, the new program met with resistance at first. Innovations are difficult to accept when people have been finding their security by operating in habitual ways. But it is almost certain that, ten and twenty years from now, those who were hardest to convince in the beginning will be the staunchest supporters of the activity program when word comes that it is time to revise the curriculum once more.

To gain some idea of the extent to which schools are encrusted with crystallizations large and small, one has only to start listing the obvious phenomena that the school and only the school exhibits. One might start with the orders given to children—"Stay out until the bell rings," "Don't come in after the bell rings," "No talking," "Don't leave your seat without permission," "Don't help anyone else," "Sit still," "Wait until recess." Then one might list school marks, grade norms, the eight-, nine-, or ten-month term, schooling from ages five to seventeen, school open from eight to four, boys' lines and girls' lines, readers, "schoolhouse" brown, and so on with a long list.

ciple, it should be stated that thereby a number of promising changes have been effected in the program of many schools. In fact, the activity concept as analyzed by Lois Coffey Mossman in *The Activity Concept* (The Macmillan Company, 1939) and others continues to provoke thoughtful reëxamination of practice and to contribute to desirable changes in the school curriculum. It is against mechanization and distortion of a valid curriculum principle that this discussion is directed. It is a wasteful procedure to replace an older crystallization merely with a newer, fresher one.

CRYSTALLIZED PROCEDURES FOR CURRICULUM-MAKING

Perhaps the most important form of crystallization in curriculum development has been the standardization of procedure for making changes in the curriculum which began to take shape in the 1920's. That was the period when local school systems such as those of Los Angeles, Winnetka, Denver, Detroit, St. Louis, and Baltimore were commencing to give serious attention to problems of curriculum change.

Toward the end of that decade books and studies dealing with principles and techniques for curriculum-making commenced to appear. A glance at the table of contents of a representative work published in 1929 reveals the nature of the pattern that was emerging. The author promises to consider such questions as:

How should the curriculum organization be set up?
How should the duties of the aims committee be performed?
What procedure should production committees follow?
How should a new course of study be installed?

Following the publication of such books came almost a frenzy of curriculum activity in the '30's. A study made by the United States Office of Education in 1936 revealed organized curriculum-development programs under way in more than seven-tenths of the cities over 25,000 in population.[4] A great many such enterprises were being carried on in smaller centers also. Most of those programs had been initiated since 1932.

By 1934 the pattern for curriculum-making that is most familiar today had become fixed and widespread. Evidence of the fact that curriculum development had been reduced to a formula calculated to work in any school system of size is a study by Trillingham, who set about to learn how curriculum programs were organized and administered at that time in a number of large cities throughout the country.[5] This, in brief,

[4] Reported by Henry Harap, Ed., in *The Changing Curriculum* (New York, D. Appleton–Century Company, Inc., 1937).

[5] C. C. Trillingham, *Organization and Administration of Curriculum Programs* (Los Angeles, University of Southern California, 1934).

is the pattern he discovered and which he then recommended for general use in sizable school systems:

1. The superintendent of schools initiates the curriculum program and is ultimately responsible for the curriculum.
2. In direct charge is a curriculum director, assisted by a curriculum specialist or consultant who is "to aid and stimulate teacher groups" and "critically evaluate the progress of the curriculum program."
3. A curriculum council or cabinet is chosen by the superintendent to determine the philosophy of the school and general guiding principles, "to set up general objectives of the program," to serve as a clearing house, and, finally, to approve work submitted by various committees.
4. An aims committee has the job of formulating the aims of education and determining the program of studies to be offered.
5. A production committee for each subject and each division becoming active determines subject aims, subject content, pupil activities, materials, and so on.
6. A course-appraisal committee for each new course of study oversees the try-outs of new materials.
7. A course-installation committee sees to it that the course is properly installed after study by the principals and teachers who are to use it.
8. A continuous course-improvement committee keeps bringing the course up to date.

Weaknesses in Procedures as Crystallized

This plan for organizing and administering curriculum programs deserves careful study, for it represents perhaps the most dangerous type of crystallization in the whole curriculum picture today. The most obvious weakness of the procedure recommended by Trillingham is its underlying assumption that the curriculum is a series of documents periodically to be added to, revised, brought up to date. In other words, at the time of Trillingham's study, *curriculum* was still synonymous with *course of study*, in the realm of operation if not in the realm of theory.[6]

[6] That some shift in thinking has occurred in the decade since Trillingham's work is attested by the following report in the *Curriculum Journal*, Feb., 1942, p. 53: "Some of the most important curriculum developments in the Bakersfield (California) city schools are those that do

In the second place it is taken for granted that superintendents of schools, curriculum directors, and curriculum specialists shall launch all curriculum programs, selecting the personnel of working committees, evaluating the progress of those committees, and taking full responsibility for the results. This method of work violates the fundamental principles of democratic participation. It looks, indeed, as if here were the type of curriculum program which Saylor [7] characterizes thus: a program "planned in terms of course of study preparation, but organized so as to promote acceptance of the completed course by teachers through participation of representative teachers in its preparation."

A third observation regarding Trillingham's proposals is that there is an unquestioned assumption that curriculum revision in the sense here employed must be a system-wide activity. The possibility of autonomy for individual schools within the system is given no consideration.

A fourth observation has to do with the recommended first steps in curriculum revision. First a philosophy must be written down by one small group; next it must be broken down into principles or objectives; at this point new groups take over to break objectives into smaller bits called "aims." These are worked out for different subjects and grade levels of the school system. The whole procedure is based on connectionism in psychology—reduce the desired response of the pupil to a convenient unit of behavior, then set a stimulus situation to produce and fix that response—an additive rather than a developmental approach.

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not ordinarily receive attention. For instance, workshop facilities have been developed where supervisors have adequate room to hold meetings within their offices and space where projects may be assembled and work in various types of art, poetry, and so forth may be carried on right in the workshop by teachers. . . . The supervisors of music and art, the material for the testing program, the circulating library, the central library for circulating books for children, as well as the Audio-Visual Aids Department are all housed in one place where the teachers may come and go into either of the laboratories for assistance."

[7] J. Galen Saylor, *Factors Associated with Participation in Coöperative Programs of Curriculum Development* (New York, Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1941), p. 2.

A final observation is that two groups of persons seem to have been entirely ignored in this master plan of participation in curriculum development. Those groups are the learners themselves and their parents and other adults in the community who have a stake in educational undertakings.

FAULTY CONCEPTION OF CURRICULUM UNDERLIES CRYSTALLIZED PROCEDURES

This whole formula for organizing and administering curriculum programs, which is still in common use today,[8] is based on a faulty definition of the curriculum. A year after Trillingham's report came the publication of Caswell and Campbell's influential work, *Curriculum Development*.[9] This book set forth a broad conception of the curriculum which cleared the air with regard to conflicting definitions of that term and should have freed curriculum workers from the limitations of mere course-of-study preparation. As refined in a later book by Caswell,[10] this now generally accepted definition of the curriculum reads: "The curriculum is . . . composed of the actual experiences which children undergo under the guidance of the school." [11]

[8] For evidence of the truth of this statement one has only to consult the department "News from the Field" in the *Curriculum Journal* during its last year of publication (1942–1943).

[9] Hollis L. Caswell and Doak S. Campbell, *Curriculum Development* (New York, American Book Company, 1935).

[10] Hollis L. Caswell, *Education in the Elementary School* (New York, American Book Company, 1943), p. 188.

[11] This definition is essentially the one accepted for the purposes of this discussion. The writer is aware that some educators have begun in recent years to regard the curriculum as all of the experiences children have under any circumstances. The latter definition is the result of a belief that curriculum workers, in selecting and organizing learning experiences for and with children, have tended to ignore the influences of the child's out-of-school living. Those advancing the idea hope that a definition of the curriculum so broad as to erase the lines between the child's school experiences and those outside the tutelage of the school will guarantee wiser planning of those experiences.

The writer is in entire sympathy with the point of view that all of each child's experiences must be taken into account in curriculum-planning. But it should be quite possible to do so without blurring the word *curriculum* until it loses its root character. As a word that meant in the