

# THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER IN CURRICULUM DESIGN TODAY

Mr. S. Abughila

## Introduction

Over the last twenty years there has been a significant development in the conception of curriculum design and the teacher's role.

The problem of dualism between the curriculum and instruction has - to some extent - been solved. Because of the fact that to conceive of (ends) and (means) as separate is to separate functions that are organically interdependent, The old conception of curriculum as "those planning endeavors which take place before Instruction" and of instruction as "the teacher-pupil interaction situation" is no longer in mode.

Teaching and curriculum are now perceived and practiced as an integral unity that cannot be separated. Consequently the role of the teacher has been changed from that of a "transmitter of knowledge" to that of one

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"who takes part in designing and developing the curriculum".

To what extent does the teacher affect the curriculum "design" and "development" is the question I will try to answer in this paper.

The following questions are of vital importance in tackling this topic:

1. What was the conventional role of the teacher
2. What was the conventional look to the curriculum ?
3. How is curriculum-instruction dualism solved ?
4. What is the teacher's role in curriculum design today ?

### **The Conventional Role of the Teacher**

The traditional role of the teacher as a "tutor", as a "transmitter of knowledge" and as a "subject teacher" had overruled education until recently. This role resulted in a kind of teacher who was passive and ineffective as far as the curriculum design and development was concerned.

There was a separation between what was taught and the real interests of both teachers and pupils.

### **The Traditional Look to the Curriculum**

The old conception of curriculum is best illustrated in McDonald words= "those planning endeavors which

take place prior to instruction"(1).

In that definition he considered curriculum as only a "plan" or an "endeavor" which is not integrated with any of the different components of the educational process.

Then Inlow gave it another definition as "a body of learning content". It is obvious that curriculum in this definition is regarded as merely recorded subject matter.

Thus curriculum was seen as:

1. Independent from instruction
2. A recorded subject matter.

### **Curriculum-Instruction Dualism Solved**

It was apparently felt that dualism between curriculum and instruction has resulted in many negative consequences, such as:

1. Teacher's indifference to the pupils' individual differences.
2. pupils' interests were neglected.
3. Teacher's feeling of unimportance in the educational process.

Thus, the pressing problem of dualism brought many efforts and theories that at last succeeded in overcoming this problem and removing for good the separation between instruction and curriculum.

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1) Tanner, Daniel, Tanner Laurel N., Curriculum Development Theory Into Practice, (New York, Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. 1980) p. 31

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Curriculum design today is integrally interdependent with instruction. Doll defines it as "the curriculum of a school is the formal and informal content and process by which learners gain knowledge and understanding, develop skills, and alter attitudes, appreciation and values under the auspices of that school"<sup>(2)</sup>.

And more precisely Tanner's definition is as follows - "that reconstruction of knowledge and experience systematically developed under the auspices of the school, to enable the learner to increase his or her control of knowledge and experiences"<sup>(3)</sup>.

In both definition the writers indicated that the school and the teachers are unique in their organization and treatment of knowledge and experience in attempting to meet their educative functions. No other institution of society compares with the school and. its staff in the systematic reconstruction of knowledge and experience for educative purposes. Education is not a process of putting the learner under control but rather putting the learner in control of experience.

### **The Teacher's Role in Curriculum Design Today**

Many new conceptions of the curriculum as a systems approach envisions the classroom teacher as

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- 2) Doll, Ronald C., Curriculum Improvement, Decision Making and Process (Boston, Allyn, 1978) p. 6
- 3) Ibid, Tanner.

being at the heart of the system and as one who is principally responsible for making the actual decision as to which strategy and which material are best suited for a particular student or a group of students.

In the particular reality of things, it is ultimately the teacher who designs the curriculum in the day-to-day interaction with students.

Then why not allow the teacher primary responsibility for this task, permitting him to select, adopt or modify goals, choose the appropriate content and design and the evaluative measures needed. Why not encourage the creative and imaginative use of locally available resources from one's own community rather than follow slavishly the prepackaged material that too often provides little involvement for either the teachers or the students.

"Experience with programs such as the three dimensional project at Sturbridge Massachusetts suggests that teachers do have abundant talent to design or develop exciting curricula that meet their students' Interests and needs"<sup>(4)</sup>. But the teacher's efforts must be supported by the larger aspects of the curriculum system which can make specialized training, resources and consultant help available to the teacher when needed. When viewed in this sense, the teacher is more the designer and developer of curriculum and a primary

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4) The Community as a Learning, Education Leadership, 29:410, 12 Feb. 1972

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influence upon the instructional program rather than a manager of resources which can be manipulated by computer.

The teacher is absolutely the most important element of curriculum designs, he is the expert working in a classroom with a group of children putting into practice what many others have had a part in deciding on. What he shall do with the course of study?, what content shall be utilized in the immediate situation?, whether or not the pupils will have a part in determining their activities and what activities will be used are all factors requiring consideration.

Teachers tend to function predominantly at one of three levels of curriculum development.

1. Imitative maintenance : the teacher is a routinist and the objective is maintenance, Change, when it occurs, is a matter of plugging in the curriculum package to the existing situation. The curriculum is treated as segments and fragments.
2. Teachers at level II (meditative) are aware that teaching should be more than routine management and that there is a macro- curriculum but improvement tends to be a matter of refining existing practices. Innovations are adapted rather than merely adopted.
3. The teacher at level three (generative-creative) conceives the curriculum as an articulated whole and acts on this conception. Improvement of

practice is actively sought by drawing upon resources beyond the local school and school system, Imagination, artistry, awareness and the testing of ideas are some characteristics of the generative-creative level. "All teachers should be at this level, but the levels of curriculum development are not a sequence that is, one does not become creative by first being imitative"<sup>(5)</sup>.

The teacher must retain primary responsibility for designing and developing the curriculum. The roles might be as follows:

1. Diagnosis of needs
2. Formulation of objectives
3. Selection of content
4. Organization of content
5. Selection of learning experiences
6. Organization of learning experiences
7. Determination of what to evaluate and of the ways and means of doing it"<sup>(6)</sup>.

Curricula are designed so that students may learn because the back grounds of the students vary. It is important to diagnose the backgrounds which is a vital first step in determining what the curriculum should be for a given population.

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5) Ibid Tanner, p. 554.

6) Lipman , James M, Hoehn, James A., Jr., The Principal Foundation and Function (New York, Harper & Row Publishers 1974 p. 220

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In the second step the teacher must understand that formulation of clear and comprehensive objectives determine what content is important and how it should be organized.

In the third step, the selection and organization of the content of a curriculum also involves criteria other than objectives such as its validity and significance of making the proper distinctions between the various levels of content and decisions about the level of development at which to introduce it.

The task of selecting and organizing learning experiences involves more than applying certain principles of learning. In the scheme of thinking employed in the book, it involves ideas about such matters a strategies of concept attainment and sequences in formation of attitudes and sensitivities Plans also need to be made for evaluation. How should the quality of learning be evaluated to assure that ends of education are being achieved?

How does one make sure that there is consistency between the aims and objectives and what is actually achieved by students? Does the curriculum organization provide experiences which offer optimum opportunities for all varieties of learners to attain independent goals ?

### **Conclusion**

Teaching and curriculum design are now perceived and practiced as an integral unity that cannot be separated. Consequently the role of the teacher has been changed from that of "transmitter of knowledge" to one "who takes part in designing and developing the



curriculum".

In the classroom the teacher must retain primary responsibility for designing and developing the curriculum. The teacher's responsibility is to establish an environment which encourages exploration, discovery, and investigation; an environment which challenges students to become critical problem solvers and decision makers an environment that is planned around the integration of understandings, skills, attitudes, and appreciations related to significant real life themes.

Many new conceptions of the curriculum as a systems approach envision the classroom teacher as being at the heart of the system and as the one who is principally responsible for making the actual decisions as to which strategy and which material are best suited for a particular student or a group of students.