

Recent Developments in Curriculum Research — A Selected Bibliography

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This selected bibliography includes recent publications concerned with the function and purposes of traditional and action research in the field of curriculum development. George V. Guy is a graduate assistant at the College of Education, University of Illinois.

TO MOST clear-thinking adults it is apparent that our schools are not doing their job of education as effectively as they should; it is evident to professional educators that the gap between our educational theory and practice is great indeed. This form of institutional lag is reflected in the school as curricular problems. A rapidly shifting social scene, added knowledge as to how boys and girls grow and develop, and changing conceptions as to the function of the school have combined to produce this gap (5). The function of educational research is twofold: to help close this gap and to bring educational practice more nearly in line with sound educational theory. There seem to be at least three avenues through which research influences educational practice and, correspondingly, three levels of penetration by research in its attack upon curricular problems.

TRADITIONAL RESEARCH

Research at the first level is the fundamental or traditional type of research. It is characterized as independent experimental research studies which are aimed at the discovery of "truth" from which educational prac-

tice may profit; it is concerned primarily with gathering knowledge which will be beneficial to education. Research at the second level is that type of traditional research which is aimed directly, as a result of the study, at the improvement of some *aspect* of the total educational program. In this sense it is a type of action research (4, 14).

First-level research has operated under the assumption that its publication and integration with pre-existing knowledge eventually will bring about a change for the better in educational practice (4). The problem, therefore, is one of disseminating the vast knowledge of a useful nature that we have. Brewton (2) has reported the preparation of the findings and results of research in the area of natural resources for use in schools and colleges by various private and public agencies. In this instance research by research personnel is being made available for use in education.

Second-level research is exemplified by Hanson's report (7) which points out that, for six years, channels for the interchange of research and ideas have been provided by which seventy school systems in a metropoli-

tan area are improving educational administration. In this case research by both research and non-research personnel are brought to bear upon the solution of problems in the areas of finance and administration. Inevitably, attention was directed toward the significance and importance of pupil-teacher-parent relationships which promises to be a fruitful field for their future efforts. Sternig (11) reports that a group of interested teachers began cooperative study and planning sessions which eventually branched out to include the citizens of the community. From the formulation of objectives and means of evaluation, this community school went to the question of achieving those objectives—to curriculum design. Wrightstone (14) urges that research bureaus should involve non-research personnel in all phases of research which is directed toward the solution of educational problems. Action research is advocated as a tool for bringing about curricular change. Although this permits research at a somewhat deeper level of penetration, the *initiative* in action research still remains with research personnel and not in the efforts of all concerned.

These forms of research, however (and particularly those which we designate as the first level of penetration), have proven inadequate in effecting the curricular changes which circumstances demand. Research techniques must be improved, for the instruments originally devised for the physical sciences are inadequate (4, 5). Traditional research has neglected the human element in experimentation (5). We conclude that realistic experimentation for curriculum development must

take into account the total school and community context (9).

ACTION RESEARCH

The utilization of research in curriculum building is at the third level of penetration. Action research is directed toward and oriented in terms of action upon curricular problems at their foundation. Moore (10) suggests that school systems must be not only important consumers but original producers of educational research. The Horace Mann-Lincoln Study Group (8) experimented with inter-age grouping (as opposed to grade grouping) and realized not only the feasibility, but desirability as well, of research by non-research personnel in terms of teacher-teacher, teacher-pupil, and pupil-pupil relationships.

Theoretical Considerations

Curriculum development or change is to be seen as an aspect of the wider and more inclusive area of social and cultural change which involves:

- the reconstruction of the school as one of our social institutions
- changes in the characters of people through the implementation of a more desirable philosophy and changes in the other institutions with which these people are identified (1).

Benne (1) suggests the latter as a more strategic starting point and explores two issues which are centrally involved, one being the problem of finding agreement upon a desirable direction of educational change. Cunningham and Miel (5) and Mackenzie (9) recognize the significance of this problem. Cunningham and Miel (5) find that the purpose of studying the

nature of change in relation to the curriculum is to give control of the processes of change; such control would be used by those who wish to move toward a program more in line with what they consider to be a desirable curriculum.

Methodology

Thelen (13) gives some valuable insights into the mechanics of curriculum development through a theory of group dynamics in which the school-community sets as its goal the solution of a common problem: "How can our school do what it *should* do?" Wrightstone (14) states that the social psychology involved is one of identification with and involvement in research on the part of non-research personnel.

Cunningham and Miel (5) suggest an investigation of what various groups have done or are doing to effect curriculum change. This may well be followed by attempts to evaluate the effectiveness of other programs of curriculum change and identification of factors responsible for discrepancies in their results. Problem-areas in the engineering of curriculum change are pointed-up: building initial interest, improving attitudes toward change, dealing with the phenomenon of curriculum crystallization, function of leadership, use of experts, organization for change, improving communication, and improving human relations—these are a few of the problem-areas. At least two difficulties are seen in the application of action research programs: broadening the range of research workers to include everyone involved, and selecting a research director not only technically objective and precise, but

sensitive to the human relations involved.

The essence of action research as a means of effecting curriculum development is its direct attack upon curricular problems within their total school and community setting. Wrightstone (14) denotes three types of action research: survey, which tries to determine or evaluate *what is*; diagnostic, which seeks to answer the question of *what is wrong* in terms of certain accepted criteria; and experimental, which initiates and evaluates changes in terms of *what ought to be*. Ultimately, in any thorough-going program of action research, it seems that these three types become phases or stages through which the program passes.

Action Research Studies

Dimond (6) reports that educators in Detroit who were concerned with the inadequacy of citizenship training in their schools, initiated a program of action research which was aimed at securing more positive results. Schools participated on a voluntary basis and represented a variety of socio-cultural backgrounds. Initial efforts of a superficial nature were found to have produced only meagre results. It was not until the study considered the problem in the entire school and community context that there was a realization of the broad dimensions of the curricular problem. The inter-relationships between this and other problems led to attempts to evaluate the total curricular pattern. Collinge and Dimond (3) report later that the objective is one of developing, by means of the total curriculum, students with increased understanding, interest, competence, and

participation in good citizenship in order that they may become, as adults, more active citizens. Conference or workshop sessions have given teachers an opportunity to work cooperatively on common problems. Data are still being collected. Experimentation and evaluation are used to accomplish those objectives which are in line with the development of good citizenship. Such is the type of action research which is being used in Detroit. It is normative in determining the present effects of its program; it is diagnostic in evaluating those effects in terms of established objectives; it is experimental in initiating changes designed to achieve those objectives.

Perhaps the most thorough and complete program of action research is being carried on by the Horace Mann-Lincoln Institute of School Experimentation (12). Several areas, involving the total curriculum, are being surveyed, evaluated, and reformulated along experimental designs. The procedural pattern in the action research program seems to have followed this organization: conditions influencing curriculum research, child development and the curriculum, the social-cultural context of the school program, the development of curriculum plans. Basic purposes of the program are to observe how curriculum improvement takes place, to note problems involved, to test means of studying those problems, and to follow certain leads which seemed to be of critical importance.

It was assumed that the teacher is the key person in any program of curriculum development, and a Teachers Reaction Inventory together with interviews and observations were utilized

in discovering relationships which might influence curriculum development. More complete findings to be published at a later date should give valuable information as to the mechanics of curriculum development through the operation of group dynamics in the context of public school situations.

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