# THE TEACHER AS MANAGER OF THE CURRICULUM?

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WHAT is the teacher's role in the design of curriculum today? Is the teacher really a "manager" of the curriculum in that he makes appropriate choices of goals, materials, and learning processes for students? One doubts it when we recall that in the past decade many newly developed curriculum programs were cynically referred to as "teacher proof." Yet 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 decision as to which strategy and which material are best suited for a particular student or a group of them.

## Curriculum as a Systems Approach

The rapid growth of technology and management in the late 1950's and 60's led to the formulation of a systems approach to education. Borrowing techniques from the world of business management, educational planners constructed models showing the complex interaction of many forces at work in the education enterprise: students, parents, the school board, teachers, the climate of the community, the level of financial support, the goals and philosophy of the schools, and so on. Each element was seen as part of a large scale "input-process-output" model capable of evaluating its output against the original objectives and correcting itself accordingly.

Closely related to the systems development approach were two specialized management techniques, the PPBS approach and the PERT networks.[1] Both of these provide a strong degree of fiscal and managerial responsibility and its present-day corollary, accountability. They are now being used with increasing frequency in school systems. PPBS is used to plan out goals, programs, assessment, and cost effectiveness (see Figure 1), while the PERT network or diagram is used to identify the sequence of events and time necessary to accomplish an objective. In many cases, state and federal granting agencies are now requiring these management techniques as a regular part of the proposal for new or innovative curriculum designs.

[1] PPBS means Planning, Programming, Budgeting System. PERT is the acronym for Program Evaluation Review Technique.

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## Curriculum Management

In a systems or management approach, planning begins with the analysis of the overall situation and its needs and some ranking of these needs according to priorities. (To "prioritize" is the current federalese word!) Next, specific objectives are defined, often in behavioral or performance terms to help make them more precise and measurable for evaluation purposes.

Curriculum content of the program is carefully selected to meet the particular objectives specified. Learning processes, teaching strategies, content materials, and field or laboratory experiences are defined and described in detail. These are carefully sequenced to be sure that the prerequisite learnings and skills have been acquired. Frequently, alternative choices of strategies and activities may be identified provided that they meet the original objectives.

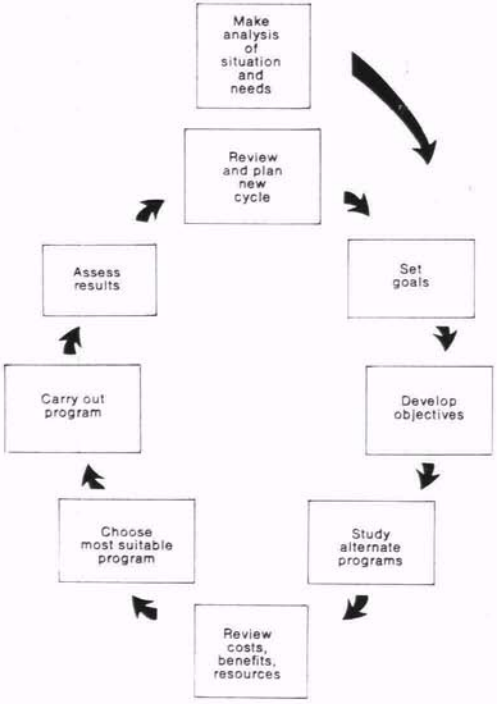


Figure 1. The PPBS Cycle

Evaluation or program assessment in a systems approach is closely tied to program objectives. It is critical to know to what extent each of the objectives has been accomplished, and often at what cost. When program objectives are specified in behavioral or performance terms, it is much easier to spell out some concrete, observable measure of accomplishment that can be used in the evaluation process. Often these measures are quantifiable so that assessment data can be treated statistically or presented graphically to show the degree of accomplishment of each objective. Such techniques can then be related to overall program review and cost-effectiveness analysis. If a decision is made to continue the program, then data from the evaluation process are fed back into the system to adjust either the program or the goals or both. Thus the cycle shown in Figure 1 is completed and begun anew.

## A Manipulative Approach?

For many involved in the educational process, particularly administrators, the systems approach provides a clear outlining of responsibility for the various components in the process. It defines who is accountable for what and makes possible an orderly, systematic analysis and review. More important, the systems approach makes a wide variety of resources and specialized materials available to both teacher and students in a carefully planned, sequential process. The teacher manages the flow of programs, materials, and resources to and from students as their needs and interests dictate.

Teachers, however, often view the entire process as a manipulative approach that locks them irrevocably into a fixed program, with little chance to exert a creative influence over it. In those curriculum programs where textbooks, materials, student assignments, and test instruments come in neatly prepared and highly detailed packages, the teacher's role as curriculum designer is sharply reduced. As "manager" the teacher has few decisions to make.

Yet the problem may not be so much with the systems approach itself as with the

*scale* of the operation. In most instances the systems approach is designed to include an entire school district with all its schools, different content areas, and the total faculty. It is a macro system that because of its scale fails to take account of the individual teacher in a particular school or class. What is needed is a micro or subsystem that is designed for an individual school or classroom, which is compatible with the larger system, but which still allows the teacher to exert primary influence over the instructional program.

## Designer or Manager?

In the practical reality of things, it is ultimately the teacher who designs or develops 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, adapt, or modify goals, choose the appropriate content, and design 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 teachers or 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.[2] 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 influence upon the instructional program rather than a "manager" of resources which can be manipulated by computer or an accounting machine.

The conception of the teacher as a curriculum designer rather than as a "manager" is not to suggest there is no place for efficient management skills and an integrated systems approach. Rather, it is to suggest that the values of teacher choice and decision making not be swept away or sacrificed for the values of efficiency or manageability. Both have a place, but at different levels, in the curriculum system.

In the classroom, however, the teacher must retain primary responsibility for designing and developing the curriculum and not be reduced to the level of a paper pusher or a filing clerk in an impersonal system, even though dignified by the high sounding title of "manager." □

[2] Alberta P. Sebolt. "The Community as a Learning Laboratory." *Educational Leadership* 29: 410-12; February 1972.