Editorial

The Curriculum Stakes

It is not too difficult to invoke the analogy of a horserace when thinking of curriculum. The roots of the word are appropriate and it is certainly real to think of curriculum as having various stakes and, alas, handicaps. Questions of what stakes, whose stakes, and the degree to which stakeholders have a handicap are becoming more prominent in curriculum inquiry, as we seek to judge the fairness of the race or jockey for positions of self interest.

There are many potential stakeholders in curriculum besides politicians and bureaucrats with their social projects. Industry and commerce have their say, as does the academic community, but what about other constituencies? Parents, learners, teachers, local communities, and a wide variety of socio-economic, religious, ethnic and cultural groups all need the "curriculum" of their institutions as a significant influence for the derivation of individual and group identity. Traditionally, however, curriculum has purportedly been determined "scientifically". In reality this has been a mere technical activity related to purposes determined by only a limited group of stakeholders. Such practices make it easy, no matter how well-intentioned the group in power is, to produce a biased selection of curriculum content.

For some time, however, these questions have been obscured by our pre-occupation with the simplistic question as to whether curriculum should be determined centrally <u>or</u> locally. During the last several decades we have shuffled backwards and forwards between two lunacies -- central prescription and imposition, with little local input and, not surprisingly, little actual classroom implementation; and the equally doomed hope that the "grass roots" on their own might handle all that is needed for curriculum development. Few local school people have either the time, the energy, the expertise, or the resources to handle this gargantuan task. There are, of course, unique exceptions from which we may learn, but we must deal with reality in the mainstream.

Moving beyond this artificial dilemma, Connelly (1972) has addressed the question of what functions of curriculum development are better handled inside or outside the school. Walker (1979) has identified different types which provide for a fairer involvment of all stakeholders. <u>Curriculum policy development</u> involves the establishment of broad frameworks, guidelines, and rationales by governments or their agencies. <u>Generic curriculum development</u> prepares designs, model plans, and materials for ideal groups of learners. (This type of development might emanate from a variety of groups including government agencies, university-based curriculum projects, or unique locally developed programs). Such desgns, as Connelly (1972) points out, should act as theoretic possibilities or as curriculum potential (Ben-Peretz, 1975) for teachers to translate into

their own instructional images. This neglected but key transition (Butt, 1981a) is accomplished through site-specific curriculum development which includes the many measures that need to be taken in a particular school community and its classrooms to adapt, evolve, elaborate, and create a curriculum-in-use specifically suited to local needs. This most important stage is school-based and "grass roots", but uses the supportive resources of other types of curriculum development furnished from outside the school.

In Quebec, a school's educational project (M.E.Q., 1980), whereby each school staff is encouraged to develop its own philosophy, broad aims, and objectives and to focus annually on a particular project, might provide for much site-specific curriculum development. This can only happen, however, if a new detailed and centrally-developed curriculum is regarded as generic or potential curriculum, thus leaving enough room for the school to elaborate a curriculum which suits its needs at the same time as pursuing broader social goals. Some successful examples are documented by Anderson (et al, 1981) and Butt (1981b).

Let us now, instead of viewing curriculum as something determined either locally or centrally, view it as something shaped by the broad policies of politicians and bureaucrats, given potential by scholars and curriculum workers as they derive generic curriculum, and ultimately acted upon by local school people as they elaborate a curriculum-in-use. Perhaps the various stakeholders in curriculum would then be able to participate more equitably in the curriculum functions for which they have concern and expertise. In addition, though, the only antidote to potential hegemony is to ensure that all legitimate participants have a fair hearing in determining not only the common core of curriculum policy, but also in negotiating what in a pluralistic, multicultural society become absolutely necessary local varieties of curricula-in-use. This implies that curriculum development is as much a political and social process as "scientific" or anything else. It also implies that curriculum policy or generic curriculum development should not be regarded as superior in hierarchical fashion to site-specific curriculum development, but that they are all interactive elements of the same dynamic endeavour - each able legitimately to influence the others. (Butt, 1980, p.12)

This issue of the Journal serves to illuminate the variety of issues, broad and particular, theoretical and practical, which are at stake in curriculum development in Canada and elsewhere. Lionel Orlikow's article strikes right at the core of the potential for hegemony in Provincial curriculum development. He makes the point that it is not politicians but senior bureaucrats who have too much power, and that ethnic and minority groups have very little voice in determining what meaning their children learn in school. In contrast Ray Baillie attempts to show how local curriculum elaboration has worked for him, his staff, and his students. Norman Henchey examines curriculum as myth, not only in the sense of illusion (as the assumed implementation of curriculum policy has been) but also as the positive manifestation of a society's broad social project. The social

context for curriculum, particularly as it applies to Quebec, is painted by Valois and Bertrand.

In order to remain alert to all sorts of bias, it is important to make sure that the hidden curriculum is continuously exposed to the light of consciousness and judgment. Henry Giroux examines different approaches to the hidden curriculum, but more importantly, he goes further in integrating them into a new framework which we can use to get a better purchase on this elusive notion and its potent content. William Pinar digs deeper than normal into hidden sediments and sentiments to raise the contentious possibility that curriculum has been fundamentally biased for sexism by the oedipal nature of gender relationships.

Some little-considered issues of value to human life are sketched in graphic and practical detail in Anderson's interview with Don Snowden. What Snowden and a good number of other unheralded Canadians have done with the notion of curriculum, even prior to Friere and Illich, is to focus on personal emancipation and community development, shedding light on the ability of learners to participate in generating their own curriculum and meaning.

R.B.

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