CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT OR CURRICULUM INITIATION?

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Curriculum development is a continuous and interactive process. Curriculum policy decisions are made at the highest levels in a school system or a nation's education system. In almost all instances these are political decisions, and are guided by advice from top officials, professional bureaucrats or by a Curriculum Advisory Committee consisting of professionals and representatives of interest groups or concerned stakeholders. Once the basic or guiding policies are established, the process of curriculum development is initiated in a central agency referred to as a Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) as in Solomon Islands, or as Curriculum Development Unit (CDU) as in Fiji.

Thereafter, it is a continuous and interactive process. In different school systems and at various points in time, these curriculum initiating bodies may be constituted as a part of the country's Ministry concerned with Education, be semi-autonomous or even enjoy considerable autonomy.

As I mentioned above, the CDC or the CDU initiates, monitors, reviews and changes the initial steps taken in curriculum development. But curriculum development is a continuous and even cyclic process. The curriculum process initiated may take various forms such as curriculum advice, guidelines, suggestions or even detailed prescriptions. The form this initial stage takes depends not only on the organizational arrangements between the school system and the CDC or CDU but also on the philosophy, belief systems and the strategic plans of the CDU or CDC on the one hand, and the professional status and preparation of

the educational administrators and the teachers on the other. The Centre for Educational Research and Innovation identified such a wide range of curriculum development initiatives varying from highly centralized to highly decentralized systems.[1] With reference to large-scale centralized attempts at curriculum development and reform, Thorsby and Gannicott have cast doubt on their success in the South Pacific school systems.[2]

Only two decades ago, referring to the English educational scene, J. G. Owen pointed out that the central control of curriculum has yielded to local or school level control:

In trying to answer the question who should be in charge of the curriculum, we have seen that official attempts to take control of something which we nowadays without question accept as belonging to the schools has failed at a comparatively early stage.[3]

The Schools Council, which spanned over two decades, encouraged individual schools to initiate or trial curriculum development projects, and even disseminated the improved curricular practice. However, by 1988 the Education Reform Act created the National Curriculum Council which determined how and what schools are expected to deliver in the curriculum.[4]

> **"School systems, such as those of most of the South Pacific countries which inherited the early English model of national level curriculum development, still retained it, but with piece-meal changes to the process."**

In short, the pendulum of control in curriculum has swung from celebrating the autonomy of schools to control by the centre. School systems, such as those of most of the South Pacific countries which inherited the early English model of national level curriculum

development, still retained it, but with piece-meal changes to the process. Thus the South Pacific countries find themselves in a situation where they do not have to swing to extremes of a national or local/ school level curriculum but accept the desirable elements of continuity, interactive participation, flexibility and adaptability to local needs and circumstances. These aspects of curriculum development are evident in the reference to both "official curricula" as described officially in published curriculum statements and materials on the one hand, and "real curriculum" as evident in what eventuates in classrooms.[5] Grand plans were afoot in the 1980s to design central Curriculum Development Centres[6] believing that anything and everything in the curriculum development process would take place within its walls. Disillusioned by the wasteful strategy, certain developing countries are limiting the CDC to a small management unit and concentrating and expanding the resources at the action level in schools and the local level.[7]

> "In this framework, teachers are to be regarded as genuine curriculum developers and not mere functionaries or implementors."

When one looks at the history of curriculum development,it appears prudent to have a manageable number of professionally well qualified and experienced staff in the CDC or CDU to deal with the initiation of curriculum and leave the further development, elaboration and implementation to the schools and education officers. Senior teachers, educators and experienced professionals must be so dispersed in the school system as to be available for help, support, encouragement and guidance in the area of further curriculum development as a part of their supervision and management. At least three interlocking components have been identified in the management of curriculum.[8] These are (a) a formal statement of the curriculum; (b) guidelines that translate the formal statement of curriculum into classroom work, and (c) a hierarchy of personnel to monitor and supervise the delivery of the curriculum in action from various distances and at various levels. If curriculum is to serve as a continuous and interactive process, the curriculum initiators in the CDC/CDU, curriculum monitors in the field and schools, and curriculum users in the classrooms will have to view their respective roles in a professionally linked fash-

ion and as significant stakeholders in education. However, at <u>each</u> of the multi-level curriculum development processes involving initiating, monitoring and teaching- learning, the community and particularly the parents have a stake as well although their right to involvement is gaining recognition rather slowly.[9] This is an urgent issue underpinning the devolution of curriculum decisions to the school level, since the community has potentially a very significant role to play.

> "Indeed, the ultimate success of any curriculum development process depends on the contribution the teachers are able to make."

In summary, the argument of this paper has been that curriculum development has to be considered as a continuous and interactive process involving curriculum initiators, curriculum monitors and practitioners as fellow stake holders in the enterprise, but also with an appropriate input from the wider community. In this framework, teachers are to be regarded as genuine curriculum developers and not mere functionaries or implementors. Indeed, the ultimate success of any curriculum development process depends on the contribution the teachers are able to make.[10] This requires that CDC or CDU not only should initiate, monitor and review curricula but also support, reward and work with the teaching profession. At the same time all parties should recognize the contribution that a community can make.

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