

# Curriculum Reconstruction

By Venancio Trinidad

**T**IME-HONORED *Attitude Towards the Curriculum*: About 30 years ago, this writer submitted for publication in a leading educational magazine two articles on curriculum development. These articles were rejected by the editor of the magazine on the simple ground, according to him, that there was no local interest in curriculum-making. The main concern then of the people interested in education was the improvement of the methods of teaching and not the improvement of the materials of instruction. By and large, teachers and school officials seemed to have taken it for granted that the content of education as found in textbooks and the courses of study is final and should, therefore, not be disturbed. There is no question that, in so far as the impartation of knowledge and the development of skills were concerned, much success had been made.

And so long have our teachers been in the grips of a textbook curriculum. With their known zeal and devotion to duty, they taught day in and day out. Little, if at all, were they concerned about the validity of what they were teaching on the basis of its impact upon the learner as a member of a dynamic society, not to say its impact upon the society itself. In many instances, the teaching materials originated from the central office and then channeled to the local school units to be carried out in schools, which procedure gave rise to a uniform pattern. We did not realize that if ten per cent of the teachers' time was spent on non-essentials, it represented that much wastage of the people's money not to say of the teachers' and the pupils time and effort.

*Reasons for Curriculum Reconstruction*: Truly has it been said that the curriculum is the heart of an educational program. As such, it is the curriculum that gives life and meaning to that program. This implies that the curriculum must be rooted in the fundamental and real needs of the people and in the conditions and trends of life both here and abroad. It is therefore obvious that as long as society retains its dynamic character, we could not possibly conceive of any curriculum that is static, irresponsive to the changing and varying individual and social needs and problems.

Specifically, why is there a need for the reconstruction of the curriculum?

1. The tremendous increase in enrolment both in the elementary and high schools has made the present school population much more heterogenous than what it was in the preceding generations. This situation clearly points out the need of devising a curriculum adapted to the needs, capacities, and interests of a more heterogenous group differing widely in ability, future occupation, and fitness for college training.

2. Young people today have outside distractions or enticements which would tend to make school work less interesting than it was to the students of yester-years. This is perhaps the reason why teachers today have such frequent problems of truancy in their classes, especially in cities and bigger towns where blaring and glaring forms of amusements are abundant. This condition brings out another need; that of producing a curriculum that is more useful and worthwhile, much more challenging, and a little less bore-some and academic, than the curriculum in, say, many high schools today that operate as independent institutions.

3. The fast, almost maddening tempo of modern life and the tremendous increase in the sources of knowledge and information presented to us by the rapid changes in the technological field shows the necessity of putting less and less emphasis on the acquisition of information *per se* and more and more on the skills in using the sources of information when the need arises.

4. The presence of destructive "*isms*" and forces around us and the present chaotic conditions in current world relationships stresses, too, the need of providing in our present curriculum to a greater degree than before, education for the development of appropriate ideals, interests, and attitudes through a more effective education in citizenship, human relations, proper use of leisure, home living, and physical and mental health.

5. The objectives of education promulgated by the Board of National Education which suggest new points of emphasis in our educational program demand a re-study and reconstruction of our curriculum.

To insure the closest possible tie-up of the curriculum to the demands of a growing, ever changing complex society, and the varying community needs, problems, and conditions, a uniform curriculum pattern worked out in a central office will not do. An

entirely new method of approach is the need of the hour. Curriculum development should be a group enterprise in which the teachers, school administrators, supervisors, curricular experts, and the laymen make their contributions.

With the generous material assistance of the FOA-PHILCUSA, (ICA-NEC), the Bureau of Public Schools was able to establish curriculum laboratory centers in strategic places in the Philippines. The establishment of these laboratory centers stimulated a nationwide interest in curriculum development. Workshops for the improvement of the curricula on all levels and types of schools were held, participated in by schoolmen and laymen.

Produced in these workshops were resource units drawn from local resources.

*Deterrents to A Sound Curriculum Reconstruction:* There are, however, certain extraneous forces that militate against a sound curriculum development. We have vested interests that vie for a major place in the curriculum. Businessmen would insist either on the inclusion in the curriculum of business courses or on increasing their time allotment if such courses are already offered. Industrialist, agriculturists, artists, linguists, and other groups would have a similar demand. As a matter of fact, there were petitions presented for the inclusion in the curriculum of such courses as aviation, laws on taxation, cooperatives, etc. Now, the question is shall we adopt a curriculum to meet the demands of vested interests or the demands of the school population?

Then, again, we have curriculum-making by legislation. On this subject we quote an editorial of the Filipino Teachers of June, 1957 written by Dr. Cecilio Putong, former Secretary of Education and easily one of the outstanding Filipino educators of our day:

"Of late there seems to be a tendency on the part of our Congress to take the initiative in the matter of prescribing specific subjects as part of the curriculum in our schools and colleges. While at first blush this tendency would seem to be all good, showing as it does seem to show, that our lawmakers are keenly interested in the problems of education in this country, yet a second thought would make one wonder whether this practice is pedagogically sound. It is feared that the practice, if continued, will expose our curriculum to the danger resulting from pressures coming from organizations with certain particular interests to promote. There should be no objection to having Congress formulate the broad policies of education, as it did when it approved Republic Act No. 896, declaring the national policy of elementary education in this country. After all, because it is made up of the duly elected representatives of the people, Congress can well be the policy-determining body in all matters affecting the welfare of the nation. Therefore no one can justly question its acts when it legis-

lates on the general policies that should be followed in our efforts towards achieving the objectives of education as set forth in our Constitution; namely, that "all schools shall aim to develop moral character, personal discipline, civic conscience, vocational efficiency, and to teach the duties of citizenship."

But when it comes to determining the specific subjects to be prescribed and the instructional materials to be used in order to attain the aims just stated, we submit that, since this is a technical job of no little difficulty, and since it needs conscientious study if it is to be done well, it is properly a function of the Board of National Education and the Department of Education. It is a generally accepted principle of the curriculum development that the curriculum, if it is to be one that is pulsating with life and vigor must be in tight grips with the society for which it is intended. But in order to produce such a curriculum, careful and painstaking research is needed. Among others, the following questions have to be satisfactorily answered; What are the needs of the society to be served? What disciplines, skills, attitudes, and appreciations should be developed by way of satisfying these needs? How may proper balance be secured among the different areas to be covered? What materials, equipment, and teaching aids will facilitate learning?

With due respect to the well-known ability, foresight, and resourcefulness of our legislators, it is our considered opinion that they neither have the time nor the facilities to undertake the studies that are needed in order to find the answers to the foregoing questions. We wish to repeat that the answers are essential to the development of a well-rounded and functional curriculum. On the other hand, the Board of National Education as well as the Department of Education has the technical personnel with the desired cultural background, professional training, and practical experience for this needed research. Therefore, in the interest of a living and balanced curriculum for our student population and as a matter of sound educational policy, we wish to suggest that this important task of working out the curriculum of our schools and colleges be left to the educational authorities concerned."

The difficulty that the Department of Education confronted in implementing the Spanish law confirms the views of Dr. Putong.

And paradoxical as it may seem, the teachers themselves are not passive in their bid for a preferential place in the curriculum of their respective subjects. Years before the outbreak of the last war, the writer proposed a general revision of the normal school curriculum with a view to affecting an integration of allied professional courses and of giving greater emphasis to the content subjects, to the prospective teachers' stock-in-trade. The proposal did not prosper for the simple reason that it would throw out of

gear or out of the service the teachers affected by the change. Thus the teachers themselves constitute a vested interest equally potent in deterring a sound curriculum development as the other vested interests. It is sad to admit that there are teachers particularly the subject matter specialists, who do not see our educational program in its totality. According to their field of specialization they see only the trees, as it were, but not the forest. Befogged by deep-seated biases they tend to be more for what is novel and spectacular, for what would give them name and prestige than for what is crucial and fundamental.

We are not saying that the claims of these vested interests have no merit. But to take care of all their diverse claims will require very much longer time of schooling on the part of our children and youth. Thus the selection of courses to be included in the curriculum and the allocation of time allotments for these courses should be strictly on the basis of urgency and cruciality, the relative importance of such courses, and their relevance to the students' chosen career or occupation. It is believed that the use of other criteria, would in all likelihood, produce a curriculum that is overcrowded, unbalanced, lop-sided, and a curriculum without sequence and continuity of its component courses, in short, a hodge-podge curriculum.

*Curriculum Reconstruction, A Challenge to Teachers:* Then, again, it seems to be a common belief among teachers and principals, if not among school officials of a higher category that curriculum improvement consists mainly in revising curricular offerings. If in a workshop, for instance, the teachers recommend changes in such offerings and hear nothing more about the recommendations long after the workshop, they get a feeling of futility about making recommendations on curriculum development. But there is really no reason for such sense of frustration.

For the program of curriculum improvement goes much further than making changes in the offerings. The offerings may remain unchanged for years on end, but curriculum improvement can take place nevertheless. Yes, it does take place. It takes place in the classroom, in the school premises, in the community. The classroom teacher can be a dynamic factor to curriculum improvement if he continually adjusts what he teaches to the pulsating realities of life around him.

The curriculum of the community school is developed around personal and social problems that occur in the daily experiences of the children. These problems may grow out of actual situations in the school, home, neighborhood, and other places. As long as the teachers build the curriculum around these problems in relation to the subject matter they are teaching; as long as they believe, as do all great souls, that the world around us is God's workshop for men, they are exercising a very important role in curriculum development.

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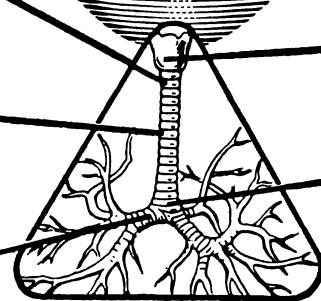
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