

Curriculum Landscapes and Trends

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10 SOCIAL AND POLITICAL FACTORS IN THE PROCESS OF CURRICULUM CHANGE

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10.1 INTRODUCTION

Effective educational provisions and curricula are not basically the result of processes of design and construction, but in essence the product of effective negotiation. Successful curriculum designers are above all competent social engineers. They skilfully manage the social enterprise of educational decision-making (Kessels, 1999).

In this chapter we describe a number of social and political factors that play an important role in curriculum reform processes. In processes of curriculum change the designers mostly focus on the internal consistency of what they consider as their product. However, in major and delicate processes of change and reform, effective negotiation and deliberation are more important in order to reach so-called external consistency, i.e. homogeneity of notions of parties involved on what the problem is and how it should be solved by educational provisions (Kessels, 1993). Social and political engineering is an essential skill or attitude for a competent curriculum designer. In suchlike situations a relational approach is a suitably strategy. This approach is illustrated on the basis of the delicate process of introducing a set of core objectives in primary education in the Netherlands. Delicate, because of the traditional feature of freedom that has dominated the social and the political agenda for nearly a century. We will mention briefly some issues related to comparable developments in secondary education with regard to large-scale innovations. Finally, a reference is made to a large study conducted in the field of corporate

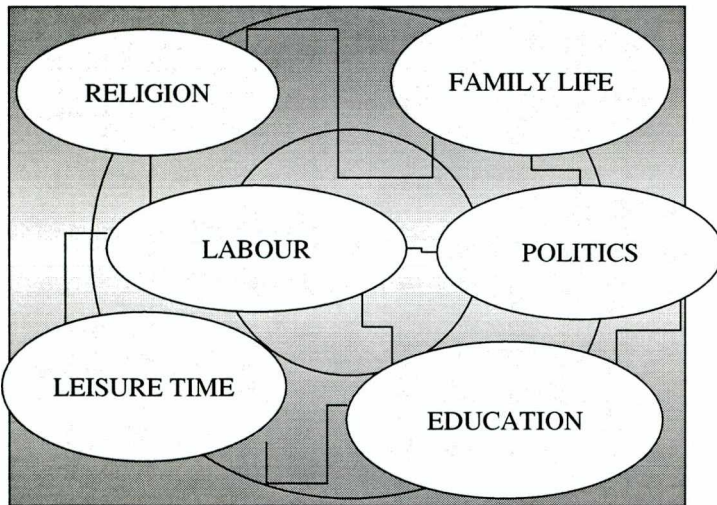
education. In that study, competencies of successful curriculum designers were investigated while applying a relational approach. This relational approach may also offer assistance when solving problems in school reform.

10.2 EDUCATION: A SYSTEM IN A SOCIAL-POLITICAL NETWORK

Social life takes place in different circles or systems (see Figure 10.1). A 'circle' is defined as the relative independency of a set of social phenomena. The concept 'system' reflects the relatively stable connections between phenomena within a circle. Each circle has its own history, its own rules, its private values and belief system, its own language, its own frame of reference, its own atmosphere, its own behaviour pattern, its own customs and habits. On the other side, each of these circles or systems does not act on its own. They are interrelated and interwoven. Examples of circles are politics, religion, labour, family life, leisure time and education.

In terms of personal or collective relevance, not all systems operate in equal ways, neither objectively nor subjectively. To many people the world of labour is very important. Having a satisfying job with a great personal and social relevance is one of those subjective standards on the basis of which the importance of a system in a network can be judged. Besides personal and subjective views on the relative importance of a circle within the social network, this relevancy can be judged by more objective standards and measurements, for instance the amount of time people spend on activities in different circles. The personal or collective importance of a system in the social network, measured by objective or subjective standards, will change over time. For instance, this is the case with religion.

Personal perspective



Societal perspective

Figure 10.1. Education as a system in the social and political network

What about the role of the educational system in the sociological drifting and strongly political influenced network? In medieval times education in school was a privilege for the happy few (priests and nobility). Later, in the century of Enlightenment and influenced by industrial, social and political revolutions, education (for all) was seen as the vehicle to get a (morally) better society. One could say that the educational circle drifted from the periphery of the network to the centre, whereas the religious system moved from the centre to the periphery. At the moment, in many countries and societies education has a rather central position in the societal cobweb. But even in our days the religious or the political systems still play dominant roles. In some countries educational goals at school are completely derived from religious convictions. In other countries national and political goals fully determine the curriculum at school.

To summarize, at the beginning of the 21st century in many countries the educational system is still in the centre of the social network of interrelated and interconnected systems. Developments in the political, technological, religious or whatever other field have their impact on the relative position of education within the network. Formal education at school - although being itself a rather stable (some will say: rigid) social system - is constantly on

the move. The curriculum is the mirror of changing beliefs and opinions (Boland & Letschert, 1995).

10.3 DRIVING FORCES IN CURRICULUM POLICY

Curriculum policy in our times is not an exclusive or internal educational issue, but strongly related to social, political and economical factors (Skilbeck, 1989, 1990; Slattery, 1995). Also, curriculum policy has close relations with contemporary trends like: internationalization, developments in technology, changes in the labour market, increasing cultural diversity, neo-liberal visions on management and administration, increase of social disparity. Besides that, curriculum policy is subjected to the influence of pressure groups (Leune, 1997). Factors, trends and pressure from outside the direct sphere of influence in education are influential in decision-making processes about what are relevant aims and contents in education. Curriculum policy affects those who are directly involved in education, professional organizations and issue-oriented organizations (Walker, 1990). Walker describes two distinct ways to describe how these actors may influence the curriculum. Under normal conditions incremental policy-making (state and local officials and top-level educational administrators) play the crucial decision-making roles. However, in crisis policy-making ordinary procedures are swept aside by organized national curriculum reform movements, initiated by advocates of a particular curriculum reform. In crisis policy-making the actors and arenas shift unpredictably, depending on the nature of the perceived crisis and the coalition that forms in support of the reform. To be successful, Walker states that the reform movement must get its message into the major national channels of communication.

Increasing coherence between (mainly western oriented) views of policymakers about educational approaches or perspectives, the economic possibilities or constraints, as well as moving expectations and pressure from society, are main forces in the processes of establishing and changing educational policy. The curriculum developer and the responsible policy-makers in the process of establishing curricula need the skills of experienced negotiators. Besides, they need a clear view on the different levels of curricula and the expected impact of their proposals at that level. Curriculum is a multi-layered concept (Goodlad, 1979; Kuiper, 1993; van den Akker, 1988). Curriculum policy, decisions and instrumentation are connected to the specific level and they ask for their own processes of construction and deliberation.

10.4 CURRICULUM REPRESENTATIONS

There are three education or curriculum levels to distinguish: macro (system), meso (school), and micro (class or group). A curriculum at macro level is for instance a national curriculum, or a set of core objectives for one type of school. A curriculum at meso level is a plan for a school or a group of schools, for instance under the supervision of a general board (van den Akker & Letschert, 2000). A curriculum at micro level can be a textbook or lesson plan for a certain age group or an adaptation to the needs of an individual child. At one school different layers can exist at the same time. Expectations about the effect or level of specific content can be mistaken if it is not sufficiently clear to what level they are related. Based on the functions and users, Goodlad (1979) mentions five curriculum representations:

- ideal curriculum: the curriculum conform the original views of developers;
- formal curriculum: the curriculum in formal documents;
- perceived curriculum: the curriculum interpreted by the teacher;
- operational curriculum: the curriculum delivered by the teacher;
- experiential curriculum: the curriculum as experienced by pupils/students.

Kuiper (1993) brings elements of different typologies together. He distinguishes the following seven curriculum representations:

- imaginary curriculum: ideal views about education;
- formal or written curriculum, covering four representations: macro documents with a formal status, macro documents without a formal status, documents at meso level (a school policy plan, for instance), and documents at micro level (textbooks, for instance).
- perceived curriculum: teacher's judgment or interpretation of documents;
- operational curriculum: the teaching and learning process at classroom level;
- experienced curriculum: students' learning experiences;
- tested curriculum: assessment instruments (tests);
- learned curriculum: students' learning outcomes.

Three other types can be discerned (Letschert, 1998):

- nostalgic curriculum: Parents idealizing the remembrances of their own education. Such an idealized perception can lead to dissatisfaction about what is experienced at the actual school of their children. This can lead to pressure at the school to change the program or the educational approach.
- hidden curriculum: The curriculum outside the formal framework and related to what is

happening in the relation or climate between teacher and student and between students;

- illegal curriculum: Private initiatives of teachers with concern to (elements of) the content, besides the formal curriculum. Formal content can be pushed aside by those private initiatives.

10.5 FOCI OF EDUCATION

In the curriculum domain, the selection of content is an important and challenging issue. From the history of education, from political and public debates and from newspapers, one can infer that the expectations of education are not always in line with each other and are very much connected to the spirit of the times. Egan (1997) speaks in this respect about three main significant educational ideas. Summarized, he states that education has to fulfil (in his view incompatible) tasks to shape the young to the current norms and conventions of adult society, to teach the young the knowledge that will ensure that their thinking conforms with what is real and true about the world, and to encourage the young to develop their unique and individual potential.

This threefold assignment, we like to speak about a 'teaching trilemma' (Letschert, 2000; see Figure 10.2), is mentioned by others too, some times elaborated in other ways. Richards (1999) distinguishes 'liberal romanticism' as a process-based ideology in which the unfolding or unlocking of the child's potential is the main focus. Barber (1996) and Skilbeck (1976) call this a 'progressive tradition'. The curriculum can best be seen from this perspective as a set of opportunities or experiences, rather than a clearly defined set of knowledge or skills. 'Educational conservatism', in the meaning that Richards uses, is the approach in which the importance of continuity with the past has been stressed. He speaks of the curriculum as a repository of worthwhile cultural elements which need transmitting from one generation to another. Skilbeck (1976) uses the concept of 'classical humanism' for this approach or ideology. Barber speaks of a 'liberal-humanist tradition', which he considers the most important approach over the last century. This approach aims at historical consciousness, understanding, and continuity in development. This understanding is divided into a series of disciplines and grounded in a Neo-Cartesian *Weltanschauung*. The impact of this approach has shaped the curriculum in a knowledge-centred structure, based on domain specific subjects. 'Social democracy', the third category distinguished by Richards, is the approach that views the curriculum as a means towards realizing social justice and focused around the social experience of students. Relevance is a key word. Barber speaks of the importance of a cultural analysis in this respect. Skilbeck (1976) is using the term 'reconstructionism'. Education is not only meant for individuals, but also for

the well-being and for the development of society as a whole. Richards adds 'Liberal pragmatism' as label, denoting a kind of reservoir in which elements of the other three approaches can be discovered.

TEACHING TRILEMMA

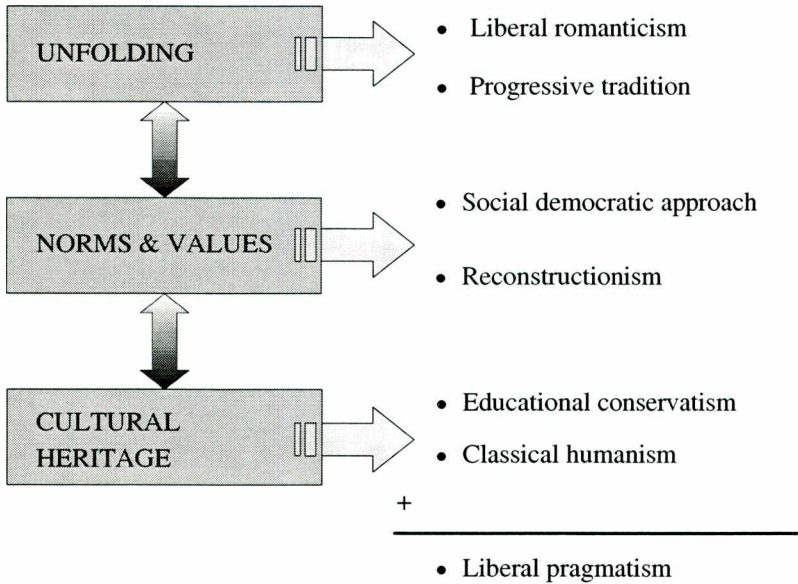


Figure 10.2. Teaching trilemma

10.6 SOURCES FOR CURRICULUM CONTENT

In the curriculum design process, having successfully negotiated about the accents that are acceptable within the composing elements of the pedagogical trilemma, and having a clear view of the curricular level that is being approached, the designers are facing more decisions, for example, with regard to the selection of sources for curricular content. There is an ambiguous relationship between the issues raised above and curricular content. In fact, the process of matching contents with principles and views is a rather arbitrarily and negotiable process.

The actual courses available in Dutch education reflect the traditional scientific

disciplines that for a long time have been taught at university level. In the past, a variety of other ways of structuring have been proposed to derive educational content from domains of knowledge and experiences. Instead of taking scientific domains as a starting point for curriculum content, in formal education and specifically in vocational education interest is growing for an analysis of competencies to be developed. The Dutch sociologist Blom (1997) holds a plea for an arrangement of domains based on main sources for cultural intelligence. She distinguishes the linguistic-literate domain, the social-economic domain, the science domain, the technologic-motoric domain, the mathematical-logical domain, the artistic domain and the historical-philosophical domain. She states that this arrangement is recognizable from a cultural-historical perspective and that it covers the traditional content of subjects. There is a relationship with the division of intelligence distinguished by the American psychologist Gardner. Gardner (1983) speaks of seven forms of intelligence: linguistic, logical-mathematic, spatial, artistic, motoric, social, and self-knowledge-based.

The Dutch pedagogue Dasberg (1996) connects five essences of human being (collective memory, morality, language, critical capability, and creativity) with seven essences of the curriculum (history, language, science, mathematics, geography, arts, and morality). She speaks in this respect about 'permanent building stones of humanity' and she warns for a move up of what she calls 'so-called social-relevant subjects'. The American Hirsch (1987, 1989) uses as sources for content for the curriculum a cultural-analytic approach. He tries to catch basic knowledge (cultural literacy) in a kind of encyclopaedic structure. Another approach, based on social-theoretical views, has been undertaken by the German researcher Derbolav, who promotes a systemic division of social practice in what he calls areas of practice (Derbolav, 1975). Derbolav uses a very explicit and normative anthropology.

There are more examples of analyses of reality and existence with consequences for the choice and disposition of curricular content. Lawton (1989) analyses nine cultural variables. He distinguishes: the socio-political system; the economic system; the communication system; the system of rationalizing, the technological system; the moral system; the system of beliefs about human existence; the ethical system and the system related to the growth to adulthood. In this approach the instrumental, the cultural and the pedagogical perspectives are integrated. In Norway, a consecutive curriculum proposal is based on the analysis of ways of being, the Christian philosophy of life being very directive in this approach (Hernes, 1994).

This is not an exhaustive survey. Many others attempts have been undertaken and

certainly will in the near future. Nevertheless, the academic subjects have been so familiar for so many generations that they might tend to seem more works of nature than of humanity (Walker, 1990). None of approaches, analyses, variables and arrangements generate in a direct line curricular content. What they do is giving some sight on important accents, possible coherence in organizing principles with respect to knowledge and development. The choice and priorities are still an arbitrary process, based on private preferences, values and norms, and philosophies of life.

10.7 DUTCH CASE

In this section the deliberative process of curriculum development is exemplified using a case that pertains to the genesis of a set of core objectives for primary education in the Netherlands. The case is meant as an illustration of the tension between, on the one hand, striving for internal curriculum consistency and, on the other hand, dealing with pressure from various actors having or demanding an influential role in the process van curriculum development.

Core objectives

The development, establishing and implementation of core objectives in Dutch primary education is an example of a policy act from the side of the central government. The various stages in this policy process can be considered as a power game between several actors involved, fed by values, norms and beliefs (Walker, 1990). Outcomes of educational policy are the result of a temporarily consent between sometimes contradictory (groups of) interests (Wielemans, 1997). The forces of power are playing at several societal and political levels. However, these forces are most recognizable at the institutional level. In the Netherlands, education policy can be designated as a 'corporatistic' policy (van Wieringen, 1996). He points at a system of functional representation, in which accepted interest groups become also responsible for carrying out the policy. In that respect they are integrated as it were, in the public domain and forced in that way to interpret their perspective less private.

The intention of the central government to establish core objectives can be regarded as a very unconventional act. Historical and cultural freedom of schools to set educational objectives is secured in the constitution and is a special feature of Dutch education. In the Netherlands, citizens have the freedom and right to set up schools based on their own religious conviction, principles, or their educational or pedagogical views and preferences. The result of this is that there is a wide range of schools parents can choose from for their

children. In view of the constitutional right of choice of concept and organization of education, it is hardly surprising that the Primary Education Act offers schools a large amount of freedom with regard to the content of education. For a long time only the name of subjects or cross-curricular issues have been mentioned. What should be taught in those subjects or issues has been hardly indicated by Act. There is no legislation with respect to the amount of time to be devoted to each of the subjects or the textbooks to be used. School curricula exist, but only at a meso level. They are developed by the school itself and are being used as a policy plan for a period of four years.

Especially in the last decades of the 20th century, school curricula came under pressure because of societal and political demands and expectations, and due to scientific and technological developments. From the wide range of possible options schools began to make their own choices. Education in primary schools began to differ more than ever before. In this context a need was felt to define the common core of primary education. After much hesitation the central government took steps that led to more control on the content of primary education. The minister of education commissioned the Netherlands Institute for Curriculum Development (SLO) to start with the development of proposals for a common core in terms of a set of core objectives. After a long and tough process of development and validation, the first generation of core objectives was set in 1993. It consisted of 122 objectives, derived from a first draft of 464 objectives in 1988. This considerable reduction has to do with the delicacy of the issue in Dutch society and political environment. When the decision is made to define a common core, the core should be fairly open to offer schools opportunities for an own interpretation. In fact this is result of negotiation and compromises, a peculiarity in the Dutch education policy. The objectives were set to be valid for at least five years. Core objectives were defined as descriptions of knowledge, insights and skills that should be offered to all pupils in Dutch primary education. The structure of the objectives followed the general indications of the educational content, described in the Primary Education Act.

Immediately after their determination the core objectives were heavily criticized. The main criticism was that schools could not cope with the demands because of the overload of the whole set and their ambitious nature. Already in 1995 SLO was asked by the minister to give an advise on how to revise the first generation of core objectives, taking into account the criticism. The result of the assignment was a report with proposals for 92 core objectives, clustered in a more homogeneous set. After some refinements, the proposals came into force in August 1998.

The pressure from society to pick up specific areas as a field of attention in education is

recognizable. Topics like technology and environmental studies are based on a societal interest in these issues and on problems society has to deal with. Another example of societal pressure on the curriculum is the addition of so-called cross-curricular core objectives. These are objectives aiming at the development or enhancement of generic skills. Therefore, they are not to be included in the specific subject matter areas. For instance: attitude to work, working according to plan, use of different learning strategies, self-image, and social behaviour. These objectives pertain to the whole of the educational offering in primary education. They are based on expectations society has on the impact of primary schooling. At the same time they are a tribute to the advocates of a more process-based approach to teaching and learning.

Besides lots of positive responses to the new objectives, many negative reactions could be observed as well. Criticism reflected the different views about the main purposes of education and the views on the role of the central government. More than ever before in the process of defining a common core curriculum, broad groups in society took interest in the issue. The debate focused at:

- the vague character of the objectives versus a wish to be more precise (for some groups the influence on the content of education was strong enough now; however, for others, like the influential Education Council in the Netherlands, the general character of the core objectives was a main point of criticism);
- the broadness of the common content versus a wish for less, more intensified content;
- the expected overload due to the need to meet a great variety of wishes of groups in society, subject matter specialists and political demands.

During the whole process of development and revision of a common educational content for primary education in the Netherlands the debate concentrated on five questions, in which the issues above are included:

- What should be the function of a common core and who are the owners (*functions*)? For instance, is the school the main owner, or is it society wanting to articulate demands to the school?
- Taking into account the delicate balance in the Dutch political climate, is the central government authorized and entitled, within the Constitution, to make more or less precise demands relating to the content of education (*legitimacy*)?
- What can be considered as sources of educational content (*sources*)? In other words, can the traditional subjects be considered as the main suppliers of educational content, or are there other, and possibly more relevant, topics to pay attention to?
- Should the agreed educational content be defined as precisely as possible or should it be

presented in a more general way (*design*)?

- Who are the actors and which procedures are most effective for developing, validating and legislating educational content (*procedures*)?

Motives used in the deliberative process

Research on curriculum changes on the policy level in Dutch primary education (Letschert, 1998) amongst people concerned on different levels of education (teachers, policy-makers, inspectors, publishers, curriculum officers, politicians) offered empirical data on the following motives used in the debate about the change in curriculum policy. These motives range from a rather liberal view into a more centralized way:

- *A turn in the strategy of the management*

Since the 1970s there is a tendency to deregulation and more autonomy, especially to the financial and logistic aspects of school management. At the same time, there is a growing need for more intensive central grip on the development of quality.

- *Destabilization of the curricular content*

The need for more central grip arises from the pressure on the curriculum stemming from powers in society and developments in subject areas. This leads to an overflow of cross-curricular issues to be addressed in the curriculum. For a long time subject content was rather stable. Caused by the explosive accessibility of information and the expanding availability of bearers of information (new media), the curriculum destabilizes.

- *Clear goals improve effective education*

Results from research on the effectiveness of education stress the importance of the formulation of clear goals.

- *International tendency*

There is an international tendency to the development and establishment of core curricula. In the Netherlands this tendency has been followed just as far as the development of core objectives is concerned.

- *Minor expectations and disappointments of the steering power of the school curriculum at the meso level*

The so-called 'school work plan' (a curriculum document at the meso level) does not satisfy the need for an instrument to stimulate the quality of neither individual schools nor education in general (van den Akker & Letschert, 2000).

- *Professionalism and pragmatism approaches to education*

Sensitiveness to the freedom of choice and arrangement of the content of education, having its roots in former centuries in the Netherlands, is changing gradually into a more professional and pragmatic approach.

- *Availability of an educational support structure*

An educational support structure has been developed with qualities and conditions to develop a common core and to support its implementation.

- *Political shifts*

The influential power of the Christian Democratic Party - an important herdsman of the freedom of education - fades to some extent. In the social-democratic thinking there has been a change in the expectations of the possible effects of a common core, especially with regard to children with disadvantaged backgrounds. Initially there was reservation because of the fear that core objectives could work out in a selective way, especially for children with poor social backgrounds and learning difficulties. Later on the insight was growing that clear and ambitious goals could be in the interest of these children.

- *Increasing commitment of parents*

The commitment of parents to especially primary education is growing. In general, there is growing interest in primary education in society. This stimulates the desire of various actors to have better insight in the content and to be involved in the main decisions about the determination of the common core.

At this very moment there is a public debate (based on publications in national newspapers of the results of the Education's Inspectorate reviews of schools) on the quality of Dutch primary education. There is great concern about the quality of education, especially in the so-called mainly black schools, i.e. schools with many pupils from ethnic minorities. There have been major changes in the composition of the school population during the last decades. In 1975, only 30,000 pupils from ethnic minorities (mainly from Mediterranean countries) participated in primary education, which was less than 1.5% of the whole population. In 1996/1997 that percentage had raised till 13.5%. With 90% of these children educational disadvantages can be observed. From the 200,000 children from ethnic minority groups who visited primary education in 1996/1997, 45% has a Turkish or Moroccan and 24% a Suriname or Antillean background. The number of children with an ethnic background increased especially in the big cities. In the four biggest cities in the Netherlands ethnic pupils form 40% till 50% of the average school population (Bronneman-Helmers & Taes, 1999).

The main issue in the public debate is about the question whether it is desirable to set very specified standards for language teaching (much more elaborated than stated in the core objectives) and increase the time for language teaching, at the expense of other curricular areas.

Large-scale innovations in other education sectors

Of course, the question of how to deal with important changes in the structure, organization and content of education does not only pertain to primary education. At the lower secondary educational level (basic education) initiatives were taken as well to develop a common core curriculum for the lower secondary level (see also the preceding chapter by Terwel, Volman & Wardekker). Also this curriculum reform nicely illustrates the inextricable coherence and interplay between internal and external curriculum consistency. It exemplifies that here is a certain tension between the demands of society, the wishes of policy-makers and the aspirations or ambitions of subject matter specialists. Finding a balance is the assignment. Other examples are the restructuring operation in the field of pre-vocational education (including the organization of so-called educational routes) and the reform that is currently taking place at upper secondary level, the so-called Studyhouse (see van den Akker's chapter 5 in this volume as well the preceding chapter by Terwel et al.). As far as the latter innovation is concerned, arguments have to do with the assumption of life-long learning. Formal education, organized in the setting of a school and a school system, is just a phase in the learning cycle of people. Education has to prepare pupils at their ongoing learning task. Meta-cognitive skills are as, or even more, important as traditional content. Competencies in making choices in the nearly uncontrolled flow of information of our information society, related to the context in which the information can be used, are a condition for the construction of meaningful knowledge. The increasing acceptance of differences in development between pupils forces the school to deal with those differences. Traditional grouping and whole-class instruction are no longer the obvious approaches in that respect.

10.8 A RELATIONAL APPROACH***Characteristics and competencies***

Dealing with large-scale innovations and the development of curriculum proposals, and in particular dealing with the discussion of the specific demands of a growing population of varied ethnic backgrounds, requires competencies of curriculum designers that go far beyond the systematic approach of analysis and construction. The traditional systematic approach to curriculum design, based on rational and logic step by step procedures by a curriculum designer that are aimed to lead towards the selection and internally consistent arrangement of objectives, content and learning experiences and the like, needs to be integrated in a relational approach. A relational approach provides activities that encourage the various stakeholders to become involved in the design and implementation of a program.

This section discusses the main characteristics of a relational approach. Although the

research basis is found in the domain of corporate education (Kessels & Plomp, 1999), the proposed integrated approach to curriculum design might also evoke a dialogue on improved design approaches in the domain of public education. The relational approach provides activities that challenge stakeholders to become involved in the design and implementation process and that reveal their perceptions of what the central goal is and how it can be achieved. The assumption is that if the mutual perceptions are made explicit, they can be modified and slowly become compatible. When skilfully applied, the relational approach leads to a strong external consistency: consensus among parties involved on methods of solving the problem, and creating favourable conditions for implementing the program.

Gay (1986, pp. 471-472) states that curriculum affairs involve issues of power, people, procedures and participation: "Curriculum development is a social enterprise. It is a 'people process' with all the attending potentialities and obstacles associated with humans engaged in social interactions. The interests, values, ideologies, priorities, role functions, and differentiated responsibilities form the contours of the interactional and dynamic context in which curriculum decisions are made. Curriculum development is neither a purely rational and scientifically objective, nor a neatly sequentialized and systematic process." Unlike the systematic approach with its clear and rigorous logic, the relational approach may often seem fuzzy, using informal networks, balancing power and influence, and striving for consensus within the limits of culturally determined feasibility (Duncan & Powers, 1992). Political awareness, cultivating support, developing relationships and gaining visibility seem to be ingredients of this aspect of curriculum design (Warshauer, 1988).

Many sources offer analyses of the competencies professionals should dispose of when applying a relational approach. The most salient competencies are listed below:

- Communication skills: listening, observing, interviewing, relating to others, self-expression and exchanging constructive feedback.
- Project management skills: leadership and chairperson skills, planning, monitoring and negotiating skills.
- Consulting skills: building open collaborative relationships, clarifying mutual expectations and responsibilities, and the ability to influence others and gain commitment.
- Facilitating change: encouraging widespread participation in the design and implementation of a project, and dealing with friction and resistance.
- Experimental flexibility, self-insight and self-esteem.
- Ability to create an atmosphere of tact, trust, politeness, friendliness and stability.

The competencies for a relational approach facilitate the developer's activities in the

domain of interpersonal dynamics of decision-making about educational planning. The relational approach involves social intervention and skilled communicative interaction. The developer organizes meetings and interviews stakeholders. These procedures entail consulting with concerned parties, problem solving, negotiating, reaching a consensus, gaining support, and strategically applying gentle pushes and decisive pulls. The goal of these efforts is to achieve a consensus among parties involved on methods of solving the problem, implementing the program, and creating favourable conditions for implementation (Kessels & Plomp, 1999).

Project management

Project management is a widely accepted form of planning and control. Some times it is seen as an administrative process of allocating resources, monitoring costs and ensuring conformity to time lines and specifications. In the context of the relational approach it should be seen as an interpersonal process that manages relationships through such actions as making sure the right people are involved in the right way, and adopting a style that conforms to the need or preferences of the people involved (Jackson & Addison, 1992). Project management is important not only for planning and control reasons, but also for disseminating innovative ideas on corporate education in general and program features in particular among important stakeholders. In many organizations project management is an accepted strategy, if not a *conditio sine qua non*, for research, development and marketing activities. Therefore, it is recommended for educational program design that a strategy similar to the one the organization is acquainted with is adopted, as it facilitates the acceptance of the idea that curriculum development can be treated as just a normal project.

Common project functions comprise planning, scheduling and control, and will recur during the different phases of a project. Although labels may differ, phases referred to here comprise: preliminary inquiry, design, construction, test and revision, and implementation (Plomp, 1982):

- Preliminary inquiry involves a.o. recruitment of a project leader, assigning the role of principal to one or more executives constituting a project team, needs assessment, stating goals and planning of activities and resources.
- Design involves further analysis, stating objectives and evaluation criteria, and blueprinting the learning environment.
- Construction involves devising instructional strategies, development of supporting materials and delivery system.
- Test and revision involve formative evaluation and revision.
- Implementation involves delivery and assessing effects, evaluation of evolving needs and

adaptation of the instructional and delivery system.

In perspective of the relational approach, project management and the processes it evokes can be regarded as a most important learning process for the organization. The developer, in the project leader's role, is offered many chances to inform participants on contingencies across needs, interventions and outcomes. Essential conditions for successful program implementation and their implications need to be discussed extensively. The project meetings offer abundant opportunities for deliberation (Walker, 1990) and adaptation (Fullan, 1986). The success of the project team largely depends on the competencies of the curriculum developer.

Rapport-building during needs assessment and task analysis

Some elements in the formal curriculum do not depend exclusively on a systematic approach and require a relational approach as well. Here, needs assessment and task analysis need to be mentioned specifically. Mostly, where management has commissioned a training program, the initial problem has already been perceived as a training problem. Subsequently, the developer introduces needs assessment in order to reconsider these assumptions. Whether management is prepared to support the upheaval of time consuming needs assessment depends largely on the image of the training function in general and on the credibility of the developer in particular. Turning needs assessment and task analysis into a process of deliberation requires consulting skills from the developer, so that he or she may adequately play the role of change agent. Activities of such nature require other competencies from the developer over and above mere skilful application of data collection techniques and logic reasoning.

Moreover, task analysis is not just a meticulous process of determining how things are done and should be done. It is also establishing a rapport. The positive and non-threatening climate during the data collection process is of great value regarding the quality of the information sought. The nature of the established relationships with management, employees and clients during needs assessment and task analysis are of pre-eminent importance for successful implementation, which starts here, right from the initial phase of the development process (Plomp, 1982).

10.9 CONCLUSION

The dynamics of the systematic and relational approach have been examined in the design of 31 corporate education programs. Moreover, the application of these approaches was related to the perceived effects of these programs. The research design and the methodological aspects of this study have been described in Kessels and Plomp (1999).

The application of these relational design principles should be applied in a systematic way, but emphasis would primarily be put on the dynamics of the interactional context of curriculum design. The findings of the present study justify the conclusion that in striving for quality in (corporate) education a relational approach should be a high priority. As a consequence, design standards that strive for an internal, rigid logic, but meanwhile hinder the integration of the actors' interests, values, beliefs and priorities (external consistency), should be abolished and replaced by mainly intervention strategies focusing on the interpersonal dynamics of educational decision-making: procedures that aim at reaching a consensus on the practical implications of the above mentioned alternative design principles. In particular, professional curriculum designers should be alerted not to focus unilaterally on the structured and internally consistent formal curriculum.

Curriculum development should be regarded, more than up till now, as a social enterprise. Therefore, developers should elaborate on their management role within that social enterprise of the educational decision-making process. Effective educational provisions are not constructed, but negotiated. Therefore, successful curriculum designers are above all competent social engineers, who skilfully manage the social enterprise of educational decision-making.

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