

Chapter Five

Directing Curriculum Development

Centralization is a characteristic feature of most educational systems in small states. This is rarely ideological but results from the limited availability of human, physical and financial resources. Centralization makes it economically viable to provide services with minimum wastage and to develop expertise without duplication. However, too centralized a system restrains individual initiative, inhibits variety of approach and discourages adaptations that are best suited to specific local needs which may vary, even in a small state, and especially in multi-island countries.

Senior education administrators in small states, whose many functions may include responsibility for curriculum development in one or several subject areas, have to balance in a pragmatic way the

Defining the Curriculum

The handbook, "Leadership in the Management of Education" (1981) published by the Commonwealth Secretariat, defines the curriculum as:

The whole complex of planned courses and learning experiences which are provided by the school. It includes not only details of course content but also the proposed learning strategies, the study materials — whether centrally supplied and/or developed at the school — and even the extra-curricular activities, in so far as they are designed to supplement and complement, influence and reinforce the learning process.

— To what extent do you agree that:

- The curriculum is a set of aims, carried out through educational processes, to achieve predicted outcomes?
- The curriculum is a structure of forms and fields of knowledge as well as a chart of local culture?

regulations imposed by central administration with the requirements demanded by local conditions.

This chapter deals with the merits and limitations of setting curricula centrally, points to the benefits and pitfalls of school developed syllabi, and makes a case for continuous professional development of educators through collegial collaboration in curriculum design and implementation. This chapter is aimed more at senior officials directly involved in the educational process than those providing administrative support services. It is important, however, that the latter are fully aware of the major administrative issues and problems related to curriculum development and implementation for their support too renders curriculum development effective. The opposite is also true.

Centrally-Set Curricula

National curriculum aims and objectives in small states are usually centrally set and established. However, curriculum implementation is dynamic, it needs to be reviewed and re-evaluated periodically to reflect changing local requirements and national aspirations. A vibrant, rather than an inert, curriculum incorporates developments in subject contents and pedagogical strategies that evolve out of the interests and needs of students. For example, a vocationally oriented curriculum may have centrally set aims. However, its implementation will vary according to rural or industrialized localities. Even when distances are small and travelling fairly easy, the emphasis on one type of curriculum orientation can make a great difference on whether teaching content and methods are regarded as relevant and therefore credible, or whether they are considered as irrelevant and consequently are ignored or sabotaged.

In their quest for locally developed curricula, small states have to balance the requirements of national needs with the demands of the international market-place. On one hand, local educators have to cater for the specific requirements of the indigenous student population and at the same time provide students with academic qualifications that have credence and validity outside their country. Indeed, many inhabitants of small states insist that local certificates are under-written by well established foreign institutions to ensure international recognition. The pressure is felt strongest in small states where emigration is heavy and where students have to seek higher education in metropolitan centres. In such cases, local schools have often been

compelled to adopt the curricula and examination certification of the receiving countries.

Senior education administrators have to guard against the likely situation where economic dependence leads to educational and cultural dependency. One method to limit dependency is to develop and maintain a system of examinations which persistently ensures standards that conform to internationally accepted norms and is void of corruption. Such a system, in turn, depends on the ability of local educators to develop curricula that respond to international developments and innovations in educational content and pedagogy. Otherwise the danger of dependency is replaced by the equally potent risk of underdevelopment or stagnation.

The Senior Education Administrator's Roles in Curriculum Development

As part of their multi-faceted and multi-functional roles, senior education administrators become involved in one or more of the following aspects of curriculum development:

- a. As leading education officials who initiate curriculum debates, set and revise educational aims and objectives, and encourage follow-up action by subordinates.
- b. As consultants, co-ordinators and facilitators of academic activities, who provide advice, encouragement and assistance not only on the basis of their high official position but also as knowledgeable educators who are in touch with curriculum development research.
- c. As controllers of financial, material and human resources, who ensure that the right people have sufficient support services to carry out curriculum development activities fully and efficiently.
- d. As evaluators who inspect, assess, act as mentors and urge subordinates to ensure that relevant curricular projects are initiated and completed to fulfil identified educational objectives.

In these tasks, senior education administrators may find themselves in a more favourable position than their counterparts in larger states. Direct involvement in many sectors of the educational system and personal knowledge of the people involved make it easier for them to be aware of the special curricular requirements of schools, of the capabilities of the teachers concerned, and of the limitations of the resources available. In contrast, "curriculum developers" in large states may face the danger of working in the isolation of institutions that are removed from the chalk-face. Even if they are fully conversant

with the latest research in the theory and practice of curriculum development, senior officials in large states may not be as fully aware of the needs, capabilities and limitations of the individual schools as their colleagues in small states who are forced into close interaction with the schools and teachers in their care.

Decentralizing Curriculum Development

One effective method to minimize the possible ill-effects of a highly centralized educational system and of a highly prescriptive curriculum, is to encourage schools to develop local variations which conform with the aims and objectives embodied in the national curriculum framework. Senior education officials must remember, however, that school-based curriculum development assumes a significant degree of autonomy and local initiative, allowing for free discussion among groups of professional teachers. These are encouraged to develop an ability and willingness to participate actively in the establishment of their own teaching and learning objectives, in the design, the implementation and the assessment of instructional strategies. They are encouraged to review and revise their teaching content and methods according to their pupils' actual needs, wants and circumstances.

This approach to curriculum development leads to some very concrete advantages.

- a. It introduces local relevance and immediacy to teaching and learning content and pedagogy which a centrally imposed curriculum may lack;
- b. It introduces a strong measure of vocational pride and a feeling of worth among teachers who come to regard themselves as trusted professionals capable of participating in the academic and administrative decision-making process;
- c. It relieves the hard-pressed senior education administrators from attempting to perform an impossible task. As stressed repeatedly, senior education administrators with their multiple and demanding functions, may find it extremely difficult to become involved in the detailed aspects of curriculum development, and even more difficult to supervise its implementation at the school level.

By relinquishing a measure of direct control to teachers' collegial support and supervision, senior education administrators will be emphasising their leadership function. The bringing together of

education officers and classroom practitioners into curriculum development teams for the various subjects areas will help the system (a) to draw upon the widespread competences of the teaching staff, and (b) to encourage greater teacher participation and self-regulation.

Peer-Group Reinforcement

The professional development of teachers can be provided by colleagues or peers, administrators, or external resource consultants. Joyce and Showers (1982) suggest that the process is more effective when it is performed by teams of teachers working together to study new approaches to teaching (Showers, 1985) — a suggestion also confirmed by the study of Sparks (1986), who found that peer observation was a more productive form of training than using trainers. Watching a colleague teach was a powerful learning experience which helped teachers analyze their own behaviour more accurately and enabled them to make more significant changes later to their own teaching. Peer-observation also created a heightened sense of trust and esteem among group members. Implementation studies also pinpoint the importance of regular interaction among peers to stimulate and institutionalize a new positive practice (Fullan, 1982).

Tillema, H. H. and Veenman, S.A.M., (1987), "Conceptualizing training methods in teacher education", *International Journal of Educational Research*, Vol. 11, No. 5.

— Do you think that the involvement of the average teacher could contribute to curriculum development projects? If you do, how would you ensure that their involvement is secured?

— To what extent do you feel that the above arguments apply also to the professional development of administrative, non-teaching, personnel?

Furthermore, collegial responsibility for curriculum development and its application in teaching and learning strategies can introduce a measure of impersonality. This becomes useful in assessing teachers' work and facilitates the possibility of corrective action and censure without impinging too much on the human element that is so pervasive in small communities. Assessment and censure are not carried out solely on a one-to-one basis, but also in relation to the group activity. Collegial responsibility and control can account for work well-done as well as for failures. Of course, the cause of failure may in certain circumstances be attributed to the negligence or the

shortcomings of a particular individual, but the fact that people work in a group and take collective responsibility often diminishes the personal acrimony that emerges from individual encounters. Of greater significance, the value of working in groups, to develop curriculum projects lies in drawing upon the support of one's colleagues and having the opportunity of learning from and through their collective experiences. Both aspects are of great importance to educators in small states.

Encouraging and developing school-based curriculum development is not easy, especially in educational systems that are accustomed to central control and strict directioning in all academic and administrative procedures. Senior education administrators may, therefore, have to ensure that:

- a. The participatory and collegial style is understood and appreciated by all concerned. Headteachers, for example, would not interpret it as undermining their authority, and teachers would not abuse it as an excuse for laissez-faire or for shifting responsibilities on their colleagues. All those participating in school-based curriculum development must have the will to engage in the exercise through a sense of collaborative team spirit.
- b. The team of teachers will need to include members who have expert knowledge about the subject matter and its pedagogical approaches. Not all members will necessarily contain such expertise, some will have theoretical and research knowhow, others will contribute through their long teaching experience, while others still will invigorate the group with their enthusiasm and willingness to learn.
- c. The local team must be fully aware of the national education aims in order to develop curricula that contribute towards rather than work against the national framework. In this respect, the team will find it useful to consult colleagues in other schools (or other teams) rather than work in isolation. It will be the job of senior education administrators to provide opportunities for liaison, pooling and sharing of experiences through regular regional meetings.
- d. The team will require reasonable ancillary resource and support staff, such as secretarial assistance and technical help to facilitate their work without getting bogged down with administrative and organizational trivialities.

The encouragement of collegial curriculum development (and,

perhaps later, collegial management teams) in schools will allow senior education administrators in small states to develop a much healthier relationship with their teacher colleagues than a curriculum development that is associated with the usually strict central, authoritarian and bureaucratic control. Senior education administrators will find that they are more welcome in schools and into classrooms if teachers regard them as senior professional colleagues. During school visits they will be able to develop new opportunities for an open dialogue with teachers who in turn will find it easier to discuss problems rather than attempt to hide difficulties or try to impress.

* **Individual vs Collective Authority** *

* Concessions must be made in individual autonomy in order to provide a *

* basis for collaborative working, for the school staff can no longer be *

* seen as a federal association of teachers and departments, it must be a *

* professional community. *

* Stenhouse, L. (1975), *An Introduction to Curriculum Research and* *

* *Development*, London, Heinemann. *

* — Will a reduced individual autonomy of the teacher for an increased *

* collaborative approach to curriculum development, enhance or *

* reduce the teacher's claim to professional status? *

* — Do you feel that the same observation applies to the work of non- *

* teaching staff? How would you encourage the spirit of a profes- *

* sional community in an office environment? *

* *****

In a professional but relaxed relationship with their subordinates, senior education administrators will be in a better position to know what actually happens at school. They will be in closer contact with classroom problems and their possible solutions. In a relationship of trusted collaboration with the operators at the grassroots, senior administrators will be in a favourable position to discover and disseminate good educational practice. Indeed, by bringing into curriculum development and implementation the enthusiasm and experience of teachers, small states can discover and exploit to the full their most valued human resources.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES***Activity One:******Plans for a National Workshop***

Suppose you have been instructed to organize a national workshop on one of these themes:

- *Curriculum Innovation: Theory and Practice*
- *Support Services to the Educational System: How can they be improved?*

You are required to provide organizational details based on answers to the following questions grouped under five general headings:

Aims and Objectives

- a. What are the general aims of the workshop?
- b. Which are the specific objectives?
- c. Who are the participants: education officials, senior civil servants, heads of school, teachers, junior staff, others? What numbers (optimum, maximum, minimum) will be accepted?
- d. If the participants constitute a mixture of the above, how many will there be in each category? Will there be participants from the private as well as state education sectors?
- e. On what criteria will the participants be chosen if there are more applicants than places available?

Organization

- f. At what time of the year will it be held: vacation time or work time? If at school time, will teachers/officials be released? Will there be replacement requirements?
- g. Where will the workshop be held?
- h. What time schedule are you planning, allowing for presentation of papers, time for discussion, workshop sessions, opening and closing sessions, lunch breaks, time for informal meetings and relaxation, etc.?
- i. Who will open and close the workshop: the Minister of Education, Director of Education, Senior Education Officer?

Proceedings

- j. Who will deliver the lead papers? How much prior notice will they require? Will some require frequent reminders? Will they expect remuneration?

- k. Will the lead papers deal with specific themes — which themes?
- l. Will the participants be divided into working groups? Will these require a rapporteur? Will the rapporteur be nominated by the organizers or will the choice be left to the group participants themselves?
- m. Who will liaison with the lead paper authors and group leaders?
- n. Will foreign experts/advisors be involved? Under what conditions: transport, airfares, accommodation, remuneration?

Resources

- o. What are the finances involved in:
 - an ideal situation;
 - under reasonable provisions;
 - under tight budgetary conditions?
- p. How will funds be provided and through what procedures? Have they been budgeted for or will a special case have to be made?
- q. What stationery, equipment, audio-visual material will be required?
- r. What arrangements will be made for tea/coffee breaks, lunches, accommodation (if required), travel expenses?
- s. What secretarial and support staff will be needed? Who will provide them?

Follow-Up

- t. Will the proceedings be published? Who will assume responsibility for the collecting of papers, keeping of records, printing, finance for printing, distribution?
- u. If there are recommendations for follow-up action who will be expected to follow them through?
- v. Will the workshop be given publicity: among the local educational community, the general public, overseas, etc.?
- w. If the workshop turns out to be a great success, who is likely to get the credit? And if it is a failure who will be accountable for what?
- x. Are there any other issues that have to be borne in mind?

Activity Two:

Case Study: The Social Studies Syllabus

It has been several years since your country attained independence and an updated syllabus for Social Studies is long overdue. As the senior educational officer responsible for this area, you have taken

some preparatory steps to fulfil the need. You were instrumental in sending on scholarships a bright, young woman teacher to specialize in the teaching of Social Studies. On her return, Alice, as she is called, fulfilled your and your colleagues expectations admirably.

Within twelve months she, with colleagues, completed a revised Social Studies syllabus for the primary schools. It is a most commendable job which was very well received by most of the teachers involved. Now, Alice is very busy conducting in-service courses for teachers of Social Studies and lecturing in the subject at the two teacher education colleges on a part-time basis. She has also proved a success at both institutions and, given half a chance, both principals of the colleges would love to employ her on a permanent basis.

You would be very much against such a development. Political pressure has been building up to proceed with the Social Studies syllabus for the secondary schools and you cannot possibly postpone any longer doing something about it. However, the difficulties in this sector are quite different from those in the primaries. For one thing, the content matter is much more extensive and complex than the rather elementary concepts and factual information required at the primary level. The content becomes increasingly more so as one approaches the higher classes of the secondary schools. Secondly, although you are quite certain that Alice has a good academic grasp of the subject, you are not so sure that she understands fully the political innuendos that will surely arise when teachers have to deal with certain local issues. It would not be easy to deal with such subjects as the conflicting stands taken by the political parties towards independence, or their foreign policies, or their proposed solutions to the social and unemployment problems.

Then there is the question of Alice's age who at 26 is much younger than the majority of the Social Studies teachers in the secondary schools. You are quite certain that this factor will colour their attitude and working relationship with her, even if she is acknowledged as an expert in the area. You know personally most of the teachers and you are convinced that they will not take easily to directives and instructions from a younger colleague.

Fourthly, there is the question of time. Alice is so busy with her in-service and lecturing commitments and she has also become heavily involved in an international organization promoting the teaching of Social Studies which is taking more and more of her time. In the circumstances, it will not be difficult to keep her out of the Secondary

School Social Studies exercise. Indeed such a move would avoid many personal and acrimonious conflicts. On the other hand, the project would lose the services of a knowledgeable and enthusiastic contributor. Above all, you actually need her expertise.

What do you intend to do in the circumstances?

Activity Three:***Planning Curriculum Development***

- a. List the possible difficulties and obstacles that school-based curriculum development is likely to encounter in your country and what measures and strategies you would take to overcome them.
- b. Select three schools that are typical of the categories in your country and:
 - identify the curriculum areas which you think are most suitable for development;
 - identify the teachers in these schools who are most likely to participate in school-based curriculum development and their particular special contribution;
 - specify the type and extent of human and material support that they would require.

Activity Four:

You are asked to advise your superiors on the setting up of permanent curriculum Development Units for both secondary and primary schools.

In each case prepare a working paper:

- a. Setting out the terms of reference for each Curriculum Development Unit;
- b. Setting out the strategies and procedures to be followed by each Unit;
- c. Making suggestions on the composition of each Unit.

What problems, do you think, could be encountered in the implementation of your suggestions? How could they be overcome?

Which of your colleagues would you consult before presenting the final recommendations to your superiors?