

## Curriculum Research and the Art of the teacher

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*Professor Stenhouse directs the Centre for Applied Research at the University of East Anglia. In this paper he reflects upon the characteristics of the art of teaching and develops some interesting comment on the relationships between idea, practice and change. This material is then extended to a consideration of the curriculum as a medium to realise amongst other things the development of the teacher. This curriculum research and development is about the improvement of the art of the teacher. In terms of the theme the paper provides a pointer for underpinning school based in-service work.*

What is a curriculum as we now understand the word? It has changed its meaning as a result of the curriculum movement. It is not a syllabus — a mere list of content to be covered — nor is it even what German speakers would call a Lehrplan — a prescription of aims and methods and content. Nor is it in our understanding a list of objectives.

Let me claim that it is a symbolic or meaningful object, like Shakespeare's first folio, not like a lawnmower, like the pieces and board of chess, not like an apple tree. It has a physical existence but also a meaning incarnate in words or pictures or sound or games or whatever.

In our imagination let us bring it into this room. The doors open and it enters on a porter's barrow, since it is too heavy to carry. Two large boxes are full of books for pupils to use in the classroom. A third contains educational games and simulations and a fourth, posters, slides, film strips and overhead projector transparencies. The big box over there is the film set — or is this the video-tape version? — and the smaller one beside it contains audio-tape and gramophone records. The seventh, and in this case the last, box holds the teachers' books and materials.

Who made it? Well, perhaps a curriculum research and development group funded by Nuffield or the Schools Council or the American National Science Foundation or Stiftung Volkswagenwerk. Or perhaps a group of teachers from various parts of the country working under an editor for a publisher. Or perhaps a teachers'

centre group. Or a school — Abraham Moss or Stantonbury or some less fabled place.

So there it stands, a palpable educational artefact. But what use is it to a student or a teacher? Often apparently, not much. Like some wedding presents it is in a month or two more likely to be found in the attic than in the living room. But that analogy is not quite right. A better one is the affluent outhouse containing the unused golf-clubs, canoe, sailing dinghy, skis, ice skates and glider. All the possessions which implied not simply ownership but learning, the development of new skills, on the part of the owner. Mr Toad's curriculum of derelict skiffs and canary-coloured caravan. Material objects cast aside because the teacher was not prepared to face the role of learner they forced upon him.

'No curriculum development without teacher development', reads one of the poker-work mottoes we hung on our wall during the Humanities Project and haven't taken down. But that does not mean, as it often seems to be interpreted to mean, that we must train teachers in order to produce a world fit for curricula to live in. It means that by virtue of their meaningfulness curricula are not simply instructional means to improve teaching but are expressions of ideas to improve teachers. Of course, they have a day-to-day instructional utility: cathedrals must keep the rain out. But the students' benefit from curricula not so much because they change day-to-day instruction as because they improve teachers.

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The most satisfying aspect of the Humanities Project, Man: a course of study, and the race project from my point of view is the fact that they have each produced virtuoso and highly intelligent teaching. This in turn has transformed teachers' images of themselves. They have become powerful people because of their confidence in their art.

In our present educational situation there is no prospect of benefit to pupils more significant than the improvement of the art of the teacher.

A curriculum, if it is worthwhile, expresses in the form of teaching materials and criteria for teaching a view of knowledge and a conception of the process of education. It provides a framework in which the teacher can develop new skills and relate them as he does so to the conceptions of knowledge and of learning. We are concerned with the exercise of skills in the service of meaning; and I believe that to be an acceptable definition of the practice of an art.

The teacher is an artist whose medium is interpersonal transactions of knowledge. Knowledge here means information and meaning so structured as to expose the problems of the warrant for truth and to provide the organisation of ideas — Barzun called it 'intellect' — which supports active thinking and reflective assimilation of new experience.

Now the really important thing about curriculum research is that, in contrast to books about education, it invites the teacher to improve his art by the exercise of art. Teacher education has too often assumed that reading books is the way a teacher gets access to ideas which can be expressed in his practice. Whether they are philosophical works or accounts of experience — such as A.S. Neill's books on Summerhill for example — books tend to put the teacher in the power of the expert. Who can carry a full teaching load and still keep up with the university education lecturer who specialises in Plato or Dewey or Piaget or the expert prominent enough to be allowed to — and even financed to — visit Summerhill — and Countesthorpe and Stantonbury and Gordonstown?

On the other hand, traditional educational theory — book learning about education — is something you can be very good at without actually getting to know any teachers. In America your status as a university professor of education

is actually higher if you have never taught in schools, even when your fame is based on telling schoolteachers how you think they should teach. In a Scottish College of Education the lecturers in education are traditionally exempted from — and thus barred from — supervising teaching practice in order to ensure that they have sufficient time for study to prevent their standards from falling to those of the English.

I am, however, not arguing that all educational thinkers and doers should be teachers, but that all should pay teachers the respect of translating their ideas into curriculum. And that means enough contact with classroom reality or enough consultancy with teachers to discipline all ideas by the problems of practice.

Only in curricular form can ideas be tested by teachers. Curricula are hypothetical procedures testable only in classrooms. All educational ideas must find expression in curricula before we can tell whether they are day dreams or contributions to practice. Many educational ideas are not found wanting, because they cannot be found at all.

If someone comes along asking you to adopt an idea or strive after an objective: political maturity or basic literacy, ask him to go away and come back with a curriculum. Or give you a sabbatical to do so for him. What does 'Back to Basics' mean? What books? What procedures? What time allocations? What investments? *Man*: A course of study in every school? It is the only graded scientific reading scheme I know!

Some people shout their plans for the reform of their football team from the terraces, Cloughie provides a curriculum instead. There are many education rowdies as football rowdies about today. And one or two are ex-players!

But I am not simply being practical about ideas, or saying that all ideas ought to be subject to testing by teachers and expressed in forms that make that testing possible. I am claiming that the expression of educational ideas in curricular form provides a medium for the development — and if necessary the autonomous self-development — of the teacher as artist.

To say that teaching is an art does not imply that teachers are born, not made. On the contrary artists learn and work extraordinarily hard at it. But they learn through the critical practice of their art.



Idea and action are fused in practice. Self-improvement comes in escaping from the idea that the way to virtuosity is the imitation of others -- pastiche -- to the realisation that it is the fusion of idea and action in one's own performance to the point where each can be 'justified' in the sense that it is fully expressive of the other. So the idea is tuned to the form of the art and the form used to express the idea.

Thus in art ideas are tested in form by practice. Exploration and interpretation lead to revision and adjustment of idea and of practice. If my words are inadequate, look at the sketchbook of a good artist, a play in rehearsal, a jazz quartet working together. That, I am arguing, is what good teaching is like. It is not like routine engineering or routine management.

Note, however, that the process of developing the art of the artist is always associated with *change* in ideas and practice. An artist becomes stereotyped or derelict when he ceases to develop. There is no mastery, always aspiration. And the aspiration is about ideas -- content -- as well as about performance -- execution of ideas.

Thus the process of developing one's art as a teacher -- or the art of teaching, which develops through individual artists -- is a dialectic of idea and practice not to be separated from change. May I quote Mao Tse Tung without your generalising my views about life from my choice of source?

'Whoever wants to know a thing has no way of doing so except by coming into contact with it, that is, by living (practising) in its environment'.

And

'If you want to know a certain thing or a certain class of things directly, you must personally participate in the practical struggle to change reality, to change that thing or class of things, for only thus can you come into contact with them as phenomena; only through personal participation in the practical struggle to change reality can you uncover the essence of that thing or class of things and comprehend them'.

Certainly, this seems true of art, including the practical art of teaching. Perhaps Mao's deviationism was to transpose 'praxis' as a cornerstone of an epistemology with Germanic

roots and render it as an expression of the experience of one to whom politics was in practice an art.

In advancing the view that curriculum constitutes both the medium of education of the pupil and the medium for the teacher's learning of the art of teaching, I am making a claim sufficiently novel for me to feel that an analogy may be helpful; but the analogy must not be taken to be too close. It is a crutch to understanding to be thrown away as soon as possible.

I compare a school to a good repertory theatre. With a manager — the head — a company of actors — the staff — a technical support staff — librarians, lab technicians, audio-visual experts — and an audience — the pupils or students. Both theatre and school embody the interaction of different groups of people: artists on the one hand, their public on the other. It is intelligible for a rep company to claim to have educated its audience as it is for a school to claim to have educated its pupils.

But note that a good repertory company is also concerned with the development of its actors as artists and of the skills and arts of its technicians too. And the medium of this development is the very same medium as that which entertains — motivates — and educates its audience. It is the curriculum of the theatre: the plays.

The good company chooses plays on several grounds. They must overall appeal to an audience. An empty theatre is not really a theatre at all. They ought to be justifiable as worthwhile. So they will say, 'We are sorry we did *Confessions of a Windowcleaner* in May: we know it's rubbish, but it allowed us to do *Antony and Cleopatra* to a smaller audience in February. Importantly, however, they should also develop the actors. 'We chose *Antony and Cleopatra* rather than *Othello* because Larry and Viv were just at the point where those parts would most contribute to their development. And, you know, the audience profits immensely from the development of our art. It is not done at their expense'.

There is yet a deeper level at which the artist learns: he not only learns his art, he also learns through his art. Thus the actor learns about life and people and moral dilemmas through participation in plays. And similarly, I learned through *teaching* literature and history something of what literature and history have to teach.

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Curriculum is the medium through which the teacher can learn his art. Curriculum is the medium through which the teacher can learn knowledge. Curriculum is the medium through which the teacher can learn about the nature of education. Curriculum is the medium through which the teacher can learn about the nature of knowledge. And curriculum is the best medium through which the teacher can learn about these because it enables him to test ideas by practice and hence to rely on his judgment rather than on the judgment of others.

This learning of the teachers need not and should not conflict with the welfare of the pupils. This is not just because pupils benefit from the development of the teacher's art in the long run. It is that the teacher's art is to benefit the pupils and is not being adequately practised unless that benefit is there. Of course, there are failures, but at some point failure has to be abandoned.

To summarise and concretise what I have been claiming. *Man*: a course of study makes the ideas of Bruner testable and is in turn testable by them. And so for all those curriculum projects

which are not teacher-proof but open to teacher judgment.

This means that the improvement of schooling through curriculum research and development is about the improvement of the art of the teacher. It is not about the improvement of students' intended learning outcomes *without* improving the art of teaching.

The curriculum movement of the 1960s and 1970s has pursued the hypothesis that the improvement of the knowledge content of education can be achieved only by developing the art of the teacher to make possible inquiry, discovery — and discussion — based modes of learning. The shift is like the shift from apron stage to proscenium or from realism to the theatre of the absurd. The argument is that pupils need to know earlier what mature experts understand about the speculative function of knowledge.

The barriers to that development, apart from the contextual lack of understanding provided by some local authorities, teacher educators, HMI, and the like, are that for the most part neither teachers nor pupils recognise teaching as an art. Hence teachers do not see their own development

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as key to the situation, in the same way as actors or sculptors or musicians do. And pupils do not understand — nor do teachers generally share the understanding with them — the significance of experiment in the classroom and their role in it.

No change can be introduced without being explained and justified to pupils. No experiment can be mounted without its purposes, duration and criteria being presented to pupils and without their being invited to monitor its effects on them, both in process and in outcome.

We must be dedicated to the improvement of schooling. The improvement of schooling is bound to be experimental: it cannot be dogmatic. The experiment depends on the exercise of the art of teaching and improves that art. It depends too on the art of learning and improves that art. The substantive content of the arts of teaching and learning is curriculum.

I am claiming, therefore, that the most important substance of in-service education or autonomous self-development can best be curriculum. Curriculum presents educational ideas interpreted in the art of the classroom. You will never improve the art of teaching by mere reading lists any more than you will improve the art of acting by mere reading of Stanislavsky. Reading has its place: its place is to support reflection about action. And the medium of classroom action is curriculum.

A great deal of work put into curriculum in the last decade or so appears to have yielded less

than in fact it has. This is because there is a tendency to regard the implementation of curriculum as dependent upon in-service education. Where curriculum has really changed classrooms there has been in-service education in support. So it might seem that curriculum research and development cannot work without in-service education.

But put the proposition the other way round. To what extent has in-service education improved schooling? To the extent, I would answer, that it has worked through research in curriculum or teaching. We might do better to consider that curriculum study is the condition of successful in-service education, rather than in-service education the condition of successful curriculum research. It is an important message as we enter a period of potential heavy investment in in-service work.

If we are not careful we shall be back on reading lists and contributory disciplines. Only the pursuit of research directly applied to curriculum and teaching puts the teacher in the power position; for he is in possession of the only valid laboratory, the classroom.

A decade of in-service education which neglects the curriculum research of the last fifteen years will not only be wasting the greatest potential of an immense investment; it will also be leading us to an unnecessary disillusion about the potential of in-service teacher development.

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