

Curriculum As Designing the Future: International Perspectives

Invitational Symposium on Curriculum Design for
Informed Transformation

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Notes you are not supposed to see

- ❑ 1) Curriculum is big – not just program of studies or content [curriculum is influence (shapes behavior), encounter (a set of meetings), relationship (networks of people and ideas), and politic (reasons for doing things)]
- ❑ 2) Father – influence
- ❑ 3) By far the best learning for me in high school- ((a) young English who got off curriculum (b) Old English teacher who didn't
- ❑ 4) My English teacher – Influence of Diploma Exams
- ❑ 5) Four of top five schools in Fraser Institute rankings have high school tuitions between \$11,000 and \$17,800 per year – .
- ❑ 6) Fraser Institute's "curriculum" – "research" without "assumptions" – or context? "High performing" = "best"
- ❑ Norm Diamond's the "real" social malaise [not ADD], "Compliance Acquiescent Disorder," children comply when they should not.

The Influence of Teachers

- For years, research has found that students achieve better when teachers have a wide array of skills and adapt these skills to different contexts. [Jere Brophy, (1986) Teacher Influences on Student Achievement, *American Psychologist*, 41 (10), 1069-77]

Confucius on Curriculum

“The thought that I have not properly cultivated virtue, that what is learned has not been thoroughly discussed, that knowing what is right I have not moved toward it, that what is wrong I have not been able to change - these are the things which bother me.”

How can the influence of an elegant curriculum inhibit learning?

What is curriculum?

- **Curriculum** stems from the Latin word for *race course*, referring to the course of deeds and experiences through which children grow to become mature adults.
- It occurs both in and out of school – although our work here is generally about schooling. In other words, what happens in schools?

The Curriculum, the first textbook published on curriculum (1918)

- John Franklin Bobbitt explains curriculum as the course of **deeds** and **experiences** through which children become **the adults they should be**, for success in adult society.
- Curriculum encompasses the entire scope of formative deeds and experiences occurring **in and out of school**, and not only experiences occurring in school; experiences that are **unplanned and undirected**, and **experiences intentionally directed** for the **purposeful formation of adult members of society**.

Age-old thinking about curriculum?

- Curriculum is the study of what should constitute a world for learning and how to go about making this world. What is the good life? What is a good person? What is the good society? (Macdonald, 1978)
- It is not the subjects offered that make curriculum properly a part of education but how those subjects are taught, how they connect to the personal interests and talents of the students who study them, and how skilfully they are laid out against the whole continuum of human experience. (Noddings, 1983)
- **Reminder: Curriculum is much more than subject-area content.**

What does curriculum do?

- What do all children need to learn? (curriculum)
 - What is the best of the past?
 - What “Big Picture” world considerations must students who now enter grade one face when they graduate?
 - How do we wish to live as a society?
- How will what we do in schools shape our future?

What is International Curriculum?

In July 2011, The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment did research covering curriculum specification in seven countries [Australia, Canada (the provinces of Alberta and Ontario), Finland, New Zealand, Scotland, Singapore, and South Africa.]

What did International Curricula share?

- All curricula shared
 - A rationale for study;
 - General goals for students (e.g. responsible citizenship);
 - Learning outcomes, expectations, (common educational) standards, objectives, competences
 - Published materials for students and teachers;
 - Subject area content to be covered;
 - Curriculum standards (e.g. assessment)

Brazil, Indonesia, and Scotland

- Is it possible that states would not want to educate their citizens?
- Paulo Freire, who wrote *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in 1972. In 1964, Freire was arrested for **treason** and then exiled for 16 years for teaching *literacy*.
- Why does Indonesia import petroleum project managers?
 - Workers follow orders; work hard, but cannot organize the work.
- In the UK, the research assessment exercise (RAE) shaped the curriculum of academic life into a two-tier system that causes resentment.

Alberta's Educational Task

- To develop a modern, world-class curriculum that will inspire and challenge all learners and prepare them for the future.

What do we know from Alberta?

- 1) We are here because we believe that curriculum can be designed for “Informed Transformation.”
- 2) We believe that research informs action.
- 3) We believe that research plus considered policy should end in curriculum action.
- 4) We believe we (educators) can make a difference in the lives of Alberta’s children.
- 5) We believe it is worth the effort to do so.

From Alberta Social Studies

- The aim of the social studies program is to promote a sense of belonging and acceptance in students as they engage in active and responsible citizenship. ***[this is a political statement]***
- At the heart of Alberta's social studies program are the concepts of citizenship and identity in the Canadian context. It also includes **multiple perspectives**, including Aboriginal and Francophone, that **contribute to Canada's identity. *[this is a political statement]***

From Alberta English Language Arts

Students will listen, speak, read, write, view and represent to respect, support and collaborate with others. (p. 13)

- 5.1 Respect others and **strengthen community**
- 5.1.1 Use language and image to **show respect and consideration**
- 5.1.2 Appreciate **diversity** of expression, **opinion** and **perspective**
- 5.2 **Work within a group**
- 5.2.1 **Cooperate** with others, and **contribute** to **group processes**
- *[these are political statements]*

English Language Arts

- As well as being an important element of culture, language is essential for **forming interpersonal relationships**, extending experience, reflecting on thought and action, and **contributing to society**. [front matter, page 1]
- By studying Canadian literature, students are able to reflect on ideas and experiences of citizenship from Canadian perspectives. The study of Canadian literature helps students to **develop respect for cultural diversity and common values**. (page 1)
- *These are political statements – who knew ELA curriculum was about students coming to see themselves part of humanity – engaging the world?*

Over the last year, Alberta engaged:

Inspiring Action on Education: A Discussion Paper

- **Inspiring Action on Education** continued the conversation about transforming education in Alberta. It provided an opportunity for Albertans to connect with Alberta Education's vision for the policy directions, legislative change and transformational shifts that need to occur over the upcoming months and years.
- The **Inspiring Action on Education: A Discussion Paper** identified the significant themes and areas which needed further discussion once the Inspiring Education: A Dialogue with Albertans Steering Committee report had been released. The discussion paper was also made available in French - *Inspirer l'action dans l'éducation*.
- A series of online Transformation Guides, which were themed and focused on one or two transformational shifts, were made available between June - October 2010. Also included was a traditional survey asking for overall feedback.
 - Parental and Community Engagement
 - Shared Governance
 - Student-Centred Education
 - Learning Opportunities
 - Teaching our Children
 - Envisioning Excellence

Alberta's articulated vision for education

- Engaged Thinkers
- Ethical Citizens
- People with Entrepreneurial Spirits

Engaged thinker

- thinks critically
- uses technology to learn
- life-long learner
- adapts to change
- communicates ideas
- considers multiple perspectives

Ethical citizen

- builds relationships
- open-minded
- demonstrates respect
- teamwork
- contributes fully as a global citizen

Entrepreneurial spirit

- creates opportunities
- perseverance and discipline
- earns success
- explores ideas
- challenges the status quo
- competitive, adaptable, resilient
- confident risk-taker

Alberta Education Action Agenda 2011-14

- **Goal One: Success for every student**
 - Curriculum standards and process redesign
 - 21st Century competencies \
 - Strategic review of locally developed courses

- How might curriculum constructs inhibit this goal – success for every student? [“The Gift of Diversity”]

Alberta Education Action Agenda 2011-14

- **Goal Two: Transformed education through collaboration**
 - Communicating high expectations for all students
 - Understanding and responding to student strengths and needs
 - Measuring success
 - Capacity building
 - Collaborative practices
 - School leadership
 - Professional learning
 - Teacher induction
 - Teaching profession

Alberta Education Action Agenda 2011-14

- **Goal Three: Success for First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) students**
 - Memorandum of understanding (MOU) for First Nation education
 - FNMI Education Partnership Council
 - Northland School Division strategies
 - FNMI collaborative frameworks
 - Teacher Induction Program

How Well is Alberta Transforming its Educational System?

- My own research:
 - (1) Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (since 1999)
 - (2) Instructional Leadership in Alberta (2009-2010)
 - (3) Teacher professional learning and efficacy (2011-2012)

How Well is Alberta Transforming its Educational System?

Notes from our AISI Research:

- **Theme 1: The Power of Collaborative Professional Development**
- **Theme 2: Project-Based or Problem-Based Learning (PBL)**
- **Theme 3: Parental and Community Involvement**
- **Theme 4: Integrating Technology into Core Curriculum**
- **Theme 5: Growing Leadership in Alberta Schools**
- **Theme 6: Creating New Cultures**

How Well is Alberta Transforming its Educational System?

Notes from our AISI Research { We read 1200 final project reports – written by teachers}:

- **Three Pillars of the AISI Program**
 - Community,
 - Agency,
 - Service

How Well is Alberta Transforming its Educational System?

Research #2: Instructional Leadership in Alberta produced a book titled *Reflecting on Leadership for Learning (Parsons and Beauchamp, 2011)*

The study was about the entire curriculum of a school – what **deeds** and **experiences** (Bobbitt) happened there?

1) Choose five great Alberta schools.

2) Ask everyone there two questions:

(A) What makes this school such a good place for teaching and learning? (B) What does the administration do to make this so?

3) Gather data.

4) Analyze, write up, and share the findings.

Findings from the Five Schools

- What does our research say about principals?
- What does the research say about how the **curriculum** of a good school shapes learning behavior?

Applied Researchers work with three questions:

- What? {What is there?}
- So What? {What does it mean?}
- Now What? {What should we do?}

Research Findings

- 1) Highly effective principals build and communicate common goals, a common sense of purpose, and a clear vision.

- Influence and politic

Research Findings

- 2) Highly effective principals take time to really “know” the people with whom they work and appreciate, value, and respect them.

- Encounter and relationship

Research Findings

- 3) Highly effective principals listen, care, and support the people with whom they work on professional and on personal matters. Highly effective principals have “Open Doors.”
- Relationship and encounter

Research Findings

- 4) Highly effective principals create “family-based” working and learning environments.

- Relationship and encounter

Research Findings

- 5) Highly effective principals are organized: they engage in detailed, inclusive, and proactive planning.

- Influence and relationship

Research Findings

- 6) Highly effective principals celebrate success with both formal and fun filled informal events.

- Relationship and encounter

Research Findings

- 7) Highly effective principals include others in planning and deciding, and are “equal partners” who empower good decision-making among teachers.

- Politic and influence

Research Findings

- 8) Highly effective principals “walk their talk.”

- Influence and politic

Four Lessons Learned

- Lesson One: When principals organized **teams of teachers to work together in communities of practice to solve real site-based issues**, teachers engaged in professional learning that helped solve problems and build communities. Teachers worked best when organized by the principal but not micro-managed – in other words, when principals trusted teachers to do the work. Teachers, working together, assumed leadership and solved problems.

Four Lessons Learned

- Lesson Two: Good schools shared common attributes. First, good schools were led by **vision**. Second, good schools were **communities** where people lived and worked. Third, when things started to go well in schools, they really began to go well. **Success became a reason to celebrate, which engendered further success.**

Four Lessons Learned

- Lesson Three: Highly effective principals demonstrated a number of successful leadership practices.
 - They **removed barriers from teachers** with whom they worked. **They believed teachers would do good work and provided teachers the space to do it.** Highly effective principals **assumed the best.** They shared expectations with teachers, then **stepped aside to allow teachers to practice their craft.** Highly effective principals gave teachers **freedom to risk, innovate, and try new things.**

Four Lessons Learned

- Lesson Three: Highly effective principals demonstrated a number of successful leadership practices.
 - They moved **from professional development to professional learning**. As a result of our research, we came to define **professional learning as local and led by teachers**. Highly effective principals expected, encouraged, and supported professional learning. They shared and **created opportunities for teachers to lead**.

Four Lessons Learned

- Lesson Three: Highly effective principals demonstrated a number of successful leadership practices.
 - They were **strong leaders** who did not hesitate to express expectations or set high goals, but moved to the **background**. Our research uncovered leaders who first earned the trust and respect of teacher colleagues and then **moved aside so these colleagues could work efficaciously**. It became obvious in our study that, to be a good school leader, one must be **big enough to become small**.

Four Lessons Learned

- Lesson Three: Highly effective principals demonstrated a number of successful leadership practices.
 - They **valued people**. Effective principals established a culture of **belonging**. The schools we studied named themselves families – small, close communities filled with joys and heartaches. The wall between personal and professional was permeable, and personal issues came to school daily. Highly effective principals **created spaces** where **teachers worked together** and supported each other, and shared stories, culture, and resources.

Four Lessons Learned

- Lesson Three: Highly effective principals demonstrated a number of successful leadership practices.
 - They built cultures of enthusiastic **celebration** of successes by **focusing on the positive**. They built a common vision and goals and shared and lived a mission statement.

Four Lessons Learned

- ▣ Lesson Four: Our research demonstrated what highly effective principals **did not do**.
- ▣ Effective principals **did not micro-manage**. Rather, they were patient and supportive. As difficult as it might be to wait for others to gain a vision, effective principals waited.

Four Lessons Learned

- ▣ Lesson Four: Our research demonstrated what highly effective principals **did not do**.
 - ▣ Effective principals were not negative. Our study found that **hard work was not an enemy** of teachers nor did it kill teachers' enthusiasm. **Negativity was the real enemy that eroded momentum and spirit.**

Four Lessons Learned

- Lesson Four: Our research demonstrated what highly effective principals **did not do**.
 - Effective principals were **not “wishy-washy!”** They were authentic, genuine, confident, and forthright. They said what needed to be said. They were collegial, yet decisive.

Four Lessons Learned

- Lesson Four: Our research demonstrated what highly effective principals **did not do**.
 - Effective principals **did not take the credit for school success**. It was clear in our study that highly effective principals **shared credit** and got more done when they didn't care who received credit.

Specific Actions for Principals

- Specific Action #1: Focus on instructional leadership.
 - Our research highlighted the bridge **between student learning and teaching**. That is, teachers in good schools were “**all about the kids.**”
 - Teachers who saw themselves as classroom and school leaders were critical thinkers and problem-solvers. They viewed **challenges as natural, possibilities for their own growth, and ways to improve learning**. {Carol Dweck's research}
 - They saw themselves as agents, empowered to address and improve their practice: they were engaged in *leading learning*.
 - Believing oneself capable of leading one's practice – regardless of years of service or experience – is prevalent in schools that esteemed and practiced instructional leadership.

Specific Actions for Principals

- Specific Action #2: Build leadership teams.
 - Our the good schools we researched invested time in **creating leadership teams** –staff members in specific focus areas such as technology, assessment, math and reading literacy, and community relationships.
 - Members of specific teams worked to become site-based experts – taking responsibility and accountability for how their school addressed its energies and resources in these areas and communicating with the rest of the staff.
 - Leadership was teamwork and good schools shared the leadership load.

Specific Actions for Principals

- Specific Action #3: Be in classrooms.
 - Principals support teachers by spending time in classrooms.
 - Principals who spent time in classrooms were able to engage in critical conversations in and around student learning initiatives, challenges, and successes.
 - Teachers trusted principals who taught – especially when teachers knew principals didn't have to.
 - Because teachers trust other teachers, principals should not forget what it means to be a teacher.

Specific Actions for Principals

- Specific Action #4: Be responsive.
 - The principals we saw took care of teacher needs and issues immediately. If there was a problem, principals attended.
 - Effective principals provided support, interventions, and resources so barriers that stopped teachers from teaching were removed.
 - In good schools, things got done immediately!

Specific Actions for Principals

- Specific Action #5: Support moves from professional development to professional learning.
 - Professional learning is **local, teacher led, and addresses school-based issues.**
 - It sees teachers as professionals and extends teacher leadership and efficacy.
 - Principals should expect, encourage, and support professional learning by sharing and creating opportunities for teachers to lead.
 - Principals who built **hard shell structures with soft, gooey insides** successfully promoted student learning.

Specific Actions for Principals

- Specific Action #6: Principals should be strong leaders – but from the background.
 - Effective principals unflinchingly expected that everyone in school was doing their best for kids.
 - Although leadership literature seems to trumpet horizontal leadership, we believe horizontal leadership cannot work unless the principal is strong enough to allow and support it.

Specific Actions for Principals

- Specific Action #7: Principals should value people and establish a culture of belonging. .
 - Effective Teachers often spoke about being the “right” person for their school and were happy to belong to a highly-functioning community.
 - Students felt accepted. Students knew what was non-negotiable and knew they would be supported and encouraged to meet expectations as valued learners in the school community.

Specific Actions for Principals

- Specific Action #8: Principals should work to build a culture of enthusiastic celebration of successes.
 - In the good schools we researched, principals – actually everyone in the school – focused on the positive.
 - Principals and teachers *looked* for ways to help students achieve and celebrate that achievement.

Specific Actions for Principals

- Specific Action #9: Principals should build vision and goals.
 - The school shared and lived a mission statement built around common language, common values, and common activities.
 - Schools become families filled with joys and heartaches.
 - Principals should help the entire school work together and support each other.

Specific Actions for Principals

- Specific Action #9: Principals should build vision and goals.
 - The school shared and lived a mission statement built around common language, common values, and common activities.
 - Schools become families filled with joys and heartaches.
 - Principals should help the entire school work together and support each other.

Research Project #3: Teacher Professional Learning and Efficacy

- I know so far that
 - There are amazing schools with amazing principals and amazing teachers.
 - Every School Division I have spoken to has a number of highly-effective schools that can be studied.
 - Schools can change cultures very quickly – I believe in the course of two years.
 - Teachers are willing to work together.

What does Alberta-based research tell us about how curriculum can work everywhere?

- First, curriculum is Influence.
- Second, curriculum is encounter.
- Third, curriculum is relationship.
- Fourth, curriculum is politic.

Curriculum is Influence

- Curriculum works to shape behavior.
 - Principals who act from authority help shape schools and classrooms and help students learn.
 - Teachers have the power to affect change. They are agents of school improvement.
 - Students who critically manipulate ideas learn.

Curriculum is Encounter

- Curriculum is a place where people and ideas meet.
 - Principals can build schools centered upon belonging.
 - Teachers who work together effect change and build community.
 - Students who talk more with each other and with teachers learn more. [Our research suggests that students should talk more in class.]

- Kent den Heyer explored the distinction between **curriculum as 'encounter'** (how our shared sense-making is itself a historical legacy requiring explicit study) in contrast to **'thing'** (a body of facts, skills, and attitudes to deliver to the student body).

Curriculum is Relationship

- Curriculum engages networks of human and knowledge relationships.
 - Principals can build schools where teachers work in teams and share leadership.
 - Teachers who are engaged also engage students.
 - Students who engage curriculum content in real-world situations learn.

Curriculum is Relationship

- In **The Passionate Learner**, Robert L. Fried talks about the importance of relationship and redefining curriculum.
- “When we view curriculum as a function of relationships, we bring it to our classrooms and lay it out, like a comfortable and useful garment. **We allow ourselves and our students to make it belong to us, to adjust it, to restyle it, to enliven it, to infuse it with meaning.** Such ownership increases the likelihood that young people will approach the knowledge and skills to be learned as active, critical, thoughtful investigators, rather than as passive receptors (or rejecters).”

Curriculum is Politic

- We engage curriculum to improve human life. (Freire, Alberta's program of studies, teachers, and principals)
- When Alberta's Commission on Learning names **Success for Every Child** as the main goal, it is talking about improving life for everyone. ***“The common thread is that each child brings his or her unique gifts, abilities and dreams to the classroom, and every child deserves every chance to succeed.”***
- ***THIS IS A HUGE CHANGE! Don't miss it. And it calls for a inspired action!***

What we know about Curriculum

- **Teachers matter** – when they are trusted in curriculum leadership, as they have been in many AISI projects and in the highly-effective schools we studied, students will learn and achieve.
- Effective principals might work differently, but they share certain actions.
- School leadership (teacher and principal) is more about **relationship than identity**. *{The leadership literature is impoverished.}*
- If school curricula action could be summed up in one idea, that idea would be **“If we could remove the obstacles from teachers so that teachers could teach, student learning would improve.”**
- Teachers are the best curriculum builders – they do it contextually with an eye on their treasure – children’s learning.

Questions

- What are the characteristics of a good curriculum – anywhere?
- What pedagogies help us achieve the goals we wish to achieve?
- How can our curriculum best meet the hopes we have for our children?
- What parts of our curriculum **exacerbate** our meeting the hopes we have for our children?
- What can we do next? “Now what?”