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ABSTRACT

An "investigative method" can be used by the English education specialist to determine both content of a curriculum and the organization and instruction of courses. Assuming that the purpose of teaching is to produce desired changes within learners, the method of the English teacher is to (1) decide the content of a new course which will develop within his students the desired skills and achievements, (2) establish instructional objectives based on this content, (3) select and organize the learning activities, and (4) evaluate the instructional program and the learning achievements of his students. Using this method, an instructor may plan and evaluate any new course (e.g., ones in film study, in the analysis of ideas, or in Black literature). Such a rational procedure for curriculum planning must be learned, practiced, and fostered by the English education specialist and his students. (JM)

A METHOD FOR THE METHODOLOGIST

Morris Finder

This issue of *The English Record* contains articles urging the incorporation into the curriculum of Black literature, the analysis of ideas, the study of film and other newer kinds of content. Through what means or methods should the English-education specialist inquire rationally and profitably into these and related proposals? What is the logical basis for such inquiry? How may he help the prospective and the practicing teacher conduct such inquiry for himself? This article outlines a method for inquiring into these questions and into curricular problems in general.¹

We begin with the assumption that the purpose of teaching is not to teach, but to produce desired changes within learners. In one plan of classification such behavioral changes are grouped into three kinds: (1) cognitive (patterns of thinking, problem-solving, comprehension, and so on), (2) affective (aesthetic responses, attitudes, interests, and so forth); and (3) psychomotor (typing and handwriting, for example). The English educator is concerned mainly with cognitive and affective changes.

It follows that the behavioral changes sought through teaching are the objectives of instruction. The teaching of English is concerned with kinds of behavior that may be developed through the content deemed proper to its field. For English, there is no agreement on what its content is. No one would object, however, to the notion that literature and written composition belong to English, although these have uses in other subjects.

With objectives defined as desired changes within learners, other consequences follow: (1) Because changes in behavior are produced only through experience, a task of teaching is to provide learners with stimuli that are likely to result in desired experience and therefore desired learning. (2) Because some learning is pre-requisite to others, a task of teaching is to organize the stimuli (or the activities of learning) in a defensible order or sequence. (3) Because the success of learning activities can be only generally predicted, a check on the extent of their usefulness requires systematic evaluation.

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The method of curricular inquiry described in this article follows Ralph W. Tyler's monograph, Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1950). For a short text on stating objectives see Preparing Instructional Objectives, by Robert F. Mager (San Francisco: Fearon Publishers, 1962).

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The latter discussion suggests that, as a minimum, the teacher of English must be able to (1) infer what the content of English can contribute to the education of his students (2) translate the potential contributions into statements of instructional objectives, (3) select and organize learning activities that are likely to result in the desired learning, and (4) evaluate the program of instruction, and the attainment of students.

A method for the methodologist, then, consists of the most simple and direct procedures for inquiring into the four areas of curriculum and instruction: (1) objectives, (2) learning activities, (3) organization of learning activities, and (4) evaluation. Any problem in the teaching of English or in the teaching of anything is a problem of any one or of any combination of the four areas.

The use of this method is illustrated in the discussion that follows.

If a teacher of English is faced with a proposal to incorporate Black literature into his program, he may begin to resolve that problem by considering whether that literature can help him reach justifiable objectives. For example, he may learn that qualified observers of today's society say that the typical caucasian student has wrong or misconceived notions of the Black and his urban culture and that a duty of the school is to develop understanding of this important part of the environment. He may observe that his students are indeed unknowing of the Black urban culture and its literature. The teacher would assume, too, that the teaching of literature is part of his task.

The skills for reading literature, he would know, do not depend for their use and teaching upon particular literary works. Thus, he may conclude that a selection of literature written by and about Blacks may be useful content for instruction aimed at developing skills of reading literature and for increased understanding of the urban Black culture.

In brief, a teacher justifies aims of instruction by showing that these meet social and individual need and imply tasks proper to the school and to his subject matter.

With a set of justified aims in mind, his next job is to translate these into clear objectives. He may begin, for example, with the notion that he wants his students to "understand" Black literature. The vagueness and ambiguity of such words as "understand," "gain insight into," and "think," he would realize, are not useful for the direct guidance of instruction, but may be points to start from.

To eliminate the fuzziness of "understand" and similar words, he may ask himself what the learner is doing when he

is demonstrating his understanding of this or that poem, story, idea, and so forth. Is the student, for example, explaining the plain-sense meaning of what is going on in, let us say, a lyric poem? identifying the emotional effect that the poem is intended to arouse? explaining the devices in the poem that bring about the emotional effect? describing the view of human experience that the poem depicts? Which of these and which of an uncertain number of other possible achievements does "understand" refer to? The important point is that his objectives must be explicitly conceived because his teaching is a process of producing the changes in behavior that his objectives specify. His objectives, ultimately, result from value judgment.

The selection, justification, and statement of objectives is the most important single part of a method of curricular inquiry, for objectives properly determine the rest of instruction. We go on now to describe and illustrate these consequences in brief, straightforward fashion.

Clear objectives provide criteria for selecting and organizing learning activities. Because specialists in English education seem preoccupied with activities rather than with objectives and evaluation, this discussion sets the preoccupations aside. However, it's important to note that there is no such thing in and of itself as a good learning activity, good teaching, or good evaluating: such matters are not ends, but means. And means can be judged as good, bad, or indifferent only with relation to the ends that they are to serve.

Evaluation is a process of determining the extent to which learners are acquiring or have acquired the desired learning. An evaluative situation is valid if it elicits from the learner a display of what he is expected to have learned. If, for example, the objective is "Explain the plain-sense meaning of what is going on in lyric poems," a related evaluative situation would be something like this: "Here is a lyric poem within your range of comprehension, but one that presumably you haven't seen before. Explain the plain-sense meaning of what is going on in that poem."

The results of evaluation provide the only sound basis for making changes in objectives and in the methods, materials, and organization of instruction. Any other basis is likely to be simply mere hunch and opinion. Evaluation is a means in the sense that one of its main uses is the improvement of teaching.

This method of curricular inquiry, when honestly carried out, has desirable results. For example, the student of such a methodologist, if he is committed and has learned his lessons, will behave in such ways as these:

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1. He won't conceive of his task as one of teaching units, subjects, or topics. Nor will he conceive of his task as "covering" textbooks, short stories, and syllabi. Rather he will realize that his job is to develop within his students desired skills and achievements, and that units, materials and the rest are means to that end.
2. He won't be a slave to lesson plans and to traditional expectations. Rather, he will decide what learning he is after. If the lesson plan helps, he will use it. If not, he will toss it aside. If traditional expectations will help, he will live up to these. Otherwise, he won't.
3. He will demand and formulate operational explanations of such lofty but vague goals as "gain insight into," "have a deep understanding of" and "think."
4. He will be able to justify his objectives by social and individual need. He will be able to justify his selection of learning activities, his organization of these, and his selection of materials by showing that these are likely to help his students acquire the learning that is made clear by his objectives.
5. He will be able to show the extent to which his teaching is successful because he will be explicit as to the learning he is after and why, the means he is taking to bring it about, and the procedures he uses to evaluate the learning of his students and, therefore, the success of his teaching. He will, therefore, have a reasonable basis for deciding what he needs to do to improve.

To conclude: this paper has developed the thesis that the investigative methods of curriculum provide rational guidance for planning courses. When the implications of this rationality are honestly carried out, the results are likely to conflict with much of the received wisdom. If rational procedures are to be part of the teaching of English, then the English education specialist must learn the methods of curriculum and adapt these to his situation. And both English educator and his student need to learn how to foster rationality in a profession whose practices are to a great extent traditions that are uncritically accepted.

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