DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 049 244 TE 002 345

AUTHOR Tingle, Mary J.
TITLE A Proposal for the Development of an English Curriculum.
PUB DATE 69
NOTE 9p.; Address given at NCTE/NDEA Institute, Seattle, Washington, March 3, 1969

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Curriculum Development, Curriculum Evaluation, *Educational Objectives, *English, English Curriculum, Language Arts, Learning Processes, Primary Grades, *Relevance (Education), Secondary Grades, *Student Characteristics, Student Interests, Student Motivation, Student Needs

ABSTRACT

A supervisor undertaking the demanding task of English curriculum planning for grades 1-12 must recognize that teaching and continuing curriculum development should proceed concurrently in a situation flexible enough to encompass evaluation and change. Consequently, procedures to be considered in curriculum development should include (1) studying as objectively as possible the students' cultural, social, and economic environments; (2) studying the student to learn his potential, motivations, values, and sources of integrity; (3) studying available information on the learning processes; (4) reviewing the content of the current English curriculum, considering reasons for change, modification, or retention of any of its parts; (5) developing a statement of objectives for the English curriculum as a reference point in maintaining consistency and relevancy for teaching procedures, content, and sequence of presentation; (6) selecting the content of the curriculum; and (7) planning for curriculum evaluation and revision. (JMC)

A PROPOSAL FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ENGLISH CURRICULUM

Mary J. Tingle

As a supervisor of English, you occupy a very demanding position. You have the responsibility of improving instruction in English in every elementary and secondary school in your state. To function in this capacity you must have a knowledge of English that is both broad and deep, you must have an understanding of the psychology of learning, you must have a knowledge about curriculum development that is theoretical and operational, you must have the ability to work with teachers whose knowledge, skills in teaching, professional attitudes, and emotional responses encompass all of the individual differences possible in human beings. I am sure that many times you wish that like "de Lawd" in Marc Connelly's Green Pastures you

Connelly, Marc. Green Pastures. A Play. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

could "rare back and pass a miracle." What wonderful English classes there would be if supervisors and teachers could "pass miracles"!

But perhaps you are miracle makers. If you examine the contexts in which recorded miracles have occurred, you have to recognize that they came as the climax to a series of events which somehow made the human beings

Dr. Mary J. Tingle
Associate Professor of English
University of Georgia

affected ready for the miracle. The work of supervisors and teachers is that of structuring the situations in which the phenomenon of learning can occur.

Whatever plans are made for learning become the curriculum. Sometimes the curriculum is loosely structured, its parts dictated by teacher preference or textbook availability; sometimes it is tightly structured through close adherence to course outlines, grade by grade; sometimes it is flexible enough to provide adaptation to variability among students; often times, whether flexible or rigid, it lacks unity derived from a consistent philosophy of education or basic objectives. Only the student who moves through the school, grade by grade, may be aware of the contradictions, the repetitions, the trivialities, and the significant features in his experiences, and when he concludes his academic experiences, he is the embodiment of the curriculum which the school has provided. His strengths and his weaknesses are indicative of the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum. The English curriculum is reflected in how he thinks, speaks, listens, writes, and reads.

Because the English Curriculum deals with language, it must be dynamic, constantly responsive to the meaning of language in human affairs, to the growing knowledge about language, to the developing understandings about the process of composing, and to the pertinence of an increasing body of literature. The task of curriculum development is complicated by the fact that the persons who are currently in positions of leadership and responsibility do not understand some of the content which must be taught, the students in the classrooms, or the world in which the students

are living now and will live their adulthood. It is possible that we old folks--anyone over thirty, I believe, is the definition--will have to relinquish our expectations of achieving stability and finding the answers to questions and re-dedicate ourselves to continuing learning and accepting change. There is, however, an advantage in having curriculum development in the hands of English supervisors and teachers who have a background of knowledge and experience which provides a base upon which they can stand while they explore with youth the new world and plan with them, or at least with them in mind, the next steps to be taken.

Teaching and curriculum development must go on concurrently. There is no way to declare a moratorium on teaching while curricula are structured; consequently, the studying, discussing, and planning of an emerging curriculum must be carried on while an established one is in operation. The advantage in this situation lies in the fact that, as English supervisors and teachers work together, elements of the changing curriculum may be introduced, experimented with, and evaluated in the framework of ongoing programs.

The following are suggested procedures in curriculum development. Although they are in a numbered sequence, there is no claim that the order is significant.

1. Study as objectively as possible the cultural, social, and economic environments in which the students live their daily lives.

As the public schools draw more and more from varied cultural groups, each of which has its own mores and its own social and economic standards,

many teachers and other school officials find difficulty in understanding and valuing the differences. The English curriculum must, however, provide content that contributes to each individual's developing respect for who he is as well as for who he can become. The teachers may have to study literature and languages they have not known before and learn to judge behavior by values they do not hold. This is not easy to do because we as teachers--individually--must learn to recognize our own prejudices and our tendencies to generalize from stereotypes and to label without recognition of the power of a label. At this stage of the planning a sociologist can be a useful consultant. He can help us distinguish between facts and old wives tales, he can help us put in perspective some of the conditions that baffle us, and he can help us overcome some of the fears that immobilize us or cause us to make unreasonable decisions.

2. Study the students.

Psychology, biology, and sociology have made contributions to the understanding of the general developmental patterns of growth of human beings. Information derived from these sources provide general directions to curriculum makers as they attempt to define some of the sequences and procedures that reasonably may be expected to be useful. Within the framework of the general, however, the individual must work as he is, not as the norm says he should be. I well remember one of my students in high school who was a strong agriculture student but not a very strong English student. One day he was in the shop hammering out something on the anvil. He pounded away and then held his work up to admire it. In this moment of satisfaction he is reported to have remarked, "I don't know much about Shakespeare, but I can sure beat hell out

of an anvil." When this was reported to me, I had a distinct feeling that Shakespeare and I had missed our chance. My interpretation of the curriculum was not flexible enough to provide for him, with his ability, desires, values, and self-concept, a meaning to life through literature.

The boy who made that comment is now the man who services my furnace. Each time that he comes we reminisce about the good old days. His children are now just out of high school and he is much concerned about their restlessness. Once he began a comment about the schools not being as good as they used to be and interrupted himself to say, "Aw, you know I didn't learn much." For some reason our conversations leave me with a vague sense of guilt. If I and thousands like me had thirty years ago been perceptive about the distance then existing between classroom practices and the students and had been willing and able to bring the two together, would the present generation of youth have less need for the violence? If school programs could have been continuously sensitive to the relationship between students and content, would the present generation now be able to enjoy and to use constructively the marvelous potentials of the present rather than to shout in confusion and frustration? Care must be taken to respect the potential, the motivations, the values, and the sources of integrity of every student.

The curriculum must be flexible enough to provide for every student the learning situation that has meaning for him. A social psychologist can be a useful consultant in curriculum planning; he can help teachers recognize and understand the forces that impinge upon every individual and shape him into what he is when we meet him in the classroom. Then, perhaps we can understand his feelings about the pertinence and relevancy of what we teach.

3. Study what is known about how people learn.

Research in learning provides information which indicates the conditions in which students and content can be brought together in the most effective way now known. Research in human learning offers no definitive guidelines but it is growing, and its potential for affecting classroom procedures is limitless. If, however, what is now known were taken seriously, instruction would improve phenomenally. An educational psychologist can be helpful in identifying principles of learning that are basic in the development of effective teaching.

4. Review the content of the English curriculum currently in use.

Innovations in a curriculum require a clear view of the present curriculum. The plan for review can be very simple. Each teacher, kindergarten through grade twelve, writes a statement of the content he has actually taught during a year. The information is combined on a large chart that shows the whole picture, grade by grade, and the staff reviews it together. Repetitions, omissions, and the nature of the content become apparent. There are pertinent questions that derive from this experience: Does the content reflect a traditional, "always-has-been-taught" basis of selection? Is it determined by a textbook series? Is the content appropriate for the students who are studying it? Does it embody the increasing knowledge about language, literature, composition? Is the content generally selected for the college-bound, academically oriented student, even though presented in varying degrees of rigorousness to students of varying abilities?

What is it reasonable to assume will happen to a student who goes through the entire program? To the culturally deprived? To the academically

talented? To the student who is intellectually limited? To the student who will engage in the service occupations in a world in which technology is producing rapid changes? Do the combined facets of the curriculum develop in the student a realization of the power of language and of his responsibility for integrity in its use? Can the student understand and appreciate what Professor Higgins says to Eliza Doolittle in My Fair Lady when she has worked to the point of exhaustion and is ready to give up:

> Eliza, I know you're tired. I know your head aches. I know your nerves are as raw as meat in the butcher's window. But think what you are trying to accomplish. Think what you are dealing with. The majesty and grandeur of the English language. It's the greatest possession we have. The noblest sentiments that ever flowed in the hearts of men are contained in its extraordinary, imaginative and musical mixtures of sounds. That's what you have set yourself to conquer, Eliza.

The evaluation of the current curriculum through a procedure such as that suggested above makes evident reasons for change, modification, and retention of parts of the current curriculum.

5. Develop a statement of objectives for the English curriculum.

The statement of objectives provides the point of reference through which consistency and relevancy in choice of teaching procedures, content, and sequence of presentation can be maintained. The objectives define the direction of changes in behavior that seem desirable in the students. As I have served on teams to evaluate the effectiveness of high school English programs, I have been amazed by the disparity between the stated objectives and class-activities. "To appreciate good literature" appears on almost

every list, but I have visited classes in which I have seen students rushed through a half dozen wonderfully rich and beautiful poems and have recognized that their concentration was directed toward what was likely to be asked on a test, not to the poems. It seems to me that nowhere do people manifest less faith in the meaning of language than they do in a statement of objectives. Objectives have meaning only as the persons who refer to them understand and accept their full implications; consequently, it seems reasonable to me that preliminary to stating objectives, the persons who are going to be concerned with implementing them should have engaged in the activities suggested earlier in this sequence.

6. Select the content of the curriculum.

The content of the entire discipline of English is available for choice, but choices must be made. The objectives provide the criteria for selection, but careful analysis of the criteria and the proposed content must be made and the relationship between them clearly established. A reassessment of the usual organization of content may be necessary. Is a study of the chronological development of American literature suitable? Is a systematic, comprehensive study of English grammar profitable? For what purpose? For whom? At what point in the program?

7. Plan for evaluation and revision of the curriculum.

Means for determining the success of the curriculum in relation to the objectives are necessary if the program that is being developed is to be any better than the previous one. A systematic, well planned evaluation

program is as much a part of curriculum development as is the selection and organization of content.

When a curriculum is formalized in printed form and placed in the hands of teachers as guides for planning their work it must be accepted as tentative. As soon as it is used and evaluation begins, revision, too, begins. When new information about students, the psychology of learning, or any of the components of English is available, revision is necessary.

Curriculum development is a continuous process and if we as teachers and supervisors work toward being knowledgeable about what is happening to the students and in our field, we can come closer to providing conditions for the miracle of learning to happen for every student.