

Organizational Principles in Curriculum Development

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Introduction

Before we attempt to know and understand what is meant by curriculum organization and the principles involved in organization of a curriculum it would be relevant here to have an overview of what we already know about curriculum and curriculum development. This knowledge and understanding would be useful in our effort to know and understand better the matters relevant to curriculum organization.

In previous activities in this course we have gone through some literature on curriculum design and development. We were able to go through a number of definitions of curriculum. We could identify most of the sources that provide data (information) for developing a curriculum, the bases of curriculum, models and patterns or approaches of curriculum development.

Today's concept of a curriculum is that 'curriculum is everything that is planned and implemented in a school setting for its learners or students, in order to achieve the expected outcomes. A curriculum is composed of three major parts, namely a formal curriculum (formal classroom teaching), a co-curriculum (non formal activities such as sports meet, prize giving, literary activities etc) and a hidden curriculum (teacher and student behavior, school dress, school discipline etc).

It is quite clear that the word curriculum is used in a very wide sense today. Therefore curriculum planning too has become a very complex and complicated activity. It is evident that when developing a curriculum, decisions have to be taken on many matters related to the curriculum.

Many factors influence when decisions are taken on curriculum matters. These decisions on curriculum matters differ from place to place and from person to person. Therefore there is no total agreement on any matter related to curriculum development and it is going to be a challenge we may face in our discussion on curriculum organization.

Curriculum elements are the components that go to make a curriculum. Different curriculum planners have identified different curriculum elements depending on their philosophy, understanding and experience in curriculum development.

With this background knowledge that we now possess on curriculum development we are in a better position to examine what is meant by organizing a curriculum and to identify the principles that need to be considered in organizing a curriculum.

3.1 What is meant by curriculum organization

According to M. Skilbeck 'Curriculum organization refers to the manner in which the elements that constitute the curriculum of an educational system or institution are arranged, inter-related, and sequenced. These elements comprise such general factors as teaching plans and schemes, learning materials, equipment and plants, the professional expertise of the teaching force and the requirements of assessment and examination bodies' (Lewy 1991).

This broad definition of curriculum organization explains that elements of a curriculum need to be combined well, in order to facilitate learning in students effectively and efficiently in order to achieve the expected outcomes. Taba's (1971) view is that curriculum design is the result of organizing a curriculum and an effective design makes clear what the bases of the selection and the emphasis on the various elements are, as well as the sources from which these criteria are derived. M. F. Klein (1990) considers curriculum design as the organizational pattern or structure of a curriculum. According to him the design is determined by decisions made at two levels; namely a broad level involving basic value choices and a specific level involving technical planning and implementation of curricular elements which different schools advocate for designing curriculum.

Disagreement prevails on the specific number of elements that go to make a curriculum. Some writers state that there are four elements to be included while some say that there are seven. Some others have pointed out that there are nine elements and so on. But all have agreed that there need to be a minimum of four elements in a curriculum namely, aims and objectives, content, methods and evaluation.

It is evident that the elements of a curriculum can be organized in different ways. This will result in having different organizational patterns or designs. Klein states that ‘a specific curriculum design is created by the ways in which the elements are created and the interrelationships which occur among them’ (Lewy, 1991).

In whatever way a curriculum is organized or designed Klein has pointed out that it should contain a high degree of internal consistency. This would result from a careful consideration of the elements involved in curriculum design. If the decisions taken on each of the sources of data and curriculum elements are not in conflict with each other, but in agreement with each other, internal consistency can be maintained. When there is internal consistency in a curriculum it can bring good results and the curriculum will be successful.

3.2 Problems in organization and principles that need to be considered

According to Taba (1962) most of the curriculum designs described in books on curriculum or in curriculum guides appear to be weak. If the sources of data and the curriculum elements are not properly treated and inter-relationships among them do not prevail, curriculum organization would be weak and unsuccessful. The weaknesses in organization can be avoided if it is properly organized having a clear understanding of the curriculum structure, when designing the curriculum.

In Taba’s (1971) words organization involves moving from a general analysis of aims to a highly specific statement of scope (what content is to be mastered and what mental processes acquired), sequence (the ordering of content and the ordering of the learner’s competencies and skills), and integration (relationship between the learning in various areas of the curriculum which take place at the same time) (Hooper, 1975).

In the above statement we can identify a few areas that need consideration in organizing a curriculum. They can be considered as areas posing problems for resolution. The areas stated above are the scope, sequence and integration. In addition to these areas curriculum writers have shown the necessity of considering some other aspects or areas like balance, relevance and utility when organizing a curriculum. Giving proper and due

attention to these areas would result in good organization of a curriculum and therefore they can be considered the principles that need to be followed when organizing a curriculum.

3.2.1 Scope

When organizing a curriculum one area the planner needs to consider is the scope. The planner needs to think of what is to be covered and what is to be learned. In Taba's (1971) view the scope is what content to be mastered and what mental processes to be acquired. The scope covers the facts, concepts, generalizations, principles and the mental processes that need to be included in the curriculum in order to achieve the expected goals. The curriculum needs to be useful, significant and relevant in meeting the needs of the society and interests of the student. Scope should be appropriate to child development, culture and knowledge. Scope covers all aspects of learning and organization of learning and therefore the designers or the planners should give proper consideration to all these aspects when organizing a curriculum.

3.2.2 Sequence

Another aspect to be considered is sequence. Sequence is the ordering of content and ordering of learning competencies and skills. Sequencing should lead to development of learning and continuity of learning in the student. When considering sequence of a curriculum attention is paid very often only to the ordering of the content and not to the ordering of competencies and skills of the mental processes. In such an instance the competencies and skills will get limited only to the content and as a result curriculum would not be able to achieve its objectives. Therefore it is necessary to give proper attention to both content and mental competencies when sequence is considered.

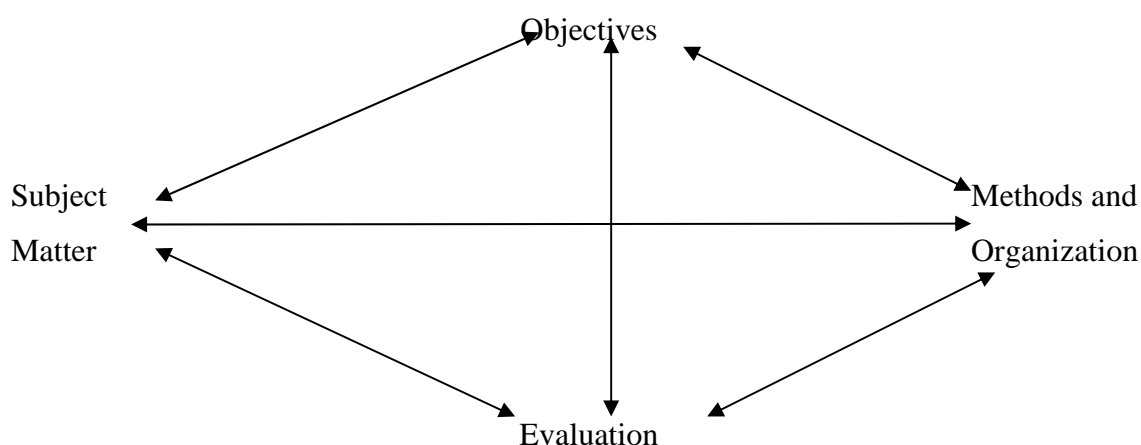
3.2.3 Integration

Integration is the relationship between learnings. This relationship can occur and it is seen between various areas of the curriculum and also between lower to upper grades. Relationship that occurs between various areas of the curriculum at the same time is called horizontal integration and relationship that occurs between lower grade to upper grade in the same area of knowledge is called the vertical integration. Curriculum

planners should take into consideration, both these aspects when organizing a curriculum if it is to be meaningful and successful.

3.2.4 Balance

A balance in all aspects needs to be preserved in a curriculum. Giving more attention to one particular aspect and neglect of other aspects will not produce a good curriculum. In both scope and sequence due consideration should be given to content to be mastered and mental processes to be acquired. Other aspect of the balance is the relationship between different elements of a curriculum. A relationship shown in a study by Giles, McCutchen and Zechiel (1942), is given below.



As the elements and the decisions taken on them are inter-related to each other, it is necessary to make clear how the various elements and the criteria or considerations connected with them are related to each other. In addition to the relationship between the elements of a curriculum Taba (1971) says ‘ a design also needs to make explicit its relationship to the factors in school organization and the instructional resources which are necessary to implement it (Hooper, 1975). Curriculum planners therefore should consider maintaining a balance between the elements and the other factors influencing a curriculum.

3.2.5 Relevance

A curriculum designed for a particular group or a grade should meet the needs and problems of that group or the students in that grade. Curriculum should meet the needs and problems of the society which give rise to that curriculum. Then only the curriculum is considered relevant to the students and to the society. If this relevance is not there curriculum would be a disinterested one and also difficult to implement.

3.2.6 Utility

Utility is another important principle to be considered in the organization of a curriculum. Utility is the value or the benefit that may occur to the individual or to the society out of the things concerned. This applies to curriculum as well. A curriculum should provide some benefit to the students who are exposed to it and also to the society which has given rise to that curriculum. Therefore the curriculum planner needs to organize the curriculum in such a way that the content, activities and experiences included in the curriculum are useful to identified students and to the society in which they live.

Summary

In the above discussion we could see that today's concept of curriculum is very wide. Therefore organization of curriculum also has become very complex and complicated.

We know that there are a number of elements in a curriculum. Number of elements identified by different writers on curriculum differs from person to person. What we understand by 'curriculum organization' is the way how the elements of a curriculum are combined or put together to make a whole in order to facilitate learning in students and achieve the expected outcomes.

When organizing a curriculum decisions on elements that go to make the curriculum and also on other matters related to curriculum have to be taken into consideration. These decisions have a great impact on the organization of a curriculum. The importance attached to different elements in a curriculum differs from writer to writer and therefore ways of combining these elements also differ from curriculum planner to planner. When a curriculum is organized it is usually named as a 'curriculum design' and we notice that there are many designs as a result of many ways adopted in organizing curriculum.

In any design or curriculum organization there are four main elements that have been incorporated in it. They are aims and objectives, contents, methods and evaluation. When combining the elements of a curriculum there are number of areas that need to be considered if the curriculum is to be successful. It is possible to overcome the weaknesses in organizing a curriculum by solving the problems that surface in these areas.

A few of the areas that need to be considered in overcoming weaknesses in organizing a curriculum can be named as scope, sequence, integration, balance, relevance and utility. As these areas provide guidelines for organizing a curriculum they are considered organizational principles in curriculum development.

By scope, it is meant the breath and the depth of a curriculum. It includes both the content and the mental competencies and skills to be developed. Sequence is the ordering of the content and the mental competencies and skills. Integration is the relationship across the subjects horizontally and through the years or grades – vertically. Integration need to be there in a curriculum to make it meaningful to learners. Balance is to maintain a good combination or relationship between all aspects of a curriculum. Relevance is another factor of importance in a curriculum. A Curriculum needs to be relevant to the individual and to the society. Another area that needs consideration is utility. There needs to be a value or importance of the curriculum to the learner and to the society in which he lives. The areas mentioned above therefore can be considered the organizational principles in curriculum development.

Objectives

After reading this lesson you will be able to,

1. describe what is meant by curriculum organization,
2. identify the curriculum elements and other aspects related to curriculum organization,
3. explain a few problems and the principles involved in organizing a curriculum,
4. clarify in brief scope, sequence, integration, balance, relevance and utility.

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