Curriculum Development and Evaluation

Spring 2017 Danielle Mott

Curriculum Politics and Current Issues

My Discussion Thread:

My Curriculum Experience

       I have had the privilege of working on two different curriculum teams.  In both cases we were looking to purchase new curricular material for each grade level within the middle school.  On my first curricular team, we were working under already established curriculum guides under the Kansas State Science Standards. Each grade level had published goals, objectives, benchmarks, and assessment boundaries.  Therefore, our focus was on methodology and best practices.  We wanted curriculum that provided many opportunities for inquiry and higher order thinking skills.  We interviewed many different textbook companies.  We choose science kits that met our goals instead of adopting textbooks.  This was a big shift for many teachers because there was no longer a reliance on a book and the prep time for investigation was significantly increased.   In this case it was our district's curriculum coordinator that formulated the team of teachers to form the committee.  Our building administrators were frequently briefed on the contents of our meetings but did not provide much feedback.  My second experience in curriculum work was more extensive.  Again, I was contacted by our district's curriculum coordinator.  The committee was made up of teacher's from every grade level to ensure that there was a spiraling of content.  The coaches from each school were also involved to provide feedback and influence.  In this case we had to start from scratch by dividing up the new NGSS between the 3 grade levels (6th, 7th, and 8th).  We then created essential questions for each grade level.  We wanted to take an integrated approach so each grade level had standards in each major branch of science. The final step was to recommend a textbook company to the school board.  Teacher's opinions and expertise drove the decision making.  In every step of the process teachers had complete autonomy.

 Curriculum Issue:

       Our school should work on developing a better plan to implement character education.  10 years ago, our district invested in a curriculum for character education K-12.  It is called Quantum Learning. Quantum is more than just a provider of character education.  It is a program built on brain-based research providing many instructional strategies that work any age of students.  The character piece of the program is called the 8 Keys to Success (there are literal keys we hang in our room): Integrity, Failure Leads to Success, Speak with Good Purpose, Commitment, Ownership, Balance, and Flexibility.  The district has committed to providing professional in-depth workshops for new employees.  The trainings are fantastic and the ideas are practical and fun to use in the classroom.  The problem is that at the secondary level, the professional development and the implementation  is left up to individual teachers.  There is little time given to refreshing the concepts with the teachers.  At the middle and high school levels students still need these skills to navigate tough decisions and relationships between with teachers, friends, and families.  These keys set students up mentally and emotionally for the future.

          Proposed Steps:

1. As part of the walk-through rubrics teachers are evaluated on the implementation of the 8 Keys.  This is just as important as the Webb Question Index.

2.  At each professional development meeting, teacher leaders can provide new and fresh ideas for implementing the keys.

3.  Secondary teachers are allowed to collaborate with elementary teachers.

Assignment:  
I.                   Politics of Curriculum Making

A number of constituents potentially have input into curriculum policy (i.e. teachers, principals, superintendents, community participants, federal government, testing agencies, etc.). As you think about your everyday working situation—who do you believe really controls the curriculum? What experiential evidence supports your belief(s)?

II.                Current Issues

Briefly describe the critical aspects for each of the “crucial curriculum issues” suggested by McNeil (i.e. development of thinking, moral education, competition with other nations, vocational education, and school safety). Write a paragraph to the U.S. Secretary of Education suggesting the urgency for a focus on one of those issues.

1. Brief Descriptions of Curriculum Issues:

Development of Thinking: Depending on which theory of teaching you are work under (Social Reconstructionist, Idealistic, Humanistic etc.) the idea of how to teach thinking varies. Some academics think that thinking should be developed with the use of inquiry and discovery. Others believe that thinking can be developed with a scientific approach. With the wide variety of theories, a school must decide how to teach thinking by aligning their goals with the mission statement.

Moral Education: According to Philip Phenix, the development of a Moral Development Curriculum should include “values, standard or norms, and justification for these norms” (McNeil 235). There are four positions of moral development according to Phenix: nihilistic, autonomic, hereonomic, and telenomic. Later, Lawrence Kohlberg proposed that moral development happens in stages in response to one’s cultural point of view.

Competition with other nations: Recent findings show that that the United States is falling behind other countries when rewarding science and mathematical degrees in higher education. There have been many comparisons in the educational systems of the United States and other countries. The problem is that the curricular choices of each national are very different. It’s like comparing apples and oranges. Among must studies and comparisons however, the US compared favorably with other developed nations but in all other comparisons of math and science the US competed at the grand mean.

Vocational Education: This type of education is now known as career and technical education. The purpose of technical training is to give students the skills they will need to become employed in variety of skill-labored jobs. Curriculum developers for vocational education approach school-to-employment in three ways: education through work, education about work, education for work.

School Safety: School safety is not about just preventing the use of weapons in school and developing escape codes for emergencies and other security measure. Curriculum developers have turned their focus to creating “learning space in which children-their bodies, hearts, and minds-are protected” (238). Teaching students empathy as well as how to stand up to bullies, are some of the strategies used to create safer schools.

Shawnee Height Middle School

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8 May 2017

Ms. Betsy DeVos

US Department of Education

Dear Ms. DeVos

I am a middle school educator in a rural area outside the capital city, Topeka. The majority of our students are from working class families. We are in need for a greater access to vocational training in our area. With several major industries with our immediate range, I feel it important to make these industries our partner in developing curriculum and internship opportunities for students. With the help from federal funds, there could be monitory and mentorship rewards for those companies and individuals who are interested in partnering with our schools. In addition, Washburn Tech, one local vocational program, could create extension programs for our students outside of city limits. Some classes could be taught at the high school. Perhaps federal grants for these extension opportunities will get more students interested in higher education and work outside of high school. Vocational training in tech or industry is needed within our community. Please consider our situation and needs when deciding federal aid for states.

Sincerely,

Danielle Mott