Curriculum Scope, Sequence, Integration, and Continuity Simulation

Introduction

This is a simulation designed to help you understand some of the issues educators face when they write curriculum. In particular, it is designed to force you to face some of the questions and problems related to scope, sequence, integration, and continuity that curriculum developers must face when they create curriculum. The assumption underlying this simulation is that, by having to face and struggle with some of the choices curriculum workers encounter, you will come to better understand the choices and what is gained or lost by making certain decisions. In this simulation, you will be asked to make choices similar to those that many curriculum developers and curriculum committees confront. Please confront the questions you are given, and as you answer them, figure out why you are making the decisions you are. The purpose of the simulation is not just to get you to make decisions, but to get you to do so in a setting where you can explain why you made the decisions you did and what you have gained or lost by doing so.

You should engage in this simulation in groups of from two to six persons, so that the decisions made must be negotiated and the reasons for taking a particular stance or suggesting a particular course of action must be clearly specified. Work through the simulation in the order in which the activities are given and make decisions before moving on to later parts of the simulation; do not jump from earlier to later parts of the simulation.

This simulation relates to issues of curriculum scope, sequence, integration, and continuity. These four issues all relate to how to select and organize the essence of a curriculum, be it content (things children understand and information children
acquire), learning experiences (out of which children make their own meanings and that stimulate their own unique growth), skills (specific competencies that children acquire), or values (moral and ethical stances and perspectives on our world).

- Scope relates to what should be taught or learned.
- Sequence relates to when different parts of the curriculum should be learned with respect to the other parts of the curriculum.
- Integration relates to how different strands of a piece of curriculum relate to other things occurring in students’ lives, either in other school subjects or outside school in their homes and community.
- Continuity relates to how previous learnings and future learnings relate in terms of cumulative effects of learning.

Within this simulation, you are to pretend that you are on a curriculum committee. You must decide which one of the following three grade levels you will be working with: Grade 4, Grade 7, or Grade 10.

You are assigned the job of preparing a curriculum that will run for only 2 weeks (10 days) at your grade level for all of the teachers in your school system (not just yourself). The curriculum will relate to the life and/or contributions of (a) George Washington, (b) Abraham Lincoln, or (c) both men. You must assume that the children you will teach know nothing of these men and that they will never again learn about them in school. Yes, that is an unrealistic assumption, but one of the problems of curriculum planning is a scarcity of time to do everything we might want to do, and that is the situation in which you are being placed. Do not assume that your students already know about these historical figures.

One of the first issues for you to confront relates to what to include in your curriculum. This is an issue of scope. Two major problems exist with respect to scope. First, there is more material to put into the school curriculum than time permits. Second, people have different opinions about what belongs in the school curriculum. For example, there are competing claims for the inclusion of occupational, political, social, and intellectual knowledge in the curriculum. You are also learning about the different opinions concerning philosophical or ideological intentions for the school curriculum. In addition, our population in the U.S. comes from a wide variety of cultural and religious backgrounds that have different hopes for our schools. One of the American dilemmas is that the diversity of the American population makes consensus very difficult to obtain. Many of our strengths and weakness stem from our diversity.

**Curriculum Design Simulation**

- First, you must decide which one of the following three grade levels you will be working with: Grade 4, Grade 7, or Grade 10.
- Second, you must decide on a very general level what your curriculum will be about. In particular, will it relate to the life and/or contributions of (a) George Washington, (b) Abraham Lincoln, or (c) both men? If you decide on (c), determine how you will allocate your 2 weeks of time between Washington and Lincoln. Also determine, in a very general way, what you wish to accomplish by having children learn about (a), (b), or (c). Here, you
must face several different decisions. One relates to going into depth about one important
topic versus having breadth and covering several important topics. In this simulation, and
life, you cannot have both. Another issue you must face relates to why you are having
children study Washington, Lincoln, or both men: to help them understand the lives of
the men, to help them understand U.S. history, to help them understand contemporary
U.S. society, to help them understand themselves, etc. You cannot have it all. Make your
decisions now. Come to a consensus in your group. Try to figure out why you decided as
you did. Is there a relationship between your preferred ideology and the decisions you
made? Try to understand what you gained and lost in deciding as you did. After making
your decisions and reflecting, discuss these things.

• Third, your curriculum can emphasize only one of the following four types of knowl-
edge: content (things children understand and information children acquire), learning
experiences (out of which children make their own meanings and that stimulate their
own unique growth), skills (specific competencies that children acquire), or values
(moral and ethical stances and perspectives on our world). You can have primary and
secondary emphases, but you can’t have it all. Decide which your curriculum will
emphasize. Then reflect on what motivated you to make your decision and what you
have gained or lost by making your decision. This is one of the most difficult decisions
related to scope for curriculum workers to make.

• Fourth, you now need to acquire the specific material that you might put in your cur-
riculum. What sources are you going to go to? In the past, curriculum workers have used
a variety of sources: the textbooks currently used in their school system, textbooks that
they used in college, scholars in a particular academic discipline (in this case, history),
teacher educators who are experts about a particular area or curriculum, professional cur-
riculum developers, behavioral or developmental psychologists, libraries (such as the
Library of Congress, which might have original sources, or the local community library,
which might have secondary sources), the Internet, toy stores (yes, curriculum developers
have found many wonderful things in toy stores—for example, many of the Elementary
Science Study materials, such as pattern blocks and meal worms, were found in toy
stores), etc. You have a limited amount of time and energy, so you cannot use all sources.
Which are you going to use! Also decide on what types of things you are going to search
for: wonderful experiences for children to engage in, the understandings that children
should acquire and events that they should know about, the values they should acquire,
the skills that they should learn, or the specific objectives your curriculum seeks to obtain.
You cannot have it all. The decision you must really make is what you will do first and what
will derive from the first things you do. For example, will you first find wonderful experi-
ences for children to engage in and then determine the specific knowledge for children to
acquire based on those experiences? Or will you first decide on the knowledge you want
children to learn and then search for experiences? Or, as Tyler suggests, will you first
determine your objectives, then acquire and organize learning experiences, so that you
can eventually evaluate whether or not you achieved your objectives? Again, you can’t have
it all. Decide which will come first and then what will flow from what you first search out.
Also, think about what you gained or lost by your way of proceeding.

• Fifth, as you acquire material to include in your curriculum, assume that you get much
more material than can fit into the 2 weeks you have. This is a problem almost all cur-
rriculum workers face: too much material and not enough time. How do you determine
what to put in and what to leave out? Other than on a whim, that is. What criteria are
you going to use to help you decide which specific items to include or exclude? Here are
five traditional questions regarding new items going into curriculum:
1. Is an item significant to an organized field of knowledge?
2. Does the item stand the test of survival over time?
3. Is the item useful?
4. Is the item interesting to the learner?
5. Does the item contribute to the growth and development of a democratic society?

Which of these questions, or which set of questions, are you going to use to guide you in your selection of material for your curriculum? Why? What do you lose or gain by using some questions rather than others? Some curriculum theorists have said that for something new to be added to a curriculum, all five of the above questions needs to be answered in the affirmative. What do you think?

So far, you have considered yourselves to be the ones making the decisions about what to include in your curriculum. This is not always the way things are. Think about the following two issues:

- One of the questions that the field of curriculum is now struggling with is “Where do you think decisions should be made about what to include or exclude from the school curriculum: at the local level within the community where children live by the members of that community, at the state level by those residents of the state most qualified to make them (or politicians who have the power to make them), or at the national level for the country as a whole by the nation’s best experts?” What do you think? (These issues are sometimes phrased in such terms as national standards, state standards, state-adopted textbooks, and local, teacher, or school empowerment.)

- Who do you think should decide what to include or exclude from the school curriculum: teachers, parents, children, school boards, university scholars, politicians, professional curriculum designers, the special interest groups who care most about the material that children might learn, or some other group?

- Sixth, you are now going to have to decide how to sequence the material you are placing into your curriculum (be it content, experiences, skills, or values). Despite the popular belief that there is only one natural way of sequencing the material within a curriculum, there are in fact many different ways of sequencing. Knowing that there are a variety of sequencing algorithms is one thing; deciding on which to use is another. What system are you going to use to sequence the material? What do you lose or gain from using your system over others?

- Seventh, you must decide how you will provide for continuous and cumulative growth of the scope of your curriculum and of the learner who will engage your curriculum. While continuity is usually an issue we think about in multiyear terms, we also need to think about it in short-term situations. How are you going to provide for continuous and cumulative growth over time, both within your 2-week curriculum and from this year to next year, of the scope of your curriculum and the learners themselves? How are your going to ensure that your curriculum provides students with opportunities to give
progressively more demanding performance, acquire progressively greater depth and breadth of understanding, engage in progressively more exacting analysis of what they read and listen to, develop progressively more sophisticated value systems, be presented with progressively more complex material, etc.? The need for continuity has been written about in the research literature, but few practical strategies have been proposed other than the “spiral curriculum” in which topics are revisited repeatedly over the years at increasingly greater levels of sophistication. What are you going to do?

• Eighth, curriculum integration is a problem that arises because many parts of the school curriculum exist and it is not easy to relate them to each other. How are you going to relate what you do in your 2-week Washington and/or Lincoln curriculum to what is going on in math, science, English, physical education, and the other classes that students in your school system are taking? How are you going to relate what you do in your 2-week Washington and/or Lincoln curriculum to what is going on in your students’ home lives, their community life, and in the society in which they live? These questions need to be answered, or we need to decide to ignore them. How are you going to answer them, or are you going to ignore them? If you choose to ignore them, how can you justify doing so?

(For your information, we used to teach penmanship, public speaking, grammar, composition, writing, reading, and literature as separate subjects, but now we have integrated all these into the language arts. Similarly, we used to teach history, civics, and geography as separate subjects, but now we teach the social studies. Are we better off now that we have integrated these subjects, or were we better off when the subjects were taught separately?)

Who do you think should be responsible for doing the integrating of the material presented by your Washington and/or Lincoln curriculum: children, teachers, or the curriculum developers? And where do you think the integration should take place? Usually the choices boil down to the following:

• Within the individual child and by the individual child
• Within the curriculum itself by the curriculum developers
• Within the instructional arena by teachers

We often think of integrated curriculum as either a product (an integrated curriculum) or a process (the process of learning how to relate the material presented by different parts of the curriculum). How do you choose to think about curriculum integration: as a set of relationships that the curriculum, teacher, or child defines, or as a process by which one learns to make relationships and see relationships? Decide this and then reflect on how your answers to the previous several questions agree with your perspective.