

CHANGING CURRICULUM POLICY: A CASE STUDY APPROACH TO
EXAMINING THE RESPONSE IN SCHOOLS

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Recent interest in alternative approaches to curriculum research reflects a dissatisfaction with what might be called traditional research approaches. A number of writers have used case study methods to shed light on curriculum practice (Reid and Walker 1975; Shaw 1978; Harrison et al. 1977; Harrison 1978). This largely reflects the need to study the curriculum as a social phenomenon in a social context, rather than as a reified entity, divorced from its milieu.

It was with these developments in mind that a case study approach was adopted in this study of the local effects of changing central curriculum policy in a State Education Department. The work reported here is part of a larger study which included analysis of how the policy change had been disseminated to schools.

Since the 1970's, the policy of the New South Wales (N.S.W.) Department of Education has been to gradually shift responsibility for curriculum development from central committees towards the schools. The official policy of the N.S.W. Department at the time this study was conducted was that,

Within the framework of central statements and supported by both Centre and Region the school develops and implements a curriculum appropriate to its pupils (N.S.W. Department of Education 1976: 1).

Such a policy represents a significant change in a Department of Education which previously granted schools only minimal discretion over curriculum matters. The move towards greater autonomy for schools over curriculum affairs took place gradually. Rather than prescribing detailed content to be taught new syllabuses have emphasised aims and objectives to be achieved and left decisions about how those were to be obtained to the teachers. Two major papers from the newly formed Directorate of Studies, the Aims of Secondary Education in N.S.W. 1973 (Aims Paper) and the Base Paper on the Total Curriculum 1975 (Base Paper), heralded a far broader discussion of the role of the school in curriculum development. The publication in 1976 of the document Curriculum Development: The Role and Responsibility of the Centre, the Region and the School (otherwise known as the Three-Tier Document) clarified, for many people, the new tasks which they were expected to undertake. This policy of school based curriculum development (SBCD) was intended to lead to school curricula which were both relevant to particular social and geographical contexts and designed to meet the needs and interests of specific students.

The first aim of this study was to examine the response to this changing situation in six secondary schools in one Region of the N.S.W. Department of Education. The second aim was to examine the value of using case study methods to conduct research in the area of school based curriculum development. The study was exploratory in nature. The researcher was interested to find out whether, given the new policy, any changes in the curricula of those schools had occurred. Where changes had taken place she wanted to find out how they had come about and in response to what factors.

It has been argued that SBCD represents a type of paradigm shift in curriculum policy (Laird 1977: 11). If that were the case, one would expect that its characteristics would challenge existing traditions and practices. Laird (1977) argues that this is so. However, this researcher hypothesized that the interpretation of SBCD in N.S.W.

would not challenge the existing arrangements, characterised by the four traditions of Australian education posited by Connell (1972). These are the academic, the piecemeal, the prudential and the administering traditions.

According to Connell, the academic tradition supports the view that there is a natural progression from the primary school, through the secondary school to university. Thus, if this tradition remained, the curriculum of primary and secondary schools would be predominantly academic in orientation, geared towards university education. Non-academic courses which were provided would be largely of low status, for the benefit of the 'less able' students. Such vocational or non-academic courses would be justified more on grounds of their contribution to a general education, or as leisure activities, than on their usefulness.

The key characteristic of the piecemeal tradition is the lack of purposeful relationships between the different parts of the school systems, and the fact that where communication between them exists it is largely one-way, from the top - down. If this were adhered to, it would imply that the curriculum of the secondary school would not be seen as an interrelated whole, that when planning courses, secondary schools would pay little attention to work which children have done in the primary school and that a system of examination would provide the link between the various elements of the education system.

The prudential tradition is characterised by a view of education which leads to economic reward through a 'good career'. It also features a concern with measurable efficiency and standardisation across the state. Thus, if it remained in evidence, schools would be concerned to measure the efficiency of the education they provide, and this would require common examination or moderation procedures as well as a system of inspection, or some other form of standardisation.

The administering tradition is characterised by the administrator having to do the best he can with the least amount of money, and taking responsibility for all significant educational decisions. In addition, educational change is always assumed to come 'from above', by organisational and administrative change. If this tradition still prevailed accountability would have to be upward from the school rather than outward to its community, and the change to SBCD would have come from the top. The process of introducing SBCD would have been a power-coercive or administrative, rather than a rational-empirical or normative-re-educative process. Further, changes which occurred in the schools would be largely administrative or organisational (eg. changes in time-tabling, grouping of subjects or grouping of students).

These traditions provided a framework for the analysis of the findings of the study by being a kind of "benchmark" against which SBCD could be judged.

The conduct of case study research.

The selection of schools for the study was based on a number of criteria thought to be significant to the issue of SBCD and notions of change and innovation referred to in the literature (size of schools; type of school i.e. Catholic or State; present curriculum organisation; isolation; size of town; distance from support systems such as the Regional Office). Six high schools were finally selected in addition to two pilot schools.

The case studies were of Stenhouse's (1977a) 'oral history' type. This, rather than an ethnographic approach, was used because the researcher wished to explore, within a set time limit, curriculum changes which had occurred in a number of schools over several years. In Shaw's (1978) terms the case studies were mainly descriptive, hopefully contributing to an accurate account of current practice. Subsequent analysis and attempts to explain relationships were kept separate from the cases themselves.

Connelly (1978) states that case studies will only be interesting when an idea is at stake. The idea of SBCD provides a common focus to the six cases and thereby limits the investigations of the researcher to this issue within each school as a 'bounded system' (Adelman et al. 1976: 141-143).

Two fundamental justifications are required in case study research (Kemmis 1977). The first is a justification of the truth-status of the findings, the second relates to the accountability of the researchers for the conduct of the research. In 'naturalistic' research, control cannot be exercised over the context of the phenomenon. However, the methods of observation and interpretation are controlled, with the process of triangulation playing an important role. What has to be justified is the practice of describing the context in which a phenomenon occurs; in the case of SBCD, it is the context within which curriculum development occurs which is the significant feature of the phenomenon, and hence provides adequate justification for this research approach. The findings of case study research must also be made open to judgement by communicating them clearly to all appropriate audiences (in this case teachers in the schools studied, other teachers and academics). The description must be rich and the researcher must attempt to explain how she came to her findings.

In addition to triangulation and taking care with the language of the studies, the researcher returned a draft of its case to each school for comment. This provided a check on the accuracy of the study and the interpretations which the researcher might have placed on teachers' comments. A few minor adaptations were made to the case studies at this stage; otherwise the chapters were well received by the schools. This response indicated to the researcher that her method of data analysis had achieved a satisfactory account of curriculum development at the schools, from the staffs' point of view.

The second problem for the case study worker relates to the accountability of the researcher for the conduct of the study. In one sense, the researcher has to be accountable through the processes of triangulation and authentic reporting for the truth status of the report. In another sense, social research of this type is a political, ethical and ideological activity. The case study worker, engaged in reporting about the action, beliefs and ideals of others, has certain obligations to them. MacDonald and Walker (1975) seek to overcome the ethical problem by negotiating the release of information with them, but Jenkins (1978) rightly shows how the power relationships between teacher and researcher make it a very unequal negotiation. An alternative, discussed by Adelman et al (1976: 146-148) is anonymisation. This would have been quite impossible for a study such as this; thus, recognising the problems of negotiation, the researcher decided that prior to her releasing each case in thesis form the school would have the right to omit or alter any part. The researcher maintained an open mind on the possibility of restricting access to the thesis, but in the event this has not been necessary.

The usual procedures for obtaining entry to schools were followed. Each school was then visited for five to six days during a two-week period. In each case the researcher interviewed the principal, deputy principal, subject masters and mistresses, teachers from each subject area, randomly selected, and additional teachers who had been involved in specific curriculum developments. Most interviews were tape recorded. Other staff were asked to complete a brief survey form which sought a wider range of opinions on a few key issues. Many curriculum documents from each school provided additional data about course structure and content within subject areas.

Processing the data was a lengthy task. Each teacher's comments were categorised under general headings derived from the pilot studies. A colour code and numbering system for each comment facilitated retrieval later if necessary. To draw all the data together each case needed a clear conceptual structure. In each case the context in which SBCD was expected to occur was outlined and the researcher described the curriculum of the school

at the time of her study. She then concerned herself with the way in which the teachers and administrators at the school were interpreting SBCD and described their attitudes towards the concept. Next, she described the curriculum changes which had come about, and the processes whereby they had developed. Finally, she determined what support people in the schools felt they needed to carry out SBCD successfully. The final section of each case was a discussion in which the researcher attempted to evaluate the changes in the school's curriculum in the light of Connell's four traditions. This was kept quite distinct from the previous descriptive sections.

School based curriculum development: what was happening to the curriculum?

From the broader study of documents as well as interviews with curriculum personnel and regional officers of the Education Department it became clear that, while the literature espousing the new policy indicated some evidence of genuine change in curriculum philosophy, many of the existing traditions were deeply embedded within it and within system practices. In the schools themselves many characteristics of Connell's four traditions remained.

The curricula of the schools studied were predominantly academic. This was most marked in the final two years. The purpose of study in Years 11 and 12 was clearly for students to pass the H.S.C. with as high an aggregate score as possible. Where Other Approved Studies (O.A.S.) had been introduced most were obviously intended for "less able" students, many of whom remained at school because no employment was available.

In the junior parts of the school, although there was considerable variation in the time spent in the six schools on different subjects, the emphasis remained academic. Many teachers commented that their decisions about what to include in courses for Years 7 - 10 were strongly influenced by the content and standards necessary to commence senior study.

TABLE I
 Variations in time spent on a range of curriculum areas
 at the six case study schools.

Areas of Study	Time spent on these as a percentage of the total curriculum, showing variation among the six schools.
1. Core academic subjects (i.e. mathematics, science, English)	36% - 45%
2. Social Sciences	Great variation - impossible to state clearly.
3. Maximum elective time possible	13% - 30%
4. Maximum time possible to spend on 'practical' subjects.	6.5% - 30%
5. Maximum possible time spent on art and music.	5.6% - 18.2%
6. Sport and recreation	6.8% - 17.25%
7. Health, Personal Development, Pastoral Care.	0% - 3.6%

Table I shows the variation in time which was allocated to different areas of study in the schools. The large block of compulsory time spent on three core academic subjects is clear. The so-called 'practical' subjects (eg. manual arts, home science) were only offered among the electives and even they seemed to have taken a relatively theoretical orientation in order to gain some respectability in the subject area stakes. Courses which had been developed at school level specifically to meet perceived needs accounted for only approximately 1 - 3%

of the total junior school curriculum. Where interest electives or other such activities had been introduced they were usually justified in terms of increased leisure time in the present or future. The introduction of some career education and work experience is an exception to the academic tradition which will be discussed later.

The piecemeal tradition remained in evidence, particularly in the lack of purposeful relationships between different parts of schools. The dominant interpretation of SBCD was found to be 'master-based' development.

From many comments made by teachers it appeared that the curriculum of secondary schools consists of various subject empires which operate largely in isolation from one another. Attempts at formulating school aims, which might be seen as providing an overall curriculum rationale, appear not to have been totally successful. Nor does this help to overcome the duplication and confusion which arises from the piecemeal approach. Evidence of close relationships with primary schools, particularly with regard to the curriculum, was extremely limited and intelligence tests were used to assist in the grading of new students in the five schools which retained streaming in Year 7. At the other end of the secondary school examinations remained as the link to tertiary education. Further, the proliferation of one-period subjects (e.g. personal development) was seen by the researcher as a very piecemeal approach to some fundamental curriculum problems. The organisation of remedial programs, such that help was available in reading and mathematics for one or two periods per week yet the rest of the time students were expected to continue with the normal work of the year group, reflected a curriculum poorly geared to meet the needs of students with varying achievement levels.

Despite attempts at the central level to challenge the prudential tradition through the almost total abolition of external examinations at the end of Year 10, in the schools there was overwhelming support for at least partial external examination, reflecting the importance which schools attach to measuring the efficiency of the education they provide in comparison with other schools. This may also have reflected the feeling that teachers had, that with SBCD they were bearing the brunt of public criticism of schools. No doubt their burdens would be lightened and much of their responsibility would appear to be removed if external examinations were re-introduced for Year 10.

As far as the administering tradition is concerned it was clear that some of the changes which took place in the schools were simply organisational but this was by no means true of all the changes which took place. Table II shows the range of curriculum changes which occurred. Curriculum modifications refer to those changes which somehow altered the scope of the school's curriculum, usually to broaden it. Many of the smaller changes reflected minor shifts in attitude towards the type of activity which was deemed to be of educational value. Of the organisational changes, many were effected to put into operation new educational ideas (e.g. changes in elective pattern at School A which provided more choice of practical electives). However, there appeared to have been no fundamental reassessment of the purpose of secondary schooling or the total curriculum appropriate to it. True to the predictions of Young (1971: 39) the main curriculum changes were either within subject departments rather than between them, and for low ability or low status children. Rather than the integration which seemed to be considered desirable in the Base Paper, there was a fragmentation of the curriculum, with social, political and economic pressures appearing to have spawned a rash of activities to be 'tacked on' to the academic core. Thus complaints that the curriculum was overcrowded followed. Nevertheless it was clear that despite various elements of the administering tradition remaining within the system, in the schools this was being challenged.

TABLE II
A classification of the types of changes which
had occurred in the six schools

TYPES OF CHANGES	A	B	C	D	E	F
1. Course changes	Science; Geography Social Science (only 1 year); Technics.	Technics; Social Science; Home Science; Some senior school syllabi.	Science; Geography; Maths.	Technics; English; Science; Social Science; Geography; Mathematics; Sen. Music.	Geography; Science.	Commerce; Mathematics.
2. Timetable changes, or changes in curriculum structure	Elective pattern changed.	Special Wednesday arrangements. Study periods for senior students.		Introduced eight- day cyclic timetable, later changed to seven day cycle. Fifty and some sixty minute periods.		Periods changed from 40-60 mins. Module scheme introduced for one term only.
3. Remedial work or course development.	Remedial Mathematics and Reading.	Remedial programme and Reading Room established.	Remedial and enrich- ment programmes in maths and reading.	Increased remedial work.	Remedial programme introduced.	Remedial Reading programme begun. 'Enrichment' added.
4. Changes in Teaching Methods.		Commerce - began Investment club; Year 7 maths - unit system and team teaching; Science - team teaching.	Increase in formal testing; French - increased use of audio-visual equip- ment.	Project Enquiry approach to Agri- culture; CCTV introduced for Technical Drawing; Scripture changed to whole day.	Craft lessons to mixed groups of boys and girls.	More use of audio- visual equipment; Science - new programme with new text book as basis.
5. Other Approved Studies.	PE and Music offered, but not taught.	Computer Studies; Business of Living; Driver Education.	Lapidary; Consumer Educ.; Film Studies; Automotive Mech.	Human Development and Child Care; Introductory Accountancy; Narrabri in Focus; Radio.	Religion	Not applicable.
6. Addition/ deletion of courses or activities.	Canoe-building as part of Technics; Mini-courses intro- duced; PD introduced; Music increased; Increased Careers Counselling.	'Language' introduced; interest electives added; Careers work extended; PD intro- duced; Elective Art introduced.	Personal Development introduced; Interest Activities intro- duced; 'Careers' added.	Introduced courses in Art, Music, Indonesian Agriculture (pre 1973); Careers work extended.	Interest Groups added; MassMedia Course introduced; Careers Prog. and work experience introduced; Reduced Religion periods; Pastoral Care and Health introduced; Technics introduced; Language introduced; Textiles & Design added.	Agriculture added; Personal Development (introduced one year only); French dropped; 'Activities' programme introduced; Girl's craft broadened.
7. Other	Regional supplement home school liason, development of courses above in PD, remedial work and increased careers counselling.	Increased Community Involvement.	Aims and Objectives Committee; Agriculture work- shop and shearing school; English - development of checklist.	Radio started. Communication Studies.	Diocesan Religion Guidelines used.	

Discussion

The use of Connell's four traditions was certainly found to be helpful as a framework for this study, although some conceptual overlap between them was revealed.

It is interesting to reflect briefly on the findings, for schools, which were encouraged to believe that they had increasing control over and responsibility for their curriculum found themselves operating within a host of constraints. Although at a system level there had been a weakening of curriculum frame factors (Bernstein 1971), to allow teachers (and students?) greater curriculum control, the internal structure of schools coupled with the subject-based promotion system and in-service activities, militated against any change in the classification.

Apart from subject-based developments, the economic situation of the mid to late 1970's seemed to be having an effect. Increased remedial work, the development of work experience and career education seemed directly related to the unemployment problem (Windschuttle 1980). In O'Keefe's (1977) terms, the move towards SBCE, which weakened the frame factors in the educational system, might be seen as a weakening of the 'curriculum as investment' model. That is, it was designed to encourage 'consumption subjects', those intended to meet students' current interests rather than those subjects studied as investments, instrumental for the future. Although the policy shift was initiated at a time of economic boom, at the time its implications were being felt in schools the economy had taken a turn for the worse. Teachers saw that students were keen for the curriculum to include more, not fewer, investment subjects; this demand was derived from labour market pressures on them. It should be added that the legitimacy of the H.S.C. examination which served to reinforce the academic structure of the secondary schools, was enhanced by a burgeoning credentialism, encouraged by employers who were able to pick and choose school-leavers, at least in part, on the basis of the grades they obtained at the end of the Year 10 and, especially, Year 12. Academic achievement in accepted subjects was instrumental to obtaining work; thus the economic situation reinforced trends already operating because of the sociological factors previously referred to.

The value of case study research.

The value of case study, rather than survey, for this research problem became apparent as the researcher visited the schools and became aware of quite different physical and social environments within which they operated. These seemed to affect the morale of staff and their enthusiasm for innovation. While this paper has outlined some general trends evident in the six schools, each one was unique in its response to SBCE. Specifically, the relationship of each school to its community seemed to be related to the amount and type of innovation which teachers had attempted. What emerged was an apparent difference in the degree of trust teachers perceived the community to have in its school. If teachers perceive that the community trusts them, then curriculum change is seen as possible, if teachers see it as desirable. Certainly, without community trust and support it appears likely that any major changes are likely to fail. Whilst curriculum literature has emphasized the importance of favourable social dynamics and human relationships within the school, this researcher believes that similar factors external to the school are worthy of attention by policy makers, practitioners and researchers alike.

Secondly it was noticed that individuals with special enthusiasm or commitment, especially when they were in curriculum leadership roles, had strongly influenced the direction of curriculum changes within their schools. Certainly the experience of visiting schools and talking to teachers impressed upon the researcher the important, yet somewhat intangible human relationship issues so essential to curriculum change.

In sum, whilst this study of SBCE was richer and yielded more information about the processes of change than a widespread survey could have achieved, a case can be made for further studies in greater depth of individual schools undergoing curriculum changes. The author certainly agrees with Stenhouse (1977a; 1977b) that collections of cases are likely to be of considerable value to educational researchers in the future, and that like accumulated medical 'cases', they will provide the basis for generating theory and highlighting areas worthy of further investigation

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