

## Curriculum making: which way to go?

Dr. Devkant Joshi\*

### Introduction

One of the most important elements in a successful school teaching program is the existence of a well-articulated curriculum. Without this, there may be good teachers in isolated areas, but upon their departure, their replacements are left at a loss, unsure of what students know and can do with the subject of study. Only thoroughly professional and truly efficient teachers can capitalize on what students have already learned and can prepare them for what is to come in the upper levels. An exhaustive and comprehensible curriculum is, therefore, indispensable to guide teachers to plan their instruction.

The primary audience of a curriculum is definitely a teacher. However, school management that oversees the translation of theoretical curriculum to practical teaching in classrooms, and parents who want and deserve to be informed about what their children are expected to learn, also form components of curriculum. In a nutshell, the construction of curriculum followed by the mind-setting exercise with regard to the direction, pace, and modus operandi of its application is expected to be comprehensive, precise, and unanimous.

### Curriculum making and divergent perspectives

One of the schools of thought on curriculum making suggests that there are ten dimensions of curriculum development, which include centralized versus decentralized curriculum. The centralized curriculum is developed at the central

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\* Principal of L.R.I. School, Kalanki, Kathmandu, Nepal.

level and is applied throughout the nation. It is called national curriculum. And the decentralized curriculum is known as the local curriculum. Both types of curriculum can be found in practice depending upon a particular country's ground reality, relevance, and usefulness.

It is observed that several trends have influenced the curriculum development process. One is macro-level globalization or internationalization of curriculum, another is mini macro-level nationalization, and there also is a trend towards micro-level localization of education and curricula. In the process of localization, institutions, staff and local communities, rather than national education boards or curriculum development centres, play crucial role for developing school curricula. It is a trend juxtaposed with the trend towards free globalization or the national context centralization. Meanwhile, use of the term 'localized' rather than 'decentralized' is more concerned with the systematization of practices, participation of local stakeholders, and use of local resources and local contents.

#### Curriculum making and international practices

In several developed countries, provincial states, districts, and even schools are provided with the rights to develop curriculum on their own. These are often called school-based curricula. The schools can choose the contents according to the needs of children and the priorities of parents. In USA, each of the fifty states has the legal right to design and implement curriculum for its public schools. On that, most of these states have traditionally delegated authority in this regard to local school councils. Likewise, in the Scandinavian countries, the concept of 'steering by goals' has taken hold, under which increasing attention has been paid

to school-level decision making. The focus, as such, is put on the constructive role of teachers in translating broad goals into learning contents and activities.

In all the above instances, the central governments have been playing the role of defining curriculum objectives, broad outlines of subject matter, advice on methodology, and certain level of control through assessment and certification. In some other cases, e.g. in England and Wales, curriculum matters are regulated by highly elaborated national curriculum testing systems.

The aforementioned initiatives and practices reflect a desirable propensity of decentralization and democratization in favour of 'progressive education' in the fast changing world. However, the point of caution the global academia need not overlook is that it is impossible with any degree of certainty to visualize what will indeed be the 'relevant knowledge' and 'skill in demand' in a generation or two.

#### Curriculum making and Nepal

Nepal is a country of diversity in terms of topography, language, caste, ethnicity, religion, and culture. The last census (2001/02) has revealed 102 social groups and 92 spoken languages. It is well acknowledged by the cross-section of stakeholders that our education system has ignored the above reality until now. Education here has been focusing heavily on bookish knowledge rather than developmental needs of children. Countless students do not complete even primary education and those who do, fail to equip themselves with minimum skills. Consequently, education has been unable to bring a significant revolution in the life situation of populace.

Government of Nepal has been hyping high-and-dry about universalization of primary education, but the outcome has so far pointed at stereotyped stimulating of quantitative figures without reaching the competency level of student achievement. By way of the Local Self Governance Act, 2000, government has spoken out its mind for devolution and decentralization even of educational decision-making. Nonetheless, clear and complacent dissemination of the idea is not at sight. The academic and bureaucratic think-tanks themselves are confused about the notion, leave alone the local stakeholders.

According to critiques, talk for local curriculum in Nepal sounds 'out of place' as the country does not have evenly scattered employment market insisting upon the same. Further, there has lately been a 'focus shift' of state in favour of foreign employment, which requires individuals to have familiarity with the marketable education.

### Conclusion

Curriculum is an integral part of schooling system. It is perceived differently by different people. Teachers may refer to it as an 'intended' curriculum, parents as an 'applied' curriculum, and educational planners and administrators as an 'ideal' curriculum. It can, however, not be developed in vacuum. It is drawn upon the past and is shaped keeping future in mind. Its design, construction, and implementation is a multi-faceted production process. The curriculum making has, therefore, remained fragile and fluid conventionally.

Curriculum is developed either following the top-bottom process or the bottom-top process. The former is understood as centralized system and

the latter as localized one. And, both of the systems have their own merits and demerits. Decentralization is more concerned with the process, whereas localized can refer to both, process and product. It is rather difficult to decide who should have the authority to set the educational goals and to select the curriculum content. Nevertheless, curriculum making has to have a reflection of people's voice, students' need, and teachers' concurrence. It has to be down-to-the-earth and contextualized. In the whole exercise, there could be avoidance of purity of approach to pave the way for a hybrid endeavour by deriving the manifested advantages of nationalized and globalized curricula.

Given the crisis and dilemma between a pro-active chanting of 'local curriculum' and realistic demand of 'universally matching broad-based curriculum', the paradox is to be analytically looked into and intellectually addressed by way of summarizing the unanimous suggestions and recommendations obtained from the stakeholders, who represent the particularistic socio-political milieu and believe in consensus building among the different interest groups.

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