DYNAMICS OF CURRICULUM DESIGN

by:
Hark Herald C. Sarmiento
Orani National High School

Curricula guide the development of programs of study that is predictable yet flexible, in response to the individual needs of learners. These developments drive changes in curriculum designs. The curriculum continuum presents the necessity for reform and innovation from the current curriculum design, seeking to examine and improve existing practices and programs. Here comes the role of curriculum designers and developers. The newly developed curriculum will be adopted and implemented, then institutionalized when proven effective, until such a time that new changes and development will again challenge the existing curriculum (Geraldo, 2017).

We have seen these changes, time and again, in the development of our curriculum in the Philippine setting. From the secularization of the curriculum during the revolution where natural science was the focus, then the Basic Education Curriculum (BEC), to its revision known as RBEC, up to the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 that we know now as the K-12 curriculum. History will tell that political agenda and government reforms prompted most of these shifts and changes, focusing very little, if not set aside, on the needs of the learners -- which must be the prime factor of curriculum change.

It is not to say that curriculum change is unnecessary. It is, in fact, inevitable. However, developers must not take the creation and adoption of a new curriculum lightly. Numerous studies have proven the complexities of curriculum development and the equally complex problems associated with bringing about curriculum change in schools (Marsh & Willis, 2007). Research-based, classroom-tested teaching practices prove that the teacher-centered approaches to curriculum are no longer relevant to the
kind of students we have today. Considering the needs and drives of these learners must be the top priority of curriculum developers. Jorgenson (2006) supports this claim by saying that teachers are becoming less relevant when they dispense disconnected information (curricula) in today's schools where there is an explosion of knowledge and global exchange of information.

Given these changes in the climate of our schools and learners, language teachers must design curricula that are relevant to students' needs. There must be a learning continuity and integration within and across curriculum content and subject areas. However, curriculum reform requires much more than the issuing of documents outlining changes in curriculum content but requires unlearning of conventional attitudes and learning new ones (Posch, 1996). Curriculum developers must make intensive use of surveys and questionnaires to generate valuable results in assessing learners' needs and what to do to those needs (Geraldo, 2017).

These shifting dynamics are a learning process for teachers and schools. Salberg (2009) pointed out that a successful curriculum implementation necessitates a clear understanding of its requirements and the changes happening around it. Many curricula are overloaded and confusing, like the K-12 curriculum that we have adapted from the West. These curricula focus on testing and assessment that they compacted almost 22 years of content and studied in just 12 years (Gallagher, 2009). Thus, there must be a drastic shift from the curriculum as a product model to the curriculum as a process model, suggested by Salberg (2009).

Empirical pieces of evidence provided for by research and needs analyses are crucial in curriculum development. For instance, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, several studies investigated which among the competencies and lessons we teach in schools better-prepared students for this devastating situation. With limited schooldays and unusual conditions becoming the new norm, the DepEd redesigned the entire curriculum and retained the "most essential competencies" in it.
These "most essential competencies" in the curriculum compelled teachers to develop new syllabi, updated, and relevant to the circumstances at hand. What Salberg (2009) said proved to be true: curriculum reforms require a change in how teachers teach and how students learn.

A few of the constraints found in the "Language Arts and Multiliteracies Curriculum" curriculum are the compacted competencies and the equally overloaded learning materials and resources, making it unmanageable to teach them all.

The first constraint in the curriculum we are presently using is the compacted, overloaded competencies that need covering over a limited amount of time. As I previously discussed, the issue of overloaded K-12 curriculum is a problem not only in the Philippines but also in the United States, where we patterned ours. It is all the more difficult when we want to finish tackling all of these in 12 years. In grade 10 alone, discussing all the grammar, literature reading, language use, among other contents, is almost impossible in one school year. As a language educator and curriculum developer in the field, we need to extract the most essential of the competencies and design a syllabus that does not take a toll on the quality of language education over quantity.

In the context of Philippine education at large, which focuses more on students' passing standardized tests than the learning process, a well-designed curriculum that fosters authentic learning is indispensable to language education.

Further to overloaded competencies in the Language Arts and Multiliteracies Curriculum is the equally dense contents of the learning materials and textbooks. Language teachers address this constraint through careful designing of the curriculum, taking from the curriculum guide and learning materials a substantial amount of content, and placing it in a meticulously planned syllabus.

The achievement of multi-literacies and communicative competence goals of the "English 10 K-12 curriculum" relies now on the language educators developing the
present curriculum and designing a syllabus that meets the interests and demands of the modern language learners. These learners differ over time, as well as their needs. We only have to keep abreast of all these changes and make ourselves, and the curriculum, relevant in a continuously changing and dynamic world.

References: