Commercial curriculum development

Clyte Hampton

The writer describes the development of a secondary-school pack (‘The Child, the Family and the Community’), and the in-service support that is also being offered by the publishers. “Perhaps the intervention of qualified private enterprise, in a time of reduced state financing and apparent indifference in the public sector, may be one answer in the field of personal relationships.”

The interview with Richard Whitfield, printed in the May 1984 edition of Education and Health, would have made discouraging reading for my colleagues and me, had we then just been embarking on our first venture in having our material published. Professor Whitfield speaks of the disappointing lack of response to his report 1, not only from Government and civil service, but also from LEAs and teachers, even from those who had been involved in his descriptive survey.

Fortunately, by May 1984 we were already receiving the response from LEAs, advisers, inspectors and individual teachers to our publicity and published secondary school pack 2. An interesting picture was emerging. In numbers that overwhelmed us, they were asking for details of our training in methodology, and responding enthusiastically to the proposed practical workshops/seminars – as developed in SCHEP 5–12 and 13–18 dissemination – as well as to those we had had then already managed to provide (for example, in Hertfordshire, Somerset, Kent, and Newham).

The type of response reinforces one of the Whitfield Report’s conclusions, namely that the most significant factor in the incorporation of ‘preparation for parenthood’ within the curriculum is the individual teacher’s aims, experience and skills. I had already learned the truth of that from my own work, first as a team member of the SCHEP 5–13 project 3, and then as an advisory teacher in the Inner London Education Authority. There, my role, and that of my colleagues, was to help teachers recognize that new or better resources were not necessarily the answer to their problems. We needed to help them formulate clear teaching aims and develop their own skills, and to provide a back-up, by teaching alongside them in whichever phase of schooling they were serving.

Reopening curiosity

I had also come to the firm conviction that children’s sense of themselves as sexual beings begins at the beginning. This was based chiefly on these experiences, despite the paucity of research evidence (but see now Goldman and Goldman 4), and in the face of some hostility to this idea from the academics, politicians and others. It is not something of which schools should only begin to take cognizance at the pubertal or secondary stage. However indifferent local authorities might appear to be, children themselves are keenly interested and aware of sexual matters, though this
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‘The pupil in context’

Our techniques are based on the new ‘professional development’ used successfully in the dissemination of the SCHEP materials, but also combine the expertise of a number of professionals from various disciplines who run the workshops, and these are tailored to suit the needs of particular groups. Teachers who continue to regard what goes on in the classroom solely as something they organise and provide, often see in-service as a means of finding out about new resources which they hope will solve problems. What is taught centres on resources, in the broad area of health education, resources are numerous and varied.8 Our seminars concentrate on the teacher as his or her own best resource, together with the ‘pupil in context’, who is bringing a variety of experience and is already living a programme of personal and social development, planned or not! Pupils are actively engaged upon it, irrespective of what the school is, or is not, doing.

It is unwise to go on thinking of the teacher as the expert’, choosing the methods to intervene with a sophisticated ‘injection’ of basic information. The teacher is now, and perhaps always should have been, heavily dependent on the development of good relationships and trust, within the changing profile of the school population. Only then can there be the LEAs, intellectuals, and emotional development of the pupils. In the curriculum field of personal relationships, the teacher is guided and assisted by the needs of the pupil.

Our pack, The Child, The Family and The Community, (and subsequent others), provides both pupil material and ideas for in-service and workshops. We have been made aware of the need for these by the number of replies we have received showing interest in them. We have also realized that many advisers in LEAs have now taken on responsibility for a wider range of curriculum areas, as well as general responsibility for groups of schools. In such circumstances they are finding it difficult to provide the specialist training programmes needed, and they are bound to look for help and assistance from any agency that has credibility and experience.

Perhaps the intervention of qualified private enterprise, in a time of reduced state financing and apparent indifference in the public sector, may be one answer in the field of personal relationships. It may be thought of as comparable to a management course in industry, or to the many counselling courses that are available. I hope I have indicated that, provided we consult the latest research, are at odds with the conclusions of major reports, and aim to support and develop the teacher’s own initiative and not replace it, the commercial curriculum development team or unit is not a threat but is helping to ‘keep the pot stirring’.

References