

## **The New Zealand Curriculum Framework: A new paradigm in curriculum policy development.**

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### **Introduction**

The years 1987 to 1993 were perhaps the most turbulent in New Zealand education history. Throughout this period, Ministers of Education, and the ideologies of their respective governments, had an overt and direct influence on administrative structures and curriculum. The changes in administration witnessed the devolution of responsibility to a local level. The curriculum changes saw a move from a liberal, child-centred, school and teacher developed curriculum, to a curriculum which was outcomes based, and where achievement objectives and assessment dominate.

These major changes in curriculum have been achieved with minimal input from professional groups, such as teacher organisations and curriculum development policy makers. The Curriculum Development Unit was disbanded, along with the Department of Education, and the experience of those who constituted those groups was lost. Depending on one's point of view, new curricula was produced without the benefit of the experience that could have been available; or conversely new curricula was produced without the baggage of history.

The New Zealand Curriculum Framework (1993) was an over-arching statement on curriculum. It was preceded by a discussion document called the National Curriculum of New Zealand (1991). The factors which enabled the Minister of the day to produce the Framework, and the part played by New Zealand professionals and academics, is of considerable interest. Of special interest is the fact that, at the time it was published, there was so little comment on, or criticism of, the Framework. A small number of critics did question the, then, direction of curriculum policy development, but it was only several years after the publication that academics and professionals found their collective voices and provided a variety of critiques of the New Zealand Curriculum Framework.

This paper contributes a summary of the recent history of curriculum development in New Zealand and illuminates the foundations upon which the current New Zealand

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Curriculum Framework has been formed. Particular attention is paid throughout the paper to the role of teacher professionals in the historical and contemporary processes of curriculum development. The contention is made that teachers, as front-line professionals, must have professional involvement in the development of curriculum.

### **An Historical Perspective**

In order to demonstrate the significance of the paradigm shift the Curriculum Framework (1993) actually represents, it is necessary to look at recent reviews of the education system. I will begin with the Currie Commission's report of 1962, as it was the touchstone for the reports that followed over the next twenty or so years. I will also briefly touch on reports from the early 1970's to the present time. Most of the reviews mentioned relate to the education system in the broadest sense, but all of them affected curriculum. It is interesting to compare how these reports and the Framework were informed.

Beeby (cited in Renwick 1986:37) described the changes which occurred within New Zealand education during the period 1976 to 1980 and indicated the end of the educational 'myth' that had sustained the New Zealand educational system. This myth centred on the 'survival of the fittest' and the equality of opportunity. Renwick (1986), noted the increasing plurality evident in New Zealand society and questioned the effect that this was having on the education system:

The emphasis is very different today. It is upon cultural diversity. Instead of a single approved rallying cry, there are now many good causes that people can – and, increasingly, do – commit themselves to. These may be ethnic, sexual, religious, explicitly ideological, sub-cultural, or counter-cultural in the sense of a consciously shared life style. And the questions are: What do citizens whose personal allegiance is to one or other of these group loyalties expect of the education system in the upbringing of their children? How far should the state go to meet their wishes? And if it tries to meet their wishes, how should the education system go about it? (Renwick, 1986: 58).

While Renwick was talking about the big picture and anticipating the future, others focused on implications for the groups or areas of interest. Criticism of the education system was steadily growing and critical analysis of curriculum and its delivery was

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constant. This was coupled with cries from within society which, from the very beginning of our education system, questioned the outcomes of schooling and the worth and work of professionals. Editors of newspapers, employers, and concerned parent groups continually challenged the standards of attainment and/or morals and values being taught in schools. Schools were accused of not teaching any form of moral values, teaching inappropriate values, or being too involved in what, essentially, was the parents' prerogative.

All criticisms centred on what was to be taught at school, how it should be taught, and whose task it was to determine these. In other words the curriculum, content, delivery and the assessment of students' achievement were consistently points of contention, even though curriculum may not have been addressed directly.

The Currie Report (1962), was the first thorough look at the education system since the Thomas Report (Department of Education 1944). It focused very heavily on structures, and devoted only a small amount of its attention to curriculum. Ten pages were given over to planning and curriculum, recommending the establishment of a permanent curriculum development unit within the Department of Education, and the co-option of expert assistance from overseas and within New Zealand for the development of curriculum. The Currie Report noted that while we took much of our curriculum from overseas, we did little by way of regular or consistent research, nor did we have regular contact with overseas institutions. It strongly suggested the need for the professional development of teachers, the trialling of new curricula, and the maintenance of good communication with teaching professionals. The pilot testing of new teaching content and methods under ordinary classroom conditions was advocated in the Currie Report (Currie 1962).

Issues of fairness in the Currie Report addressed the performance of Maori in schools, rural education and children with special needs. These issues came from the point of view of equality of opportunity. Submissions to the commission contained criticisms about 'modern (teaching) methods' especially the 'play-way' method or, as teachers called it, the activity approach to learning. In various submissions, emphasis was placed on the need to concentrate on the 'three Rs' and to forget about the 'frills' such as music, art, physical education, and social studies. The Commission stated that it received these submissions and regarded them seriously. In the final analysis these particular submissions were ignored; instead it was noted that there was a need for

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better communication between teachers and parents to ensure parents were aware of why schools used progressivist methods.

Essentially the Currie Report was supportive of the status quo regarding the direction of curriculum and its delivery to students. It was concerned with the structure of the system and dealing with immediate problems, such as teacher shortages. Considering how the Curriculum Framework (1993) ultimately identified core subjects, it is interesting to note one of the competing claims for education received by the Commission was that:

Advocates of a new education for a new world, including those who point to advances in science and technology, warn us that our economy is becoming such that mathematics and the sciences will have to be given a bigger place in the school curriculum (Currie 1962:19).

When the third Labour Government came to office in 1972, the Minister of Education, Mr. Phil Amos, instigated an Education Development Conference. Several working parties were set up to look at aspects of the system with reports made on the following: *Educational Aims and Objectives* (1974), *Improving Teaching and Learning* (1974) and *Organisation and Administration of Education* (1974). In *Improving Teaching and Learning* the need for national guidelines was stated:

These guidelines would indicate both general aims and more particular goals...which would allow considerable freedom in planning and implementing appropriate programmes' (1974:132).

The report on Educational Aims and Objectives contained not only statements of the aims and objectives but devoted considerable space to the shortcomings of the education system. Most of the report was given over to issues that needed to be addressed and provides a feeling that there was far more wrong with the system than was right with it.

These reports contain a critical analysis of what was being taught in the 1970s. They also look at how curriculum was being taught, who was benefiting and who was not benefiting. Most of the people who participated in the working groups were liberal and supportive of the system, but were looking for gradual sustained improvement. Consequently, there was a willingness to be critical of the system. The reports also contained recognition of the increasing diversity which was becoming apparent in

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New Zealand society, and the problems this was creating for schools. The authors of *Improving Teaching and Learning* noted:

The objectives of the educational system as a whole, or of any part of it, are based on values, and as the values of society change so will a school's aims. However, it is precisely when the community is unable to agree on values and is divided by moral issues, that teachers find their task most difficult and their attempts to help their pupils with these problems most open to question (1974:148).

The Coombe's Report on secondary education followed (Department of Education 1976). *Towards Partnership*, was particularly concerned with the disjoint nature of the secondary curriculum, and the way subject orientation left students trying to work out the connections between subject areas and their relevance to the world beyond the school. The report's authors recommended policies to co-ordinate the curriculum so that subjects were better related to one another. The authors also recommended that national curriculum guidelines be developed. They were looking for teachers and schools to have the freedom to develop appropriate programmes for their students, but to do this within certain parameters. These parameters were to ensure national consistency both with what was taught and the assessment of students' performance.

At the same time as Coombe's committee began its investigation into secondary education, another group was set up to report on Health and Social Education. It was recognised that this committee would inevitably become involved in looking at values in social, educational and moral contexts. When the resulting Johnson Report was released it provoked considerable outcry from conservative groups, such as the Concerned Parents Association. This association questioned whether schools were the place for the teaching of values. There was also a considerable surge in a call to get 'back to basics'. In the latter case, values and social matters were seen as 'frills' best left to someone else - most appropriately the home and church.

The 'back to basics' movement resulted in a report from the Department of Education to the Minister of Education, Les Gandar, called *Educational Standards in State Schools* (Department of Education, 1978). Schools had been criticised for the perceived dropping of standards. The opening sentence in the Director General's letter to the Minister, which prefaced the report, was very telling, 'Last July you took up my suggestion that, in light of growing public comment, a review of standards in State schools would be timely' (p.3).

Politicians and education bureaucrats were increasingly sensitive to mounting public criticism. It was also evident that solutions proposed in the many reports generated through this period were failing to satisfy the rising tide of criticism from the general public.

In 1983, a committee was set up by Les Gander's successor, Merv Wellington, to review the core curriculum. Wellington was essentially a conservative politician and he was very sympathetic to groups such as the Concerned Parent Association. His aim was to direct schools about what should be taught, and the amount of time that should be devoted to specific curriculum areas. In talking with a participant of the conference, H.Meek (the NZEI Curriculum Officer at that time), it was evident that the committee exercise was non-consultative and a very closed affair. Meek stated that all suggestions and recommendations were referred back to the Minister for his approval; and what started out as a relatively open exercise, degenerated into a very negative one. A very short timeframe (eight weeks) was allowed for public consultation. The subsequent report failed in its stated intention of defining, 'the structure and balance of the core curriculum in primary and secondary schools' (p.1). The report was issued in March 1984 to general disapproval. A snap election held in July 1983, saw the National Government voted out of office.

Curriculum matters did not come to an end with the change of government. Russell Marshall, the Minister of Education in the fourth Labour Government, picked up on the popular sentiment regarding the curriculum, and set about building on work started by Merv Wellington. Marshall's approach was quite different to that of Wellington. Marshall's intention was to achieve maximum public involvement. He began a major review of the curriculum, receiving in total 31500 submissions. Marshall's aim in reviewing the curriculum was to develop a national curriculum with broad guidelines. The curriculum was to be flexible enough to give schools room to develop their own programmes. Marshall was also looking for a more unified curriculum than had been the case up to that time. The 1988 *Draft National Curriculum Statement* was the outcome of the *Report of the Curriculum Review*. It covered the entire compulsory school sector, from junior primary to senior secondary.

The *Curriculum Review* (1986), contained 'Curriculum Principles'. It had eight areas of learning called 'Curriculum Aspects'. These were accompanied by descriptions of the aims for each aspect, and were followed by learning outcomes organised around

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key ideas. At the very beginning of the draft there was an endeavour to define curriculum:

At a national level, a national curriculum statement, would show, in general terms, what is expected of all schools in New Zealand. It would show the elements that should be present in school programmes, and provide a framework for programme planning' (Department of Education 1986:5).

In the appendices and notes attached to all of the above reports it is interesting to note the contributors: bureaucrats from the Department of Education feature prominently, then a range of interest groups, schools and individuals. Names of academics who were writing at the time of the later reports are not to be found. The social science critical analyses, based on critical theory, were not prevalent at the time. Criticisms were obviously there, but they were more 'polite' and 'muted' than contemporary critique of policy.

Events quickly presaged the eventual publication of the *Draft National Curriculum* (1988). Marshall lost the Education portfolio to the Prime Minister, David Lange. The 1987 general election saw education at the forefront, with the National opposition attacking liberal ideas and ideals as being the root cause of the problems faced by the education system. National promoted notions of excellence, accountability, rigour, and parent choice. Education professionals were portrayed as having captured the system and being untrustworthy. These sentiments took their lead from what had been happening in England and the United States, and there were recommendations for the implementation of similar approaches to education in this country. National's election manifesto, *A Nation at Risk*, was a straight 'steal' from a report done for the U.S. government on the state of education in the U.S.A.

### **1987 and the Curriculum Hiatus**

1987 was the watershed year for New Zealand education - not since the formation of the national education system had such radicalism been foreshadowed. Education was the key factor in the election with the National Party attacking liberal education and proposing consumer choice, accountability, an end to state monopoly in the provision of education, objective measures of achievement, and performance contracts for

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teachers in key positions. The State's role was to be funding and quality control. National did not win the election, but had made the running with regards to education. The incoming Labour government received a detailed and considered paper from the Treasury. The briefing paper on education spanned one whole volume of the two containing the *Brief to the Incoming Government 1987*. The preface to Volume II noted 'apparent public concern about the public education system'. The report damned, with faint praise, recent developments in education: 'We believe that some recent changes are largely positive.' but then went on to state, '... our analysis suggests that substantial elements of current government expenditure are, at best, ineffective when viewed in terms of the equity and efficiency concerns that justify such expenditure.'

It appears from the Treasury brief that for a significant number of the population the education system was well regarded. There was, however, dissatisfaction with 'the system' from a significant minority. A growing body of academics, mainly critical theorists, had been writing of the inequities evident in the system and the inequality of outcomes for some groups. This concern was clearly expressed in the Introduction to *Political Issues in New Zealand Education* (1985). In this publication the editors state, 'New Zealand in the late 1980's faces an educational crisis no less urgent than the economic crisis that commands the attention of politicians and dominates the popular consciousness' (Codd et al. 1985:9). Issues examined in that publication included gender, cultural pluralism, Maori, social reproduction, training and education. Other contributors to this particular book were Shuker, Middleton, Gordon and Openshaw.

At the other end of the spectrum, the spirit of New Right politics had taken hold, and writers and groups were also complaining about outcomes, but more from the point of view of the failure of the system to achieve the 'excellence' required in the new competitive economic era. The then current system of progressive education was under attack because it either failed to deliver a quality product, or because it continued to consign underprivileged groups to the economic under-class of their origin.

Consequently, throughout the eighties, there was a building disquiet regarding the education system. Codd (1990), saw this as a 'legitimation crisis', a term that could be seen to have the same connotations as Beeby's collapse of the 'educational myth'.



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Treasury's 1987 briefing picked up on both sets of arguments. Throughout the brief, references were made to writers and researchers who supported the arguments being advanced. Very few references were made to New Zealand publications and writers, with most references from the USA, Australia and England. The skillful way in which the arguments were used to support the views of the new-right are quite admirable. In the notes which follow most chapters, a quick précis of arguments is advanced, either to show how they supported calls for equity, or how neo-Marxists themselves saw the shortcomings of liberal education.

Treasury appeared to take the view that the curriculum itself was unproblematic; it was the delivery mechanisms, structures and schools, that were the problem. As can be seen earlier in this article, Treasury was also concerned that should Russell Marshall's new curriculum and the associated support systems become adopted, government policy and the opportunity for the major systemic reforms which Treasury felt necessary would be impossible to implement. Hence, throughout the briefing papers there was virtually no mention at all of curriculum. Treasury effectively focused the education debate away from the Marshall's curriculum review, towards the system itself.

The administration of schools became the most pressing issue to be addressed. David Lange, the new Minister of Education, set up a taskforce to examine how schools were administered, and how they could be better administered. For some years the curriculum and curriculum issues went on hold. Picot, author of the report *Administering for Excellence* (Department of Education 1989), recommended the devolution of school administration to schools themselves. The Department of Education was legislated out of existence by the 1989 Education Act, and with it went the Curriculum Development Unit which had, up until then, been the principal source of curriculum development. While not actually having curriculum matters as part of its brief, Picot made reference to it in the section on National Objectives, 'These objectives would cover matters of curriculum, financial management and social goals' (Department of Education 1989:42).

Beginning with the Picot Report, schools experienced four years of upheaval before curriculum was addressed again. In 1990, the subsequent Treasury briefing to the incoming National government reflected a different tone altogether. It was a confident statement, which demonstrated the Department of Education's primacy. While still

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concerned with efficiency, equity, inputs, outputs and outcomes, one sentence out of the ten pages devoted to education stated, 'Another key task confronting the Ministry is to regulate for appropriate minimum requirements in curriculum contexts and standards'(p.134). In summarising social policy and implementation of change there was a statement which appeared to be in complete contradiction to policy direction, and certainly to advice given in the 1987 briefing: 'Major institutional changes are likely to require sustained Ministerial involvement over a prolonged period' (p.140). Unlike the 1987 briefing, there was no supporting material for the assertions made by Treasury in 1990.

The Education Amendment Act of 1991 cleared the way for the development of the Curriculum Framework and the national curriculum statements. Section 9 of the Act gave the Minister the power to publish National Education Guidelines. These included National Education Goals and National Curriculum Statements, as well as the National Administrative Guidelines that were the delivery part of the guidelines. The way was now clear for the Minister to set to work on his notions of what constituted 'appropriate minimum curriculum contexts and standards'.

There can be no doubt that the Treasury saw administration structures as having primacy over the education system and, as a consequence, the curriculum that it delivered. It is probably a reasonable assumption that Treasury saw the curriculum as unproblematic. With its technocratic view of the world, Treasury took little account of policy issues that lay behind curriculum development. The development of curriculum was seen to be a simple technical exercise. The only stipulation in published documents appeared to be the implication that curriculum development and policy making should not be carried out by the providers of education (teachers) - as the implication was that educational professionals had 'captured' the system.

### **The Curriculum Framework**

The New Zealand Curriculum Framework of 1993 represented a totally new approach to curriculum development in New Zealand. The education community greeted it with almost a sense of relief, and even a degree of approval. The reasons for this were that it was perceived as being not as bad as it could have been, especially in light of the political rhetoric of the time. It fulfilled a desire, expressed over a period of time

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by many in the teaching profession, to have a clear set of national guidelines within which teachers could develop programmes for their students.

At the time the Framework was being developed, right through to its eventual release, its form was consistent with developments in countries from which our politicians were taking their cues. It accurately reflects the social, political and economic views of the time. Rationalism was, and still is, in vogue and the Framework is essentially a rational statement. Marshall (1992), coined the phrase 'busnocratic rationality' to describe the Frameworks forerunner, *the National Curriculum of New Zealand: A Discussion Document*. The phrase accurately reflects not only the form of the document but also the outlook of those influencing its development.

The Framework outlined seven essential learning areas in the core curriculum, with priority given to language and languages, mathematics, science and technology. The Framework outlined the format of all future curriculum statements, and the fact that there would be levels of learning. Each level would have achievement objectives against which student outcomes could be assessed. The document also spelt out the essential skills to be mastered, the attitudes and values that students needed, and the forms of assessment for assessing achievement objectives.

The Framework had its genesis in the policy of the Government of the time. Lockwood Smith, the Minister of Education, was very much influenced by educational developments overseas, especially those in England. This is evidenced by the frequent references to overseas curriculum in the original discussion document *The National Curriculum of New Zealand* (1991). Most of the appendices in this document were taken directly from English curriculum statements.

There is some reference (in side notes on page 1 and in the Introduction) to work done on curriculum by the previous Labour government. Capper (1991:18), writing in the *New Zealand Annual Education Review*, noted that the references were used to, 'describe(s) an evolutionary process whereby the outcomes of the Curriculum Review, together with the 1990 report *Tomorrow's Standards* have been brought together,' rather than the revolutionary shift they actually represented. The references had perhaps helped to placate liberally minded educationists and other interest groups who had devoted considerable effort contributing to the Curriculum Review (1986).

The Curriculum Framework owed much to the administration reforms that had preceded it. Whether this was by design or was just a natural consequence is a matter

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of debate and speculation. Codd (1990), referring to a Treasury report obtained under the Official Information Act writes, 'Treasury produced a highly critical report which they sent to the Minister of Finance on 29 May 1987'. The covering letter first stated that:

The Curriculum Review is liable to form the basis for developments in schools over the next ten years. It seeks to increase community involvement in schooling, increase the flexibility of the curriculum and broaden the role of the school in the community. Emphasis is given to meeting Maori aspirations, countering racism and sexism and creating an enabling and challenging curriculum.

Having described the potential of the review in these terms, the letter then stated:

However Treasury feel the review would not be an adequate blue print for the development of school education because it: holds unstated and narrow assumptions as to the nature and sources of education; overlooks issues as to: community and education values and benefits, the relationship between education and the economy, and the nature of government assistance; does not tackle issues of management and consumer choice' (p.92).

As the pre-eminent State departments in New Zealand, Treasury and the State Services Commission were reported to have been the principal movers in the reform of education administration (Dale & Jesson 1992). Given the considerable reservations expressed about the 1986 Curriculum Review by Treasury, it is not difficult to draw the conclusion that the 1993 Curriculum Framework was also influenced by that department. Certainly within two months of receiving Treasury's report the Taskforce to Review Education Administration was in place and there was a new Minister of Education. However, to take this line as the sole means by which the Curriculum Framework came into being denies the influence of other agents or agencies beyond these two departments.

It would be too easy to dismiss the development of the Framework as the end product of a right wing conspiracy. There are clear indications that the Minister of Education and the bureaucracy had a clear vision of their goals. While the Framework was ideologically driven, and while, undoubtedly, there were some actors with right wing agendas, the principal actors were convinced of the 'rightness' of the directions they were headed.

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James Marshall (1992), discussing the Framework, wrote:

...I see the curriculum as also being 'driven' by the ideas of neo-liberal ideology and economic theory, as has been the case in the recent restructurings of the education system. By 'driven' I do not mean 'caused' or necessarily 'consciously entertained', nor do I mean that the changes were the effects of intentions or motivations of major actors in the changes, though some clearly held such intentions, but I do mean assumed or presupposed and, perhaps, unconsciously and unintentionally (Marshall: 1992:1).

Conclusions by Crocombe et al (1991), in what became referred to as The Porter Project, demonstrate the point Marshall was making. The Porter Project looked at ways of increasing New Zealand's international competitiveness, and looked to education as a means of achieving this. The Porter Project was extremely influential in shaping opinion at the time of its release. The authors begin by decrying the 'move away from commitment to educational standards' (p.168) and then went on to recommend that '(A) central priority for our education system should be providing young New Zealanders with the skills necessary to become productive members of society in an increasingly competitive world. This means an increased focus on mathematics, technological subjects and languages '(ibid.). The report questioned the relevance of academic exams, pushed for greater vocational training, espoused the use of economic goals as part education policy and argued for improved management in education.

The Framework, and the process by which it was produced, seems to fit one particular political ideology. It is an ideology that finds little favour with most educationists, academics or liberals in general. It is interesting then to consider why it was that there was, at that time, so little opposition to the Framework. Was it that there was no opposition or was it that academics in particular were distracted with concurrent developments and reforms in other areas of education? Subsequently there have been very sound criticisms of the Framework, its structure, the principles underpinning outcomes based curricula, as well as the process by which the Framework was developed. These criticisms have flowed on to the national curriculum documents which have followed.

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## Conclusion

In light of the politics of the time there is probably little that educational professionals and academics could have done to effect any change in the development of the Curriculum Framework. At that stage educational professionals were not positively regarded. It was quite likely that, given the sentiment of the time, even if an academic's work had been read, it would probably not have been acknowledged for political reasons.

Jenny Ozga, on her recent visit to New Zealand, suggested that education professionals, and academics involved in educational research, needed to communicate better with a wider audience. In her view it is important to 'make the running' and not simply be reactive to events. She also observed the fact that educational professionals become polarised on issues too readily. Her message was not to take every issue head-on, but rather guide or redirect issues in the way that we would have them go. This means being more aware of social, economic and political imperatives and not being too pure or precious about 'professional standpoints'. It is interesting to note that, as long ago as 1962, Currie was talking about the need for better communication between teachers and parents.

Teachers, as frontline professionals, need to take a much greater interest in the curriculum. This is as much a matter of confidence as it is of professionalism. Rather than waiting for others to tell them what to do, teachers need to recognise that their knowledge of the children may make them the most competent to develop curriculum. Teachers need to avoid what McNaughton (1974) wrote of as feelings of inferiority in curriculum issues. Teachers must recognise that by asking others to tell them what they should be doing within classroom walls, they are giving up a fair measure of professional autonomy. Teachers, as part of their pre-service training and in-service professional development, should learn about curriculum issues and development. These aspects of curriculum are as important as strategies and techniques for delivering curriculum.

Educational professionals may never again have the degree of influence they once had over curriculum. However, if teachers act in concert through professional bodies, and begin communicating their message about what curriculum should be about, they will have a much greater say in the school curriculum. The professional involvement of

teachers in the development of curriculum is essential if they wish to maintain the status of professionals and enhance learning for children.

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