

Curriculum m Analysis

a reference manual

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CONTENTS

	page
Introduction	3
What is curriculum analysis?	4
Why curriculum analysis?	5
How can the curriculum be analysed or unpacked?	6
What does the curriculum analyst need to know before doing an analysis?	7
Impact analysis	8
Design analysis	12
Policy analysis	17
After curriculum analysis...	19

INTRODUCTION

In 1994 the Improving Educational Quality (IEQ) Project received a request from Sue Poulosom, the co-ordinator of a non-governmental organisation (NGO) training program based at the Peninsula Technikon in Cape Town and funded by the Association of Canadian Community Colleges, to conduct a workshop on curriculum analysis.

This workshop was to be the final session in a series of curriculum-related workshops entitled “Curriculum Development Workshop Programme” during which participants learned about models of, and approaches to, curriculum development, the role of media in materials development, and other related topics. The overall purpose of the series was to help build the capacity of NGOs to design, review, assess and unpk educational programs and curricula while the purpose of this workshop was to provide NGO staff, responsible for curriculum development and evaluation, with curriculum analysis tools for appraising a curriculum.

The participants included representatives from NGOs working with teachers, students, pre-schoolers, and adults, in urban and rural areas and the education and training sectors. Participants brought to the workshop a curriculum (e.g. adult literacy curriculum or curriculum to train educare workers) from their respective organisations which formed the context for the application of the curriculum analysis tools.

This document is an attempt to bring together the workshop plans, and the ideas and exchanges generated by the workshop into a user-friendly manual which could be used both by the participants as an ongoing reference, and by other organisations wishing to conduct similar training or internal analyses of their curricula. We hope that this manual provides a framework for doing curriculum analysis.

We would like to thank the participants for their input and Sue Poulosom for inviting us to conduct the workshop as well her dedication to understanding that elusive thing called curriculum.

WHAT IS CURRICULUM ANALYSIS?

a)

Just as **CURRICULUM** means different things to different people; **CURRICULUM ANALYSIS** means different things to different people.

Whereas **CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT** involves *building* the curriculum in order to present a coherent plan, **CURRICULUM ANALYSIS** involves *unpacking* the curriculum in order to understand the plan.

CURRICULUM ANALYSIS:

unpacks a curriculum into its **component** parts (e.g. learning, teaching, knowledge, society, resources);

evaluates how the parts fit together, say in terms of focus and coherence;

checks underlying beliefs and assumptions;

and

seeks justification for curriculum choices and assumptions.

CURRICULUM ANALYSIS is NOT

student assessment, although student data could inform curriculum decisions;

teacher appraisal, although teacher performance data could impact on curriculum decisions.

WHY CURRICULUM ANALYSIS?

Some of the reasons for doing curriculum analysis are:

to make an assessment of the curriculum in order to improve it;

to identify potential and actual problems as early as possible and recommend possible solutions (formative assessments);

to make decisions about future support for continuation of the curriculum (summative);

to see if the different parts hold together;

to determine whether the goals have been met;

to identify strengths and successes in order to build on them;

to examine whether assumptions underlying the curriculum are valid and defensible;

to identify blindspots, biases, perspectives;

to demonstrate the worth of the curriculum to different stakeholders e.g. funders.

HOW CAN THE CURRICULUM BE ANALYSED?

We can ask the following questions of the curriculum:

What is the **IMPACT** of your curriculum?

Does your curriculum satisfy acceptable **DESIGN** principles?

Is your curriculum **POLICY**-relevant?

EXTERNAL <i>micro level</i>	IMPACT ANALYSIS	What are the effects of the curriculum?
INTERNAL	DESIGN ANALYSIS	What theories, principles, methods, standards and assumptions underpin the curriculum?
EXTERNAL <i>macro level</i>	POLICY ANALYSIS	What is the relevance of the curriculum in relation to a particular set of social policies?

WHAT THE CURRICULUM ANALYST NEEDS TO KNOW BEFORE DOING AN ANALYSIS

The analyst must ask the following questions about the curriculum prior to doing the analysis:

What need is your curriculum responding to?

Who is the curriculum designed for?

Who designed the curriculum?

What content areas does it focus on?

Who teaches the curriculum?

What exposure time is there to this curriculum?

How will the success of the curriculum be determined?

What resources does the curriculum need?

Such questions orient the analyst to the kinds of questions and tasks required in conducting a particular curriculum analysis assignment.

IMPACT ANALYSIS

Impact analysis is analysis at the external, micro level and involves looking for **effects** of that curriculum.

a) Impact analysis:

asks: “is the curriculum making a difference?”

involves appraising the curriculum in terms of its external impact;

requires a clear understanding of the programme goals; purposes and expected results;

needs making decisions about the level of impact or unit of analysis;

requires the articulation of clear questions concerning the impact;

identifies appropriate means to measure impact.

Impact analysis involves determining the extent to which one set of directed human activities (X) affected the state of some objects or phenomenon(Y) and determining why they turned out to be this way.

b) We ask impact questions of the curriculum to determine the following:

Is the curriculum relevant or effective?

Which parts of the curriculum should be strengthened?

Which parts of the curriculum should be removed?

c) The following types of questions measure impact :

motivational questions

(e.g. did the trainees like the program?)

change questions

(e.g. did the trainers train differently as a result of the training program?)

Change questions may require experimental studies because of the problem of attribution i.e., determining which factor or factors explain a particular outcome.

sustainability questions

(e.g. were the changes induced by the training programme stable over time?)

Sustainability questions require a longitudinal study i.e. measuring impact over time. Impact over time is difficult to undertake because you do not know whether the impact is due to a single factor.

d) The following instruments are usually used by NGOs to measure impact:

focus group interviews;

structured and semi-structured interviews;

performance assessments;

observations;

tests;

documents;

questionnaires.

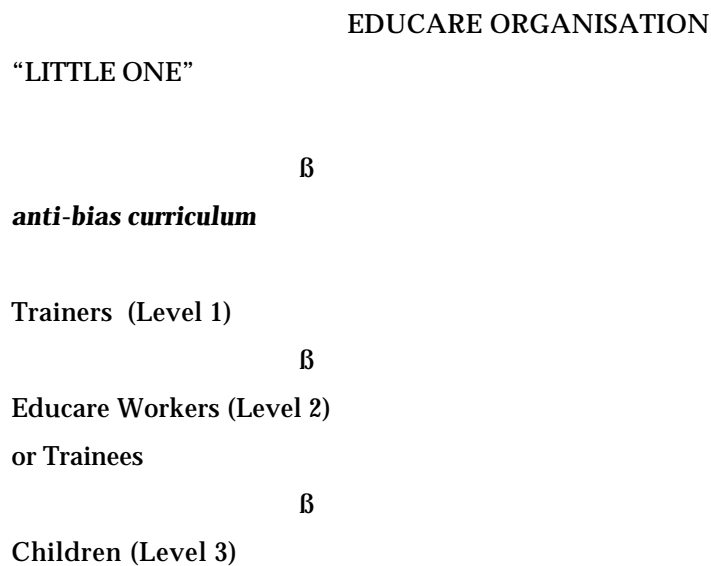
e) **Impact studies must begin by specifying the level at which the impact is to be measured.**

For example:

A large educare training organisation, LITTLE ONE, develops an anti-bias curriculum (reflecting anti-bias torace, gender, handicap) for the training of trainers. The trainers trained by LITTLE ONE then provide training on anti-bias to educare workers (trainees) who in turn teach children in educare centres.

What is the impact of this curriculum?

We can represent this in a diagram as:



We could examine the impact (effects) of the LITTLE ONE's anti-bias curriculum at the level of Trainers (L1); Trainees (L2); or Children (L3).

Questions that can be asked about impact of the anti-bias curriculum on **the trainers (level 1)** of educare workers are:

Did the trainers like the anti-bias curriculum?

Did the trainers train differently as a result of participation on the anti-bias training programme ?

Did the trainers train differently 6 months after participation on the anti-bias training programme?

Questions that can be asked about the impact of the anti-bias curriculum on **the children (level 3)** being taught by educare workers who had been on an anti-bias training programme are:

Did the children enjoy participating in the anti-bias activities proposed in the curriculum?

Did the children show positive anti-bias behaviours through their interaction with their peers?

Did the children express positive anti-bias attitudes 6 months after the anti-bias curriculum was introduced?

DESIGN ANALYSIS

Design Analysis involves appraising the curriculum in terms of standard or agreed-on design principles. There is no single set of design principles against which to assess a curriculum. Each set of principles offer a particular perspective on the design of a curriculum. For example, a curriculum could be analysed in terms of the Tylerian model of curriculum design or in relation to principles of learning articulated by Bloom.

Design analysis includes:

Determining the purpose of your curriculum.

Measuring the curriculum against agreed-on design principles.

a) Determining the purpose of your curriculum

What is the story behind the curriculum?

Curriculum must be understood within the historical context:

who designed the curriculum (names and roles e.g. subject specialist, adult educator) ?

what are the guiding principles and values of the curriculum?

what set of conditions does the curriculum seek to address?

what social, political, economic or cultural situation does it seek to respond to?

b) Measuring the curriculum against agreed upon design principles

A model that has been used to unpack the design of the curriculum is one proposed by George Posner in his book **Analysing the Curriculum** (1992) published by McGraw-Hill.

Posner unpacks the curriculum by examining it in terms of four categories of analysis:

learners and learning,
teachers and teaching,
knowledge,
society.

One could extend Posner's categories to include an analysis of curriculum in terms of available resources.

Another angle from which to unpack the curriculum is in relation its core claims, assumptions and silences:

Claims:

What does the curriculum claim will happen to those using or exposed to the curriculum?

Assumptions:

What does the curriculum take for granted?

Silences:

What does the curriculum say nothing about?

As an example, let's look at the claims, assumptions and silences of the following curriculum.

An organisation, EQUAL, devises a curriculum on race to address the issue of social prejudice in society.

Claim: the issue of race is critical to addressing the issues of social

Assumption: an understanding of the issue of race will reduce or eliminate social prejudice in society.

Silence: the curriculum says nothing about class or gender prejudices in society.

Teasing out the assumptions underlying a curriculum is not a straightforward process. Often, we are not aware of the assumptions which influence the curriculum. Uncovering assumptions requires probing beneath the surface of the document, reading between the lines, and making inferences.

Looking at Posner's categories (plus resources) in terms of assumptions, claims and silences we can devise the following grid.

	ASSUMPTIONS	CLAIMS	SILENCES
LEARNERS AND LEARNING			
TEACHERS AND TEACHING			
KNOWLEDGE			
SOCIETY			
RESOURCES			

As an example, let's look at a statement in the 1995 White Paper on Education and Training.

The curriculum and teaching methods should encourage independent and critical thought, the capacity to question, enquire and reason, to weigh evidence and form judgments, to achieve understanding, and to recognise the provisional and incomplete nature of most human knowledge

Unpack the design of the White Paper statement in terms of the above framework and fill your responses in the following table.

	ASSUMPTIONS	CLAIMS	SILENCES
LEARNERS AND LEARNING			
TEACHERS AND TEACHING			
KNOWLEDGE			
SOCIETY			
RESOURCES			

The grid reflects the assumptions, claims, and silences in the curriculum. It allows us to look critically at the perspectives that were employed when designing the curriculum.

Questions that can be asked about a curriculum are:

Is the curriculum perspective justifiable?

What does the curriculum perspective illuminate or conceal?

Does the curriculum perspective address different categories (teaching, learning, knowledge, society, resources) in a coherent and consistent way?

POLICY ANALYSIS

A curriculum can also be analysed to assess its relevance or relationship to a broader set of social or educational policies.

For example a curriculum analyst might ask:

“to what extent do the goals of Curriculum Y articulate with those of the Reconstruction and Development Programme?”

Consider the following:

The Department of Education has adopted proposals for a competency-based curriculum with specified learning outcomes encouraging articulation across programmes and institutions and progression from one level of education to the next. An organisation wants to assess its curriculum (Z) in terms of the new criteria since this would enhance the chances of accrediting its curriculum.

The questions a curriculum analyst might ask, in relation to the above, are:

does Curriculum Z specify clear and consistent learning outcomes (competencies) which its trainees could accomplish by the end of the programme?

does Curriculum Z meet the standards reflected in similar programs which are already accredited?

does Curriculum Z meet the statement of "vision and principles" outlined in the 1995 White Paper for Education and Training?

does Curriculum Z adequately equip students to proceed to a higher level of training or schooling in formal or non-formal institutions?

The curriculum analyst who reflects on a policy is interested in making decisions about the curriculum. Such decisions could include the following:

that Curriculum Z needs to be completely re-designed to meet specified standards of performance in a particular policy document

that Curriculum Z exemplifies RDP principles and can be submitted to the Provincial Department of Education to be considered for funding and support

The curriculum analyst as a policy critic:

Sometimes a curriculum analyst may conclude that an organisation's curriculum is adequate but that a particular policy is not. In the 1980s a curriculum analyst may have posed questions which challenge and critiques a particular policy.

For example:

to what extent does Curriculum X undermine the apartheid philosophy of schooling as defined by Christian National Education?

Similarly, a curriculum analyst in the 1990s may find that the outcomes-oriented vision of the RDP's education proposals is antithetical to its own priorities i.e., to develop a curriculum which emphasises classroom processes and interactions rather than measurable outcomes.

AFTER CURRICULUM ANALYSIS,..

The task of the curriculum analyst is to "unpack" the curriculum in order to facilitate decision-making about the curriculum. The curriculum analyst does not herself make the decisions about the future of the curriculum.

The organisation or institution commissioning the curriculum analyst makes the final decision about the fate of the curriculum.

The following are examples of decisions and decision-makers:

The Funder decides to continue support of the curriculum since it has demonstrated considerable impact on learning gains among preschool children after they pass into junior primary school

The Board of Trustees decides to recommend discontinuing support for the curriculum since its design is shown to be flawed with respect to the organisation's core Mission and principles.

The Programs Division of a large NGO decides to redesign the curriculum since the analysis showed that the curriculum needs to articulate clear learning outcomes (competencies) if it is to make a successful bid for accreditation.

While the curriculum analyst does not make policy or political decisions about a curriculum, she nevertheless has considerable influence on the outcome. It is critical, therefore, that the analyst works according to systematic and consistent procedures and guidelines: the fate of both programs and people may depend on it.