

**European Conference
on
Educational Research**

**BOOK OF
SUMMARIES**

Volume 1

**University of Twente
The Netherlands
June 22 - 25, 1992**

COLOFON

Editors:

Tjeerd Plomp
Jules Pieters
Andries Feteris

Editorial assistance:

Harmen Abma
Jeroen Breman
Conny de Koning
Olivia Kramers
Renate Schraa

Cover:

Hanna Snijder

Print:

Duoprint

University of Twente
Department of Education
P.O. Box 217
7500 AE Enschede

ISBN 90-365-0534-8

Copyright © 1992 by Department of Education, University of Twente

OPEN LEARNING AS A CURRICULUM INNOVATION: A LONG ROAD FROM IDEA TO PRACTICE

E. van den Berg, Department of Education, University of Twente, Enschede, The Netherlands

Introduction

This paper reports about a study on the efforts made in curriculum development in three schools for adult education in the Netherlands. These schools have acquired special funds from the National Department of Education in order to establish an open learning program. Open learning is both a process which focuses on access to educational opportunities and a philosophy which makes learning more student centred. It is learning which allows the student to choose how to learn (modes of learning, e.g. lecture, seminar, independent learning, computer assisted instruction), when to learn (timing, frequency, duration), where to learn (classroom, library, at home) and what to learn (subject matter) (Cunningham, 1988, Paine, 1988). In an open learning system learning is less dependent on classroom instruction and more self-directed. This implies that the quality of (conventional and electronic) curriculum materials becomes far more important to steer the learning process.

Problem and methodology

The central problem in this study is how the process of curriculum development move forward. Special attention was paid to potential pitfalls of schoolbased curriculum development within the context of a large scale innovation project. The typology of Goodlad et al; (1979) for different manifestations of the curriculum - ideal, formal, perceived, operational and experiential - guided the data collection and analysis.

An in-depth case study has been carried out with two stages of data collection in the school year 1989-1990 and 1990-1991. In these periods the process of curriculum development and implementation were documented, using interview and observation procedures and analysing documents produced by the schools. After the first raw data analysis the results were compiled in a summary report (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

Results and conclusions

The designing of the open learning curriculum consisted of two stages. Firstly, a curricular framework was developed and, afterwards, based on this framework, the instructional materials were developed.

In designing the curricular framework there were three main problems.

In the first place there was not a shared vision between school management and teachers about open learning. The concept clarification or ideal curriculum was very weak. Van der Vegt and Knip (1988) pointed out that it is essential to formulate a concept of the desired state of affairs that serves to focus attention and energy. Also Walker (1990) stipulate the importance of a 'platform of ideas'. In the experimental schools this was not the case.

Secondly, there was hardly any time to communicate in a formal and informal way about the innovation, because of much part-time faculty.

Thirdly, there was no adequate training to support the design process and no systematic design model was used.

As a result a curriculum has been developed in which the traditional program was divided into periods of eight weeks, but the program has no flexibility in the way that students can choose how they will plan and conduct their learning activities. So the linkage between the ideal curriculum (an open learning program) and the formal curriculum (a traditional curriculum outline) was inadequate.

The development of the instructional materials was not steered by an acceptable curriculum outline. Moreover only one or two teachers were in charge with the development of a learning package. These teachers did hardly get any instruction or guide-lines to support them. As a consequence the authors, also because of time constraints, relied heavily upon the traditional textbooks. Only printed materials were produced and these materials were implemented without formative evaluation. Many teachers reported severe problems when they actually used the instructional materials.

Interviews with teachers and classroom observations showed that the poor material were the main cause of the failure in implementing an open learning program. Another important reason was that many teachers and students were sceptical about the idea of open learning.

We can conclude that both management and teachers, who were authors, underestimated the time, finances and know how needed for designing and developing an innovative curriculum resources.