A Critique of the Grade 6 English Language Arts Saskatchewan Curriculum

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Introduction

For this curriculum critique, English Language Arts 6 curriculum document, published in 2008, will be the focus. This critique will use the aims and goals in the front matter, page 4 and 10-11, and select outcomes and indicators, pages 33-46. I expect that ELA 6 is curriculum as praxis, because the push for students’ individual thoughts and taking interest in their work was emerging in 2008 but most likely not curriculum as product, because factory working was not a priority at the time. The focus of the front matter, titled English Language Arts Goals and Outcomes Overview, pages 10-11, contains the 3 main goals of ELA 6 and the outcomes that reappear in the outcomes and indicators. The goals, outcomes and indicators of ELA 6 show limited value and discrepancies of cultural diversity, but the document is consistent about curriculum as process.

Curriculum Orientation

English Language Arts 6 strongly reflects curriculum as process. The “K-12 aim of the Saskatchewan English language arts curricula is to help students understand and appreciate language, and to use it confidently and competently in a variety of situations for learning, communication, work, life, and personal satisfaction” (2008, p. 4). The stated aim reinforces curriculum as process; “curriculum is not a physical thing, but rather the interaction of teachers, students, and knowledge. … curriculum is what actually happens in the classroom and what people do to prepare and evaluate” (Smith, 2000, p. 5), as the reader will notice throughout this critique. The use of language throughout a student’s life, for a variety of situations, ensures that the student truly understands language. Although the mention of using language skills for work in the aim may reflect curriculum as product, curriculum as process is a better description because of the process required to learn language. Furthermore, there is a main goal that aligns with curriculum as process; “students will extend their abilities to assess and reflect on their own language skills, discuss the skills of effective viewers, representers [*sic*], listeners, speakers, readers, and writers, and set goals for future improvement” (2008, p. 11). This goal clearly outlines a process by which students will build upon their language skills with discussions and goal setting which is also consistent throughout six out of eight indicators for this goal; “reflect on speaking, writing, and other representing strategies used including relating work to criteria, … identifying what worked during the process, responding to feedback, setting realistic goals, and taking steps toward achieving goals” (2008, p. 46), “review own and others’ work for clarity, and give concrete suggestions for improvement” (2008, p. 46), “assess own contributions to group process, and set goals for enhancing group work” (2008, p. 46). These indicators, among others, further prove curriculum as process with group discussions and individual and group goal setting, all of which are “active process[es]” (Smith, 2000, p. 5) where the students are involved. Continuing Smith’s (2000) idea of curriculum as process as meaningful interactions between teacher and student, the ELA 6 curriculum document includes an outcome in which students must “prepare a teacher-guided inquiry report to a stand on a topic, theme or issues discussed in English language arts” (2008, p. 11). Positive interactions between students and others are consistent among indicators, such as, “exchange ideas and concepts with teacher, peers, and adults” (2008, p. 43) and “share ideas/knowledge in a clear manner, encourage the contributions of others, disagree courteously/sensitively, answers others’ questions clearly and politely” (2008, p. 44).Curriculum as process is apparent in the outcomes and indicators regarding goal setting and extensive collaborative work.

Curriculum Priorities

Some priorities of the English Language Arts 6 curriculum are clearly stated in the front

matter of the document but show discrepancies. For example, “students will extend their ability to view, listen to, read, comprehend, and respond to a range of contemporary and traditional grade-level texts from First Nations, Métis, and other cultures in a variety of forms … for a variety of purposes” (2008, p. 10). This illustrates a priority of diversity and is consistent with the outcome, “view, respond, and demonstrate comprehension of visual and multimedia grade-appropriates texts including traditional and contemporary texts from First Nations, Métis, and other cultures” (2008, p. 10). At face value, the priority of cultural diversity seems to include Aboriginal peoples and other cultures, but the document does not specify what ‘other cultures’ should be taught. It seems that the teaching of Aboriginal peoples and ‘other cultures’ are less likely to be implemented because of the lack of specificity. Because there is a lack of knowledge about diversity, there is a lack of interest among students; “They [do not] know and they [do not] ask” (Chambers, 2000, p. 30). Not wanting to know about other cultures may lead to a lack of acceptance of others. Furthermore, devalued cultural diversity is consistent with an indicator; “use standard Canadian English that follows accepted rules of usage” (2008, p. 42). The curriculum does not consider how the language of Aboriginal peoples or others may differ from standard Canadian English, nor does the curriculum cater to the possible differences. Therefore, white knowledge, including English, is considered superior, because white people created the document. The front matter suggests that cultural diversity is valued but as I read further into the document, cultural diversity is not a priority.

Conclusion

This critique reveals that the selected parts of English Language Arts 6 curriculum document is curriculum as process. The orientation of the curriculum is the most consistent aspect within the document, whereas, there is discrepancy regarding valuing cultural diversity. Surprisingly, the curriculum document lacks information about what cultures should be taught. I hope classes such as ECS 210 provide further insight into the Saskatchewan curriculum and its discrepancies so that I can learn how to make sense of the discrepancies in my future classroom.

References

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