

CORE CURRICULAR CHANGE: BARRIERS AND STRATEGIES FOR ACHIEVING MEANINGFUL CHANGE

W. Gary Cannon

*California School of Professional Psychology
Fresno, California*

and

James D. McHolland

*Illinois and Minnesota Schools of Professional Psychology
Chicago, Illinois*

Leaders of professional schools have a responsibility to prepare students of today for careers of tomorrow. Ongoing social and cultural changes, as well as a broadened vision of career settings and client populations, require constant reevaluation of curricular relevance. Computer literacy largely has replaced the foreign-language requirement as a doctoral research tool. Slide rules have disappeared in favor, first, of hand-held calculators, now computers. As emerging areas of study such as hospital practice, mental health administration, community public policy, neuropsychology, health psychology, minority mental health, and forensics are added to the curriculum, some previously sacred curricular components must fall by the wayside. Changes in faculty and administration induce curricular change because each new group seems driven to improve on what they find.

A rigidly inflexible curriculum is anathema to a discipline, profession, and social structure that are in constant flux. Commenting on his own preparation as a psychologist, Mink (1982) stated:

What was lacking was the awareness of the kinds of changes psychology was about to undergo or was already undergoing and the political and social influences in society that were changing the larger context in which we operate. We were not good in predicting trends then and we aren't much better now though prediction and control is what we are supposed to be about. In any case, the changes that are challenging us now require flexibility, the capacity to analyze problems, an array of methodological skills which we can

apply selectively, and confidence in our competence to add to changing circumstances while maintaining a sense of continuity with the core of concepts and techniques that make up the enduring content of psychology. (p. 36)

Although flexibility may be required, it is seldom present. In the foreword to Mayhew and Ford's (1971) *Changing the Curriculum*, Godwin repeated the story of a distinguished educator who some years ago accepted the academic deanship of a bustling state college. The president of the college said to him, "You will have a free hand in this job—make whatever changes you see fit to make. Just don't monkey around with the curriculum" (p. xi). In contrast, in the preface, Mayhew and Ford (1971) asserted, "The college curriculum can be considerably more than an aggregate of courses offered as professional interests dictate. The curriculum should be based on human needs and structured to make educational sense to students" (p. xiii).

How then does one achieve change in academia? After a thorough review of the curricula of 22 schools of professional psychology, Kopplin (1986) noted that the American Psychological Association (APA) criteria for accreditation appeared to be the principle influence in shaping these curricula. In a study of clinical training programs from 1964 to 1965 and from 1968 to 1969, Simmons (1971) indicated that the 1964 APA Chicago conference (Hoch et al., 1966) had a profound effect on the content of curricula in professional psychology. Therefore, it may be realistic to hope that the San Antonio core-curriculum conference, as well as the other focused midwinter meetings of the National Council of Schools of Professional Psychology (NCSPP), will stimulate change in the professional school curriculum.

Barriers to Change

There are many barriers to change, some of which are justified. To some degree, change in and of itself is not inherently of any particular value, and it even may be destructive. The nature, extent, direction, and timing of change are all important. In his classic description of field forces and field theory, Lewin (1951) suggested that behavior tends to be stable because there are approximately the same number of driving forces as there are restraining forces so that behavior is held in a state of equilibrium. Obviously, the amount of flexibility or rigidity that is desirable, as well as achievable, depends on many different factors. In the following sections, we discuss the factors that influence curricular change.

Organizational Settings

Curricular change may be facilitated or impeded by the organizational structure of the institution in which change is desired. Fox and Barclay (1989), in a report based on the 1987 NCSPP Mission Bay conference, the 1987 Association of Psychology Internship Centers Gainesville conference, and the 1987 Salt Lake City, Utah conference, indicated that there is an emerging consensus that university-based education is a preferable training model for professional psychologists. If indeed there is such a consensus, it is not because such settings facilitate curricular change. If university departments, university-affiliated professional schools, and independent professional schools are compared, it appears that it is most difficult to achieve curricular change in university departments because of the complex organizational structure of universities and the

frequent necessity for university-wide review processes. Concerns held not only by other departments in the same school but also by departments within other schools must often be addressed.

Samuels, Hatcher, and Cannon (1988), for example, described the development and ultimate failure of the doctor of mental health degree in the University of California system. This new degree was to combine aspects of the education and training of social workers, psychiatrists, and clinical psychologists to create a more ideally trained mental health practitioner. In tracing the history of the doctor of mental health degree, Hatcher detailed the many battles fought to obtain permission to offer the new program, described the unraveling of the program, and attributed its ultimate demise to a battle lost in a struggle with the anthropology department at the University of California, Berkeley.

In describing the university environment, Mink (1982) said, "Ironically the challenge of the future is responded to in many institutions with a reclamation of the past and a concomitant emphasis on fundamental courses and distribution requirements" (p. 35). Albee (1970) cited Bennis's observation that "changing a university is about as easy as reorganizing a cemetery!" (p. 1072). When it comes to flexibility and self-determination, independent schools of professional psychology appear to have an organizational advantage compared with university-affiliated professional schools and university departments.

Philosophical Considerations and Personality Style

In addition to the impact of various organizational settings on curricular change, philosophical considerations and, in particular, personality styles play a major role in the ease with which change is accomplished in an organization. It is not lost on psychologists that some personality types abhor change, whereas others welcome and embrace it. For these reasons, the introduction of change in a discipline, profession, or curriculum is often fraught with resistance.

An example from the discipline of medicine illustrates this point. In the mid-1800s the medical profession was in the early stages of development much as psychology is today. John Elliotson, an English physician, a professor of the practice of medicine, and later a senior physician at the university college hospital in London, played a primary role in the establishment of the hospital connection to the medical school (Boring, 1957). The value of such an arrangement is obvious to us today, but in the mid-1800s the connection between the medical school and the hospital was opposed vigorously by some of Elliotson's more conservative colleagues. Similarly, Elliotson's attempt to introduce the use of the stethoscope, which had been invented on the continent, into medical practice and into training was met with ardent resistance (Boring, 1957). One argument was that the introduction of this instrument between the physician and the patient would lead to a less caring and a less humanistic approach to practice. Of course, many people would later contend that this is precisely what has happened to the profession of medicine, that is, technology and mechanization have led to a cold and unfeeling profession. Despite this, few of us would argue that the stethoscope or other modern innovations never should have been adopted.

In our own profession, the tension between innovation and change on the one hand and resistance to change on the other is illustrated by the debate about prescription privileges for psychologists. Some encouraged such prescription privileges and argued that modification of professional school curricula is the first step toward a legisla-

tive endorsement (Burns, DeLeon, Chemtob, Welch, & Samuels, 1988). Others countered that medication is detrimental to therapy, and psychologists have no business considering such an option.

Shaping or Being Shaped by the Future

Higher education responds to the needs of society; thus, the birth of clinical psychology and, later, the professional school movement itself. Educational institutions can respond to societal needs in one or more ways: (a) resisting change, being dragged, kicking and screaming, into the future; (b) coevolving and adapting with societal change; or (c) initiating change that anticipates the future.

As we look toward the 21st century, obvious emerging societal needs demand our attention. The data regarding our aging and our multiculturally changing society are compelling. The significant role for health and organizational psychology specialties cannot be ignored. Changes in family structure and stability have highlighted an urgent need for child and family treatments.

In addition to data-driven change, two alternative strategies for shaping change remain: first, divining the more remote future by "guessing ahead"; and, second, shaping the future. Professional schools should be bold by responding humanely to current and emerging societal needs and, through planning, building the future we wish for ourselves, our society, and our profession.

Strategies for Achieving Curricular Change

The informed support and willingness of the faculties of professional training programs are required to implement significant change in the core curriculum. In this section we suggest some specific and general approaches for achieving change.

Linkages Between National Training Conferences and School Faculties

If faculty in their home institutions are to act on the information generated and on the resolutions approved by national training conferences, there must be systematic linkages both before and after meetings. Preconference discussions with faculty about the critical training issues based on relevant papers both brings the issues to the attention of the faculty and allows their opinions and concerns to be represented in the national discussion. If faculty are not involved systematically before the conference, they are likely to have little interest in its outcomes and conclusions. Involved faculty will participate more readily in change if the changes are not imposed by department chairs, deans, or provosts.

As a representative organization based on schools, NCSPP is particularly well organized to develop these sorts of linkages between its national training conferences and local faculties. Because at the annual conferences the institutional representatives themselves have had the opportunity to develop working relationships with their counterparts during a period of many years, the likelihood of productive and influential outcomes is greatly increased.

Promotion of Curricular Change

The administration must provide educational leadership for establishing a forum wherein all the faculty (not only the curriculum committee) consider the nature and scope of the curriculum for training professional psychologists. Ideally, these discussions should take place during a 3- to 4-month period to increase awareness of the scope and the significance of the following issues:

1. Regardless of the intended career application, what should the core curriculum of professional psychology be?
2. What is unique about our program's core curriculum?
3. How are considerations of diversity and gender integrated into the curriculum?
4. How does the present core curriculum differ from what was emphasized 10 years ago?
5. How do we want to impact the profession in the next 10 years through curriculum? Specifically, what kind of psychologist do we want to train in the next 10 years and beyond?
6. What specific barriers to curricular change exist?
7. What strategies can be used to facilitate curricular change?
8. How best can the curriculum of psychology be taught?

Incentives for Curricular Change

The desire to be part of one of the best training programs in psychology motivates faculty toward considering change. Furthermore, faculty will recognize the opportunity to be part of a national consortium that moves together to create significant change in how professional psychologists are trained. The professional psychology movement itself is an excellent example of how dramatic changes in the training of psychologists can occur. On a more personal level, rewards and recognition for contributions leading to significant curricular change, words of acknowledgment and encouragement, and expressed appreciation for attitudes conducive to change may provide incentives. In addition, underwriting expenses for faculty presentations at state and national psychology conferences will provide greater exposure to the common goals of professional schools.

Accountability

Discussion of local curricular change without an identified goal is as effective as target practice without a target. Discussions should consider explicitly the processes by which the changes identified in national conference resolutions can be achieved. To ensure specific action consistent with the national resolutions, administrative leaders should facilitate time-limited discussions on the core curriculum as well as provide the structure of deadlines to ensure accountability.

NCSPP itself should require a mechanism whereby member schools report annually on their success in responding to NCSPP resolutions.

Competition

Some curriculum changes will occur because training programs will not want to lose a competitive edge in the marketplace. This will be true for university-based and for free-standing training programs alike. Competition occurs in two arenas: (a) the recruitment of students, and (b) the employment of graduates in the mental health marketplace. It is anticipated that, for example, the growth of health maintenance organizations (HMOs) and preferred provider organizations (PPOs) will reduce the client base currently available to private practitioners of psychology. Therefore, programs that are recognized for preparing their graduates to adjust to changes in the marketplace and to changes in required skills will do well competitively. Programs that refuse to change when change is required not only will lose the competitive advantage, but may indeed have their own survival brought into jeopardy.

Allowing Change

Sometimes it is not the faculty who resist the change; rather it is the administration of the university, the dean of the training program, or the students. The recent move of an eastern professional school of psychology from one university to another appears to be an example of administrative resistance to change. Within our member schools, department chairpersons, deans, provosts, and presidents must be articulate and frequent in their statements of support for regular curriculum review and for necessary change. Students can be a factor in blocking curricular change if the importance of the change is unclear. Faculty or administrative ambivalence can be exploited to split "the powers that be."

Curricular change involves the whole system of the training program, including the faculty, students, and administration. To the extent that all three sectors can be involved in change, the impact on the system will be more agreeable. As is true in a family system, one person or several are in charge of the training program system and can allow change, discourage it, suspend it indefinitely, or foster it. We hope that the leadership of professional school programs is in the hands of mature, healthy, rational, considerate people who will allow constructive change, not thwart it.