

CHAPTER 3

Ongoing Appraisal in Curriculum Work

Chapter Overview

Ongoing appraisal is an inherent part of all curriculum work, from initiation of the idea of curriculum change, to evaluation of a fully implemented curriculum. This core process of curriculum work is a means of quality assurance. In this chapter, a definition of ongoing appraisal is presented, followed by descriptions of its purposes and processes, including the inherent cognitive processes. Criteria are offered for ongoing appraisal of curriculum work. Finally, attention is briefly given to the interpersonal aspects of ongoing appraisal. The chapter concludes with a summary, a case for analysis, and questions for readers to consider in their own settings.

Chapter Goals

- Understand *ongoing appraisal* as a core process in curriculum development, implementation, and evaluation.
- Appreciate the purposes of ongoing appraisal.
- Recognize the cognitive processes inherent in ongoing appraisal in curriculum work.
- Value the role of professional judgment in ongoing appraisal.
- Consider interpersonal aspects of ongoing appraisal.

DEFINITION OF ONGOING APPRAISAL

Ongoing appraisal is the deliberative, continuous, repeated, and careful critique of curriculum ideas, products, and processes during and after their creation, implementation, and evaluation. It involves constant analytical comparison between what is new and what has already been decided to identify areas of coherence and inconsistency.

This appraisal is dependent on:

- A commitment to the development, implementation, and evaluation of an evidence-informed, context-relevant, unified curriculum
- Knowledge of:
 - Curriculum development, implementation, and evaluation processes
 - The context in which the curriculum will be offered
 - The philosophical and educational approaches of the curriculum
 - The conceptual bases of the curriculum
 - Students for whom the curriculum is being developed
 - Decisions already made about the curriculum
- Professional judgment

Ongoing appraisal is a core process of curriculum work, although it is generally unlabelled and its purpose not explicated. It is part of a scholarly approach to all curriculum work, both while the work is in progress and after it is completed. It is important that this core process be an expected, explicit, and visible part of curriculum work.

PURPOSES OF ONGOING APPRAISAL

Ongoing appraisal is a quality assurance process in curriculum development, implementation, and evaluation and is the basis of the recursive nature of curriculum work. The purposes of ongoing appraisal are to ensure that:

- An evidence-informed, context-relevant, unified curriculum is developed.
- The curriculum is implemented and evaluated in a manner true to the curriculum intent.
- Decisions and processes inconsistent with the curriculum intent are identified early, and the necessary revisions are made.
- The curriculum work is of a suitable quality.

ONGOING APPRAISAL PROCESSES IN CURRICULUM WORK

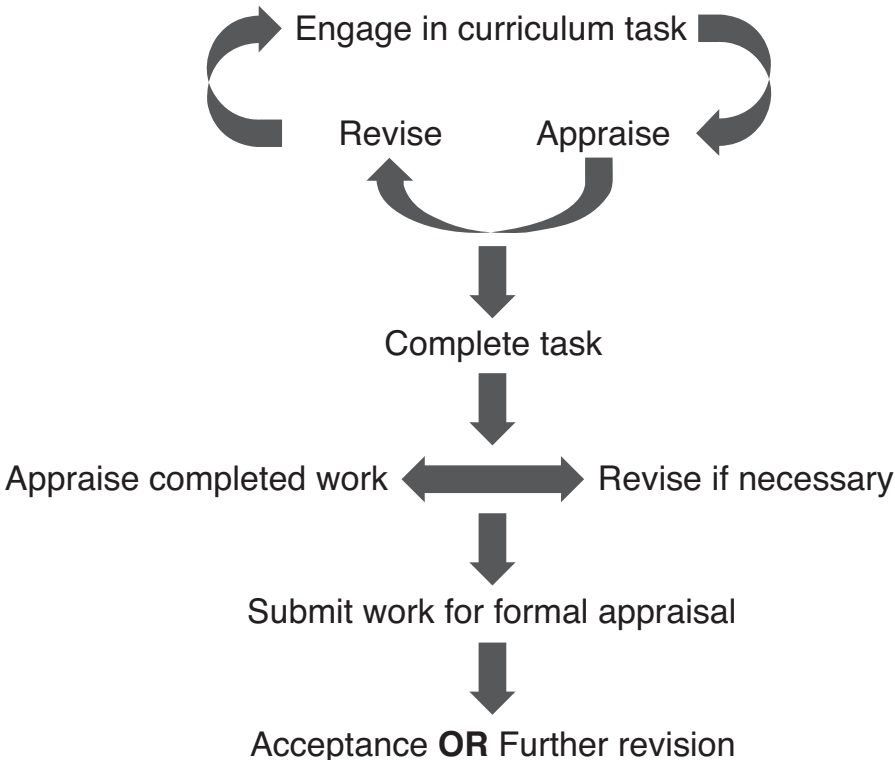
As the term *ongoing* implies, the appraisal process is continuous during all curriculum work. It begins with an understanding of the context in which the curriculum will be offered and the curriculum decisions that have been made. Then, as curriculum development teams work together, individual members judge ideas that are proposed. The team discusses the ideas, examining and informally appraising them. The ongoing appraisal results in revisions and improvements during the creation of ideas. Once the team feels its task is completed, members review and appraise the completed work to ensure that it is

consistent with prior curriculum decisions, the curriculum context, and so forth. This constant consideration and reconsideration of the work at hand is essential to achieve quality, but appraisal only by those who created the ideas may not be sufficient to achieve a feasible and unified curriculum.

Also needed is more formal review of completed work to ensure that it meets the desired criteria and standards. Although one curriculum development team may view its own work as appropriate, the work must be appraised in light of all other developing work to ensure that the concurrent work is consistent. Therefore, it is recommended that a mechanism for formal appraisal of the developing curriculum be in place. This appraisal could be conducted by members representing several development teams, or by a critique committee. Formal appraisal is essential to ensure that all aspects of the curriculum, singly and together, are unified and consistent with the curriculum intent. A depiction of the ongoing appraisal process is provided in **Figure 3-1**.

Figure 3-1 Ongoing appraisal

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Similarly, ongoing appraisal is necessary during curriculum implementation. Ongoing appraisal is essential to ensure that the curriculum intent is reflected in the strategies to ignite learning and methods to evaluate student achievement. Also, student learning is continuously appraised. During curriculum evaluation, it is necessary to continually appraise whether the evaluation procedures are consistent with the curriculum philosophical approaches, and whether the procedures are providing necessary and important information upon which to judge the entire curriculum.

The process of ongoing appraisal might result in a rethinking or reaffirmation of past decisions, and possibly adjustments to past or newly completed work, whichever is not fully congruent with the curriculum intent. Importantly, intentional ongoing appraisal should lead to the development, implementation, and evaluation of an evidence-informed, context-relevant curriculum whose elements are conspicuously unified.

COGNITIVE PROCESSES INHERENT IN ONGOING APPRAISAL

Experienced nurse educators will recognize that the intellectual work of ongoing appraisal includes cognitive processes common in nursing education, research, and practice. A few of these interwoven and overlapping processes are briefly described, along with their application to curriculum work.

Critical Thinking

The consensus definition of the American Philosophical Association is that critical thinking is “purposeful, reflective judgment which manifests itself in reasoned consideration of evidence, context, methods, standards, and conceptualizations in deciding what to believe or what to do” (Facione, 2013). It is composed of a constellation of core cognitive skills: interpretation, analysis, inference, explanation, evaluation, and self-regulation (Facione, 2013).

Curriculum developers must constantly do the following:

- Interpret evidence, theories, and philosophical approaches.
- Consider and explain the evidence and theory underlying proposed ideas.
- Take into account the context in which the curriculum will be implemented, the philosophical bases of the curriculum, and the goals or outcomes they want students to achieve.
- Establish and review their methods and standards for the curriculum work itself.

In so doing, they interpret information and ideas, analyze the congruence with other curriculum decisions, predict the outcomes of their ideas, explain how new ideas fit into the

developing curriculum and are consistent with its tenets, and evaluate the quality and merit of individual ideas and constellations of ideas. This all requires being alert to one's biases and assumptions, and being open to the ideas and reasoning of others.

Constant Comparison

Constant comparison is a process used in the analysis phase of grounded theory research. The procedure includes the constant comparison of new data to previously developed categories to assess whether the data fit or whether new data codes are necessary (Polit & Tatano Beck, 2012). In curriculum work, new ideas, decisions, products (i.e., written documents), and processes are constantly compared to previous decisions and completed work to ensure there is logical, conceptual, and philosophical unity.

Evaluation

Evaluation is a process of judging the quality or worth of something. It entails three steps. First, a standard is established. Then, data about the phenomenon of interest are assembled or observed and compared to the established standard. Finally, a judgment is made about whether the observed data represent an acceptable level.

Throughout curriculum work, ongoing appraisal is a form of evaluation. Curriculum developers repeatedly ask whether their ideas meet the explicated and unexplicated criteria and standards that they hold as individuals and as a group. When implementing the curriculum, faculty members, students, and external stakeholders constantly make judgments about the quality of teaching and learning. Similarly, as formal evaluation of the curriculum is planned and undertaken, the evaluation planners continually judge their efforts against a standard: *Will the evaluation procedures tell us what we need to know about the curriculum?* Finally, when the evaluation data are available, the total curriculum is judged.

Reflection

Reflection-in-action is a “reflective conversation with the situation” (Schön, 1983, p. 76), a process in which every action becomes a local experiment and the responses to the action become the impetus for further development, reframing of the situation, or deeper analysis. Reflection-in-action includes elements of intuitive knowing and artistry. Reflection-on-action, in contrast, is a retrospective examination of a situation (Schön, 1983). Mezirow (1991) furthered these ideas by identifying that it is possible to reflect on *content* (perceptions, thoughts, feelings, or actions), *process* (how we perceive, think, act, or feel), and *premises* (why we perceive, think, act, or feel as we do).

Curriculum development requires constant individual and collective reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. As curriculum developers propose and accept ideas, they constantly appraise and revise them in response to group discussion and assessment of the ideas' congruence with the curriculum intent and their own standards. Similarly, during curriculum implementation, faculty monitor responses to the teaching-learning situation and modify their teaching as necessary on the spot. Their subsequent reflection on action results in course refinements. During curriculum evaluation, the procedures are monitored to ensure that pertinent information is being obtained. Throughout the curriculum development, implementation, and evaluation processes, decisions and actions are reviewed concurrently and retrospectively with a view to improving the ideas and processes. In this ongoing appraisal, the questions asked and the comments offered are representative of reflection on content, process, and premises.

Professional Judgment

Professional judgment is “the ability to make considered decisions or come to sensible conclusions” (Stevenson, 2010). According to Murphy (2006), people have different perspectives on the information available when making a judgment, some attending mainly to the *range* (time orientation from historical to future), some to the *scope* (breadth), and others to the *depth* of information. The point of view influences the conclusions that are reached.

In curriculum work, the quality of the judgments reached is improved by curriculum development teams whose members have different perspectival emphases. For example, those with an historical perspective will know what has worked in the past. Members with a future orientation will see the possible consequences of ideas and what nursing practice and education could and should be. Those with a broad scope might integrate knowledge of curriculum development, students' characteristics, and nursing practice. Participants who focus on depth of knowledge can add important information unknown to the others. Therefore, when completed work is being judged, interactive critical reflection and team consensus are likely to be more useful than the professional judgment of any one individual. In addition, a curriculum team's professional judgment, based on a variety of perspectives, is more likely to be acceptable to a larger group than the views of one person alone.

Although much information is gathered in advance of creating and implementing a curriculum, there is no absolute formula for interpreting and prioritizing the data, and then transforming it into a nursing curriculum. The data and ideas that arise are concurrently:

- Interpreted
- Considered within contextual realities of the school, educational institution, and community
- Combined with curriculum development teams' imagination and artistry

- Viewed in relation to curriculum tenets
- Examined in light of team members' experience and expertise

Ultimately, each curriculum represents the best consensual professional judgment of those who developed it. Their sensible conclusions become the nursing curriculum.

CRITERIA FOR ONGOING APPRAISAL IN CURRICULUM WORK

Curriculum developers, implementers, and evaluators determine the criteria and standards for the curriculum work, and this can include acceptance of externally imposed standards. They create processes and products, and monitor the quality of the work. The processes, products, and quality all require discussion when the group is organizing for curriculum development.

In all curriculum work, five major criteria to ensure a quality curriculum and against which curriculum work is appraised are:

- Relevance for the context in which it will be implemented
- Consistency with current evidence about nursing practice, nursing education, and learning
- Congruence with the curriculum intent
- Logical progression
- Unity

The sections that follow provide some questions that reflect ongoing appraisal during curriculum work.

Curriculum Development

While engaging in deliberative ongoing appraisal during curriculum development, faculty and stakeholders repeatedly ask themselves such questions as:

- Is this work consistent with the philosophical approaches?
- Do these ideas fit the context?
- Is our language reflective of the curriculum's philosophical approaches and major concepts?
- What is the evidence, rationale, or theoretical base for deciding this?
- How well does this work align with previous decisions and completed work?
- Will these plans give opportunity for students to achieve the stated goals or outcomes?
- How can ideas or processes be improved to be more consistent with the curriculum intent?

- Is this curriculum work of the quality that we expect of ourselves?
- Is this curriculum work of the quality that will likely be acceptable to external reviewers?

Curriculum Implementation

During curriculum implementation, some questions faculty, students, and professional practice partners might ask are:

- What are the premises that underlie decisions about teaching-learning events?
- Are the strategies to ignite learning consistent with the agreed-upon philosophical and educational approaches?
- Are strategies to evaluate student learning consistent with the philosophical and educational approaches?
- Are the methods suitable for the context?
- Is the language reflective of the curriculum's philosophical approaches and major concepts?
- How well do students understand the main ideas of the curriculum?
- How well do course processes provide opportunities for students to achieve the stated goals or competencies?
- Are the expectations of students reasonable?
- How can ideas or processes be improved to be more consistent with the curriculum intent?

Curriculum Evaluation

During curriculum evaluation, appraisal questions about the evaluation process might include:

- Are the curriculum evaluation strategies consistent with the philosophical approaches?
- Are the evaluation strategies providing information that will be useful in making a judgment about the curriculum?
- Are all relevant stakeholders involved?
- How can the curriculum evaluation strategies be improved?

INTERPERSONAL ASPECTS OF ONGOING APPRAISAL

Ongoing appraisal is a deliberative, continuous, repeated, and careful critiquing of ideas throughout curriculum development, implementation, and evaluation, and this constant critique is part of a scholarly approach to curriculum development. The ongoing creation,

critique, and refinement of ideas during curriculum work can be intellectually stimulating for team members. Indeed, the work relationships themselves “can be a generative source of enrichment, vitality, and learning that helps individuals, groups, and organizations grow, thrive, and flourish” (Ragins & Dutton, 2006, p. 3).

However, not all curriculum teams are sources of mutual support and enrichment, and even in such groups, ideas that are proposed must be handled with care. Curriculum ideas do not present themselves in the middle of a table, fully formed, and unconnected to individuals. They originate with people who may have a large emotional investment in the ideas they offer. Therefore, appraisal, no matter how strongly it is grounded in the curriculum tenets, may not be perceived as objective or constructive. It may be viewed as personal criticism or an attack of a highly-valued viewpoint.

Verbal appraisal of ideas requires attention to the sensitivities of the originator and to careful use of language. Important is a collective attitude of, *How can we make it align more closely with the curriculum tenets?* or, *How can we make it better?* As in all other academic work, there will be divergence of views, and groups must manage these to reach a consensus that will lead to the best curriculum possible, while preserving and possibly enhancing relationships within the groups.

When a team has submitted its work for formal appraisal, team members’ self-esteem is at stake. The formal appraisal can be perceived as a *pass or fail situation*. If the curriculum team is asked to revise its work substantially, members may believe they have failed in the eyes of their colleagues. If the work is deemed acceptable with minor changes or no changes, they may believe the team has passed. In all circumstances of informal and formal ongoing appraisal, it is vital that members treat each person and their suggestions with care and respect, so that everyone feels valued for their ideas and efforts, and remains committed to the curriculum work.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Ongoing appraisal is the deliberative, repeated, and careful critique of curriculum ideas, products, and processes during and after their creation and implementation. It is a core process of all curriculum work, contributes to the scholarliness of the endeavor, and is a form of quality assurance. Ongoing appraisal incorporates processes such as critical thinking, constant comparison, evaluation, reflection, and professional judgment. The appraisal requires careful attention to curriculum team members’ self-esteem. In curriculum work, ongoing appraisal occurs continuously within curriculum teams and more formally when each portion of curriculum work is completed. A formal appraisal contributes to the unity of the curriculum. Ultimately, the conclusions reached by the curriculum development teams become the curriculum.

SYNTHESIS ACTIVITIES

The Shakespeare University College of Nursing case is presented to illustrate the main ideas about ongoing appraisal in curriculum work. It is followed by questions to guide a critical analysis of the case. Then, questions are offered that might assist readers when considering how to incorporate ongoing appraisal into curriculum work.

Shakespeare University College of Nursing

Shakespeare University has a 40-year history of providing nursing education. Initially, it offered certificate programs in public health and nursing administration. Current programs include a baccalaureate program for registered nurses, an upper-division baccalaureate program, an 18-month accelerated program for students with prior degrees, and a nurse practitioner program.

Following considerable discussion, the faculty members have agreed that they should offer a 4-year integrated baccalaureate program to replace the upper-division baccalaureate program. Although it took considerable lobbying within the university, the College of Nursing did receive permission to introduce a 4-year program.

Faculty members, students, and stakeholders of the Shakespeare University College of Nursing have been working on curriculum development. They are excited about the prospect of this approach to nurse preparation and most recognize the potential for students' stronger acculturation into professional nursing. Following agreement about the philosophical and educational approaches, curriculum outcomes, and overall design, course development teams were formed.

There are two nursing courses in the first semester of the program, *Nursing and Society* and *Communication Skills for Nursing Practice*. In the second semester, there are three nursing courses. *Introduction to Nursing Practice* will give students opportunities to learn about assessment throughout the lifespan. In the course, *Nursing of Developing Families: Theoretical Perspectives*, students will learn about family theory and nursing care of young families. The third course is *Nursing Interventions with Developing Families*. In this course, students will visit young families to complete growth and development assessments, practice communication skills, and identify the health-promoting activities of young families.

Dr. Sophia Alexiou, Dr. Abraham Danziger, and Dr. Jill Summers are either leaders or members of the course development teams as described in **Table 3-1**. All are experienced nurse educators who have participated in curriculum development

Table 3-1 Involvement in Course Development

| COURSES | PROFESSORS | | |
|--|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| | Dr. Alexiou | Dr. Danziger | Dr. Summers |
| Nursing and Society | Leader | | Member |
| Communication Skills for Nursing Practice | | Member | Leader |
| Introduction to Nursing Practice | Leader | | Member |
| Nursing of Developing Families: Theoretical Perspectives | Member | Leader | |
| Nursing Interventions with Developing Families | | Leader | Member |

in the past. Other faculty, students, and clinicians are also part of the development teams. Each team has three to five members. Only Drs. Alexiou, Danziger, and Summers are working on more than one course in the first year of the program. They each believe they have a firm understanding of the curriculum intent, prior decisions, context, and standards. Accordingly, they interpret these to other team members who have not been actively involved in the planning. Concurrently, course development for second-year courses is beginning with different development teams.

James Blackenstock, a faculty member on the course development team for *Nursing and Society*, suggests that there be regular meetings among the course leaders and one additional member of each course team (making a group of eight). The purpose of the meetings would be to review the work completed by each team to ensure that ideas about the courses are complementary and consistent with the curriculum intent. He believes this is important while the courses are being developed and that a final review is necessary once the course development is completed. Moreover, he suggests it would be prudent to meet with those developing the second-year courses so there is continuity in the curriculum.

Dr. Alexiou allows that this idea might be good *in theory* but asserts that this is unnecessary because she and the other course leaders are experienced curriculum developers, talk frequently, and know what should be in the courses. She also says that additional meetings are out of the question because everyone is too busy.

Questions and Activities for Critical Analysis of the Shakespeare University College of Nursing Case

1. What could be the value of James Blackenstock's suggestion for the curriculum and for the course developers?
2. Determine how the development team might be influenced by Dr. Alexiou's statement that the course leaders know what should be in the courses.
3. How might the course development teams be affected by the fact that some members have not been involved in previous decision making about the curriculum?
4. Describe how ongoing appraisal may be built into the course development procedures even if there are no formal meetings to review the work of all teams.
5. What insights can be gained from Dr. Alexiou's and James Blackenstock's views of formal, ongoing evaluation?

Questions and Activities for Consideration When Planning Ongoing Appraisal in Readers' Settings

1. How can ongoing appraisal be explained as a core process of curriculum work?
2. What rationale can be offered about the value of ongoing appraisal?
3. In what ways can deliberative ongoing appraisal be built into curriculum work?
4. Propose processes to ensure that all members feel free to contribute to interactive, ongoing appraisal.
5. Suggest a feasible process to develop explicit standards against which to judge the curriculum work.
6. Who could or should be involved in ongoing appraisal of curriculum work?
7. At what points of the curriculum development processes should formal ongoing appraisal occur?
8. How can the curriculum leader ensure that ongoing appraisal is a core process of curriculum work and that it contributes to quality assurance of the nursing curriculum?

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