

## Ongoing Appraisal in Curriculum Work

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### CHAPTER PREVIEW

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Ongoing appraisal is continuous critique of curriculum ideas and products, and is an inherent part of all curriculum work. This core process of curriculum work is a professional activity undertaken by faculty members while in the midst of their endeavors. In this chapter, a definition of *ongoing appraisal* is presented, followed by descriptions of its purposes and criteria for appraising curriculum, work. Ongoing appraisal processes, including the inherent cognitive processes are explained. Some questions are offered as a guide for ongoing appraisal. 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.

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### QUESTIONS ADDRESSED IN THIS CHAPTER

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- What is *ongoing appraisal* and why is it a core process in curriculum development, implementation, and evaluation?
- What purposes are realized by ongoing appraisal?
- What are the cognitive processes inherent in ongoing appraisal?
- How do interpersonal dynamics influence ongoing appraisal?

## Definition, Purposes, and Bases of Ongoing Appraisal

*Ongoing appraisal is the deliberative, continuous, reiterative, and careful critique of curriculum ideas, products, and processes during and after their creation, implementation, and evaluation.* It involves:

- Constant monitoring and analytical comparison between proposed ideas and what has already been decided to assess coherence, consistency, and comprehensiveness
- Comparison to tacit or explicit quality standards

The purposes of ongoing appraisal are to ensure that:

- An evidence-informed, context-relevant, unified curriculum is developed, one that will prepare graduates to practice professional nursing competently and ethically.
- The curriculum is logically and philosophically consistent.
- Gaps and redundancies in the curriculum are identified and corrected before implementation.
- 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 alterations made.
- The curriculum work is of a suitable quality.

Ongoing appraisal, quality assurance, and continuous quality improvement share the overall aim of the “ongoing and overall pursuit of excellence” (Halstead, 2017). Quality assurance is generally a management function with formal procedures and criteria to assess processes and products, including (in education) policies and procedures, programs, students, faculty, learning resources, information systems, and so forth (Manatos, Sarrico, & Rosa, 2017). Continuous quality improvement is a management philosophy and function that builds on quality assurance, with emphases on systems, efficiency, and client and employee satisfaction (Samman & Quenniche, 2016). In contrast, ongoing appraisal is a less formal professional activity, initiated and undertaken by faculty members and stakeholders while in the midst of curriculum work. This unceasing process is based in:

- A commitment to the development, implementation, and evaluation of an evidence-informed, context-relevant, unified curriculum
- Ongoing dialogue
- Knowledge of:
  - Curriculum development, implementation, and evaluation processes
  - The context in which the curriculum will be offered and graduates will practice

- 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
- Educational policies
- Openness to critique and possible revision of completed work and/or processes

## Criteria for Ongoing Appraisal of Curriculum Work

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Curriculum developers, implementers, and evaluators determine the standards and criteria for their work, typically as the group is organizing for curriculum development. Some criteria against which curriculum work is appraised are:

- Relevance and feasibility for the context in which it will be implemented
- Consistency with current evidence about nursing practice, nursing education, and learning
- Congruence with the curricular philosophical and educational approaches
- Logical progression
- Unity
- Comprehensiveness
- Faculty confidence that graduating students can be successful on the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX<sup>®</sup>) and in professional practice

Additionally, schools may include externally imposed expectations, such as institution-wide educational requirements, program approval, and/or accreditation standards. Other criteria may be established in accordance with priorities and values of the school of nursing.

## Ongoing Appraisal Processes in Curriculum Work

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Ongoing appraisal has always been a part of curriculum work, although it may not have been labeled and its purposes not explicitly stated. It is part of a scholarly approach to all curriculum work, both while the work is in progress and after it is completed.

As the term *ongoing* implies, the appraisal process is continuous during all curriculum work and therefore, it is a core process. 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 undertake their work, 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.

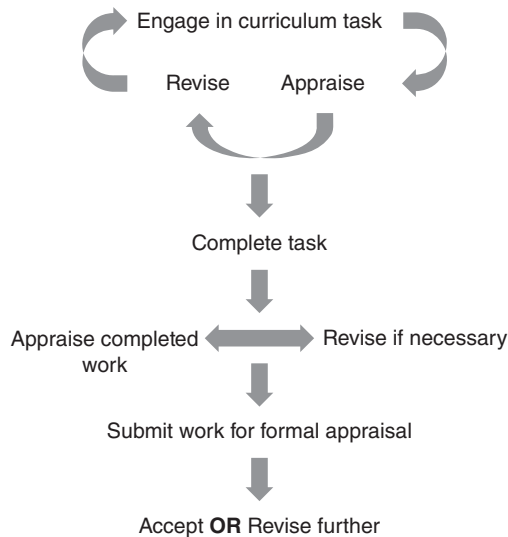
Once a development team feels its task is completed, members review and appraise the completed work to ensure that it is consistent with prior curriculum decisions and the curriculum context. This constant consideration and reconsideration of the work at hand is essential to achieve quality. However, appraisal only by those who created the ideas may not be sufficient to achieve a feasible and unified curriculum.

Also needed is planned review of completed work to ensure that it meets the desired criteria and standards. Although a development team may view its own work as appropriate, the work should be appraised in light of all other developing work to ensure that the concurrent work is logically and philosophically consistent, and that there are no gaps or redundancies in the total curriculum. 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 teams, or by a critique or review committee. This “external” appraisal is a means to ensure that all aspects of the curriculum, singly and together, are unified and consistent with the curriculum intent.

Similarly, ongoing appraisal is necessary during curriculum implementation to ensure that the curriculum intent is reflected in the strategies to ignite learning and methods to evaluate student achievement. Also, student learning and responses to the curriculum are continuously appraised. Appraisal of curriculum implementation is undertaken by those implementing courses and then shared with a larger curriculum group because appraisal data may have implications for other courses.

During curriculum evaluation, it is necessary to continually appraise whether the evaluation procedures are consistent with the curricular philosophical approaches, and whether the procedures are providing necessary and important information upon which to judge the entire curriculum. As a result of the appraisal, procedures may be modified “mid-stream” and/or the ideas recorded for consideration in future curriculum evaluations.

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. A depiction of the ongoing appraisal process is provided in **Figure 3-1**.



**Figure 3-1.** Ongoing appraisal.

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## Cognitive Processes Inherent in Ongoing Appraisal

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 (APA) 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” (APA Delphi Report as cited in Facione, 2015, p. 23). It is composed of a constellation of core cognitive skills: interpretation, analysis, inference, explanation, evaluation, and self-regulation (Facione, 2015).

Curriculum developers 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 biases and assumptions, and being open to the ideas and reasoning of others.

## Constant Comparison

Constant comparison is an iterative process most associated with the analysis phase of grounded theory research. The procedure includes the constant comparison of new data from interviews, observations, and documents to prior data and previously developed categories to assess whether the data fit or whether new data codes are necessary (Holloway & Galvin, 2015). In curriculum work, new ideas, decisions, products (i.e., written documents), and processes are constantly compared to earlier decisions and completed work to ensure there are no gaps or redundancies and that there is logical, conceptual, and philosophical unity.

## Evaluation

Evaluation is a process of judging the quality or worth of something. It entails four steps. First, a standard and/or criteria is (are) established. Then, data about the phenomenon of interest are assembled or observed and compared to the established standard. Finally, a judgment is made about how well the data match the standard.

Throughout curriculum work, ongoing appraisal is a form of evaluation. Curriculum developers repeatedly ask whether their ideas meet the explicated and implicit standards and criteria that they hold as individuals and as a group. During curriculum implementation, faculty members, students, and external stakeholders constantly make judgments about the quality of the teaching and learning experiences and their relevance for the development of future nurses and nursing practice. 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 ongoing 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. 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 perceptions, content, processes, and premises.

## Professional Judgement

Judgement is “the ability to make considered decisions or to arrive at reasonable conclusions or opinions on the basis of the available information” (“Judgement,” 2016). Professional judgement, therefore, is the ability to form reasonable conclusions or opinions within an area of specialized expertise. The conclusions and opinions are influenced by beliefs, values, experience, and evidence (Hazi, 2012), as well as inclinations to attend mostly to the time orientation, scope, or depth of the available information (Murphy, 2006).

The quality of curricular judgements is improved by team members who have a variety of perspectival emphases. For example, those with considerable experience or 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. Members who view a broad scope of information might integrate knowledge of curriculum development, students' characteristics, and university policies. Participants who focus on depth of knowledge can add important details unknown to the others. Therefore, when completed work is judged, interactive critical reflection and team consensus are likely to be more useful than the professional judgment

of any one individual. Moreover, 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 the 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, expertise, and preferences

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

## Questions for Ongoing Curriculum Appraisal

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The sections that follow provide some questions for ongoing appraisal that reflect the criteria previously described. The questions are offered as a beginning guide for appraisals during curriculum development, implementation, and evaluation.

### Curriculum Development

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



- Will this curriculum support graduates' success on the NCLEX-RN® and in professional practice?
- Is this curriculum work of the quality expected in the school of nursing?
- Will this curriculum 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 are students responding to the courses?
- How well do course processes provide opportunities for students to achieve the stated goals or competencies/outcomes?
- How well is the design working?
- Are the expectations of students and faculty reasonable?
- How can ideas or processes be improved to be more consistent with the curriculum intent or be more feasible?

## Curriculum Evaluation

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

- Are the curriculum evaluation strategies consistent with the philosophical approaches?
- Is information being attained that is useful in making sound judgments about the curriculum?
- Are all relevant stakeholders involved?
- How can the curriculum evaluation strategies be improved?

In situations where faculty members have limited experience with curriculum work, the curriculum leader can pose these questions at appropriate times. In

this way, faculty members' awareness of the importance of ongoing appraisal and their ability to analyze their work will be strengthened.

## Interpersonal Aspects of Ongoing Appraisal

Idea generation, appraisal, and refinement are constant features of curriculum work, and this process can be intellectually stimulating for team members, particularly in an environment of respect and support. Indeed, the group 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, nor how gently it is presented, 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 desire for a quality curriculum. This is reflected in questions such as:

- How can the idea be aligned more closely with the curriculum tenets?
- How can this idea be developed further?
- Might there be alterations that will ultimately enhance the outcomes for graduates?

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 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.

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## CHAPTER SUMMARY

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Ongoing appraisal is the deliberative, continuous, reiterative, and careful critique of curriculum ideas, products, and processes during and after their creation, implementation, and evaluation. It is a core process of all curriculum work whose purpose is to ensure a quality curriculum. Moreover, ongoing appraisal contributes to the scholarliness of curriculum work. Ongoing appraisal incorporates the processes of critical thinking, constant comparison, evaluation, reflection, and professional judgement. 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. Ultimately, the conclusions reached by the curriculum development teams become the curriculum.

### SYNTHESIS ACTIVITIES

The River Heights University Faculty 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. Questions are then offered that might assist readers when considering how to incorporate ongoing appraisal into curriculum work.

#### ■ River Heights University Faculty of Nursing

River Heights University Faculty of Nursing has been offering a 4-year integrated Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BScN) program for 20 years. Seven classes have graduated from the current curriculum, which was first introduced 11 years ago. Periodic revisions have occurred throughout the life of the curriculum.

Faculty members, students, and stakeholders of the River Heights Faculty of Nursing are beginning to organize for curriculum development. There has been agreement that the curriculum has been revised so much that its unity has been lost. It is time for a new curriculum, and early discussions and current literature have led members to believe that they would like to develop a concept-based curriculum.

Dr. Maria da Silva, the undergraduate chair, is leading the curriculum development initiative and has invited two faculty members and one student from each year of the current curriculum, along with two healthcare agency

representatives, to consider how to proceed. Dr. da Silva has developed a tentative plan for the curriculum development process. She explains that the plan is only a suggestion, a starting point for discussion, and that she recognizes that those present have valuable ideas that will contribute to the final plan.

The group discusses the plan, generally likes it, and modifies some of it. However, the “sticking point” for some faculty is the idea of a Critique Committee to review and determine consistency in the completed work of the curriculum teams that will be formed. Dr. Benoit, who is newly tenured, has a large research study, and is new to the development of a complete curriculum, states that this committee seems unnecessary. “Once we agree on the philosophy and outcomes, we should be free to do the work in our own time and with our own ideas, as long as the first-year courses are ready when they are due to begin.” Dr. Finley, a mid-career faculty member who has experience in curriculum development concurs, “Surely we don’t need to have a policing committee. We can monitor and evaluate our own work. We’ve done fine in the past, and no one needs more committee work.”

Although hesitant to speak, a senior student says, “Isn’t this like peer review that we learned about in our research course? You know, your work is read and if it’s not accepted, you get suggestions for improvement before you submit again.” A clinical agency representative says, “Yes, when we are introducing a change in practice, representatives from different units always meet to ensure that there is consistency and thoroughness in how things are done.”

After further discussion, most agree that a Critique Committee should be formed. Dr. da Silva proposes that the committee be called the Review Committee because that terminology could sound less negative, less harsh. She then wonders if some of the curriculum teams may need some guidance about ongoing appraisal, that is, the self-monitoring and evaluation that Dr. Finley had suggested. Dr. Finley responds that if guidance is necessary, the Review Committee can provide it.

### ■ Questions and Activities for Critical Analysis of the River Heights University College of Nursing Case

1. Is Dr. Finley correct that experienced curriculum developers do not require their work to be critiqued? Why or why not?
2. What response can be given to Dr. Benoit’s comment?
3. Are the comments of the student and clinical agency representative convincing? Why or why not?
4. What could be the value of a Review Committee?

5. Who should be members of the Review Committee and how can the committee contribute to the curriculum development process?
6. What are the guidelines the Review Committee might provide to the curriculum teams in relation to ongoing appraisal of their own work?
7. How could Dr. da Silva explain ongoing appraisal within curriculum teams, and by a Review Committee, to everyone involved in curriculum work?
8. How could Dr. Benoit's and Dr. Finley's statements affect their work and the work of the curriculum teams they join?
9. What insights can be gained from Dr. Benoit's and Dr. Finley's views of formal review of completed work?

#### ■ 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. Develop guidelines for ongoing appraisal of curriculum work.
7. Who could or should be involved in ongoing appraisal of curriculum work?
8. At what points of the curriculum development processes should formal ongoing appraisal occur?
9. How can the curriculum leader ensure that ongoing appraisal is a core process of curriculum work?
10. How can quality ongoing appraisal be fostered in situations where time, faculty numbers, faculty knowledge about curriculum work, and/or curriculum leadership is limited?
11. Consider the terminology that would be suitable: *Critique Committee*, *Review Committee*, or another name?

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