

Conflict Analysis and Resolution Among the Participants in Curriculum Planning

BY

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Abstract

Human experience of conflict in the developing and developed countries of the world continues to move through a plethora of phases based on diverse perspectives of conflict theorists and conflict parties. This has often led to tense traumatic and violent approaches to issues in various facets of life where such conflict is not seen as an opportunity to change. In the education terrain, curriculum planning process involves different stakeholders of education coming together to formulate a workable curriculum for any target audience. As a result, conflicting situations are bound to emerge. As an attempt for peaceful co-existence among curriculum planners involved in Nigeria education, this paper focused on conflict analysis and resolution among the participants in curriculum planning. It delved into curriculum planning and the participants, human perception of conflict, conflict types and theories of conflict vis-a-vis some ugly situations in which conflict might emerge during the curriculum planning process. As a mechanism for conflict resolution, the author recommends that conflict should be dealt with using any means that would prevent conflict escalation among which is Diagnosis Progress Therapy (DPT).

Keywords: *Conflict, Curriculum, Participant, Planning, Resolution*

1. Introduction

The task of planning a workable curriculum which is generally a set of learning opportunities for any level of education in both developed and developing countries of the world are very complex. It entails searching for facts, putting the facts under extreme scrutiny, making considerations about the body of facts, and taking a number of decisions in the process of the planning. The complexity of this task often calls for different categories of people otherwise referred to as the participants in curriculum planning which work collaboratively in order to come up with a blue print of qualitative learning opportunities for the target audience or the level(s) of learners in mind.

Among the various participants that are called upon to participate in the curriculum planning, it is undoubtedly clear that when positions are arranged and the curriculum planning process structured in such a way that makes some people to be subordinate to others, the hierarchy puts in place may from the starting point through the curriculum planning process give birth to tension. Tension, which usually precedes the outbreak of conflict eventually, gives birth to conflict, crises and chaos among the participants in curriculum planning. When some of the participants are at logger heads, each member's contributions of his or her quota towards the success of the curriculum being planned may be hindered. This makes the curriculum planning which is already a complex task to become a difficult task, and by implication, affects in part, or in the totality, the cooperative curriculum planning process.

In order to avoid making the cooperative curriculum planning exercise at any level of education in Nigeria and beyond a purposeless exercise where there is outbreak of conflict, this paper discussed conflict analysis and resolution among the participants in curriculum planning.

Curriculum Planning

We live in a society that is dynamic and not static. Thus, conceivably, the curriculum of any

educational institution and of any period is a reflection of the motives or the demands of the society of that period. When the value structure of the groups making up the society is considered, it may call for curriculum changes or reforms so as to ensure functionality of the curriculum. This makes curriculum planning to become very needful.

The act of making choices by a group of curriculum experts or / and educational planners regarding what is to be taught, how it is to be taught, to whom and by who it should be taught in the theory and practice of education is termed curriculum planning (Alade, 2007). Curriculum planning is based on the assumption that the subject matter suggested, the learning activities identified and the materials developed will actually lead to the achievement of educational objectives of the society via curriculum objectives.

Curriculum planning is a part in the curriculum process. Curriculum process is the entire activities carried out by a team or statutory body with a view to ensuring that a curriculum document meets the social changes and the peculiarity of educational demands of a nation or global setting. The involvement of the people concerned with the education of the learners in the planning of the curriculum is regarded as cooperative curriculum planning (Offorma, 1994).

The Participants in Curriculum Planning

Curriculum planning cannot be singly-handled. It is a cooperative exercise. It is not a sole proprietorship enterprise. The undertaking is expected to be cooperative and collaborative. Alade, Adeyemo and Adeniran (2007) identified the following participants in curriculum planning process.

- (i) Professional Educators - Specialists in education from their knowledge domain as Sociology, Philosophy, Psychology, etc.
- (ii) Teachers - These are classroom learning facilitators who are the chief implementers of the curriculum.
- (iii) Learners - These are the recipients of the curriculum whose characteristics are important for consideration during curriculum planning.
- (iv) School Administrators - School principals and co-heads/administrative staff along with officials of Ministries of Education.
- (v) Lay citizen - The community people, parents and guardians.
- (vi) Guidance Counselors - They are those responsible for the career guidance, educational and socio-psychological guidance of learners.
- (vii) Subjects Specialists - They include authors of textbooks, storybooks and workbooks among others.
- (viii) Professional Bodies - Professionals in different works of life like Teaching, Architecture, Law, Language, Medicine/ and Engineering etc.
- (ix) Curriculum Consultants - Professionals in curriculum and instruction and curriculum studies who provide the required leadership and direction in the process of planning a curriculum. Their technical skills qualify them to vet the plan and map out strategies for effective curriculum implementation.

The selection of the curriculum elements to be included in the design phase of the plan is the responsibility of the identified participants in the cooperative curriculum planning process.

Human Perception of Conflict

Often times, human perceptions of the term conflict have been grievous, alarming, and in volumes of negative interpretations. Generally, conflict occurs where there are groups of people. That is why in this paper, the curriculum planning process which requires the contributions of people cannot be diffused from conflict index. Conflict can be perceived from both positive and negative pedestals. Conflict according to Albert (2005) is in two folds viz: constructive and destructive conflicts. Constructive conflict allows the parties involved in the conflict to discuss the issue and settle the matter amicably, and make them to discover some new things about each other. This could help future relationship, while destructive

conflict is characterized by verbal and physical assaults, and it injures development. Alade (2010) puts it that destructive conflict occurs when it exceeds the limits imposed by societal consensus.

Conflict to the Chinese is an opportunity for change. Conflict from another point of view, is a conscious opposition to another during a struggle over superiority, class status, value scrutiny, claims, power and personality. In this context, conflict becomes tension-soaked. This perspective sees conflict as a disagreement between two individuals or groups who have cause to interact formally or informally. When some of the participants in curriculum planning are not in good terms, especially in matters that relate directly or indirectly to them during the curriculum planning process, there is every possibility of conflict occurrence.

Conflicts having some degree of negative connotations is focused in this paper, and that is why a case is made for conflict management and conflict resolution in this paper after a vivid conflict analysis. The negative connotations associated with human perception of conflicts are;

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|------------------|----------------|-------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| (i) disagreement | (ii) chaos | (iii) tear | (iv) disruption | (v) grievance |
| (vi) quarrel | (vii) injury | (viii) wound | (ix) discontent | (x) crises |
| (xi) destruction | (xii) violence | (xiii) oppression | (iv) fight | (xv) war |
| (xvi) argument | (xvii) looting | (xix) complaint | (xx) curse. | |

Any of the twenty negative connotations of conflict listed above can give birth to any other one in the group and /or produce many other symbols of conflict in destructive terms. Alade (2010) declared that:

...conflict situation is often an unpredictable occurrence. When it occurs, wound and scares are produced, especially where it is perceived to have some degree of negative connotations. Such grievous state of conflict may result in the non-attainment of educational goals and objectives as expected (p.1).

Conflict in consequent terms, is unarguably a crises situation whereas inter alia, conflict in human terms should be seen as an engine of evolution which should breed progress, peace and enhanced relationships to mention but a few.

Types of Conflict

Imran (2003) identified some of the notable conflicts that people grapple with from day to day in their daily lives. They are:

- (i) Land conflict
- (ii) Chieftaincy tussle (conflict)
- (iii) Family conflict
- (iv) Boundary conflict
- (v) Economic conflict
- (vi) Political conflict
- (vii) Ethnic conflict
- (viii) Religious conflict, etc

As a buttress on the types of conflicts identified by Imran above, conflict may emerge when there is rancour between members of a family on land matters. The struggle for chieftaincy title may also be taken as a battle to finish affair. On family conflict, argument may develop between a couple over the choice of food, taste or any material value. Likewise, over demonstration of political animality to spend more than a normal period of time in a political position or post may cause pandemonium in a

political terrain. In addition, the cultural diversity due to the multi-ethnic nature of the larger society can cause value disparity and reluctance to reach a consensus on value system. On religious conflict, religious doctrines or injunctions which are often at variance is an avenue for religious clash, hence, conflict results.

Conflict Theories

Bartholomew and Mclellan (1989) regarded a theory of conflict as a theoretical approach that views social phenomena as the result of conflict between individuals or groups which has developed at both micro and macro levels. The micro level is the level at which an individual is studied and from his or her behaviour inferences are drawn about collective behaviour, while at the macro level, inferences are drawn about socially induced behaviour by a sense of collective grievances.

In this paper, the following conflict theories are examined:

- (i) The Karl Marx Model of Conflict Theory
- (ii) Getzels and Guba Model of Conflict Theory
- (iii) Dahrendoff Model of Conflict Theory

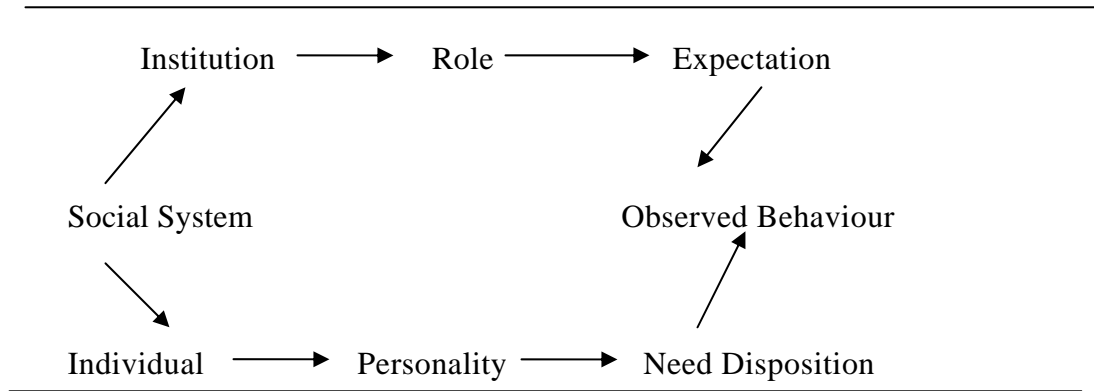
i) The Karl Marx Model of Conflict Theory - Karl Marx lived between 1818 and 1883. As a conflict theorist, he argued that the ruling ideas of a particular age are those of its ruling class. The ruling class determined the methods or ways of governance because of its power and influence, and likewise constructs social structures that best serves its interest. The creation and emergence of social structures by the ruling class is often characterized by strata, and in the process, conflicts are prone to emerge by those involved in the social structures formation.

In curriculum planning, grouping of the participants involved, generation of ideas and opinions consideration, more especially in value clarification may lead to conflict. Refusal to bow down to superior argument in most cases usually leads to crises within or among the groups.

(ii) Getzels and Guba Model of Conflict Theory- Getzels and Guba are also conflict theorists who hold the views that an organization is a social system where tasks achievement is based on participatory efforts to every member of the organization. In relation to curriculum planning, the participants mentioned earlier in this paper among many other specialists and contributors to curriculum developmental process have specific and specialized roles and activities to perform under the coordinatorship or auspices of the curriculum policy committee. In the process, Getzels and Guba in their model of conflict theory explained that apart from the positions which are arranged and structured hierarchically, two specific interests result and could cause conflict. The first interest is termed "Nomothetic" dimension – this emphasizes the interest of the group or organization and its expectation as a whole. The interest of the group is the desirable or workable curriculum for the audience, that is, the learners. "Idiographic" dimension is the interest of the individual in term of his needs disposition and personalities. Conflict occurs when some participants in the curriculum planning group are sentimental at the expense of developing a workable curriculum that will satisfy the needs of the target learners and the society at large.

The value system of the society is supposed to galvanize participants in curriculum planning to action in order to transform the society in an uplifting manner through an eventual curriculum. Instead, a variety of conflicting values as a result of nomothetic dimension versus idiographic dimension mar the curriculum planning exercise. The nomothetic dimension and idiographic dimension identified by Getzels and Guba model of conflict theory and presented in Fadipe (2000) is shown below in form of line diagram.

Nomothetic Dimension



Idiographic Dimension

Figure 1: The Social Process of Behaviour (Getzels and Guba (1958) cited in Fadipe 2000: p.56).

From Figure 1, when the role expected from an institution is contrary to expectation, conflicts become inevitable, and the observed behavior is at variance to the common goal of the institution or social system. Violent conflicts emerge in curriculum planning whenever individual, group or/and the personality involved perceived his own need disposition or argument to be the most and only superior alternative. This does not help the acclaimed cooperative curriculum planning in curriculum building.

Dahrendoff Model of Conflict Theory- In his book "Class and Class Conflict in an Industrial Society", Dahrendoff's theory states that conflict of interest would still occur because a group is to submit to the authority of another. He opined that in any organization, leadership existed and as a result, some people will give command while others would accept command. Failure for one side to bow gives room to conflict. In cooperative curriculum planning, when some members appear dominant, they tend to lead and give others directions to take. The alienation of the other participants from the mechanism of control and participatory efforts hinder curricular success.

Conflict Interference in Cooperative and Collaborative Curriculum Planning Process

In curriculum planning process, one of the major causes or sources of conflict is conflicts involving values. Values are the belief systems people cherish, and would unequivocally not like to compromise for any reason. Values are standards, principles or criteria for judging the worth of anything for judging things on the one hand, to be good, worthless, despicable or somewhere between these extremes (Iheoma, 2000, cited in Alade, Adeyemo and Adeniran, 2007). Values are what make our being (Imran, 2003). Values are generally multi-dimensional. They are the rules by which members of a social group co-exist and shape their existence.

Value consideration is the beginning point in curriculum decision making. A primary source (the society) for selecting school programme of education must be given due attention in curriculum planning. In doing this, the human units as community, culture or sub-culture among others presents their values system, and this often leads to a variety of conflicting values which require adequate scrutiny in curriculum planning process.

When the parties involved in curriculum planning are debating about different values, it is a common thing to see the parties that are involved in "value conflict", defending their positions strongly. When

the participants in curriculum planning as well as those involved in value conflicts express their excess energy in a destructive manner, it would lead to misplacement of values, hence, the curriculum being planned is at a risk.

Commenting on the different ways conflict can be expressed, and the symptoms of which are possible to occur and reoccur in curriculum planning, Centre for Peace Initiative and Development (2003) presents it in form of conflict energy as expressed in figure 2 below.

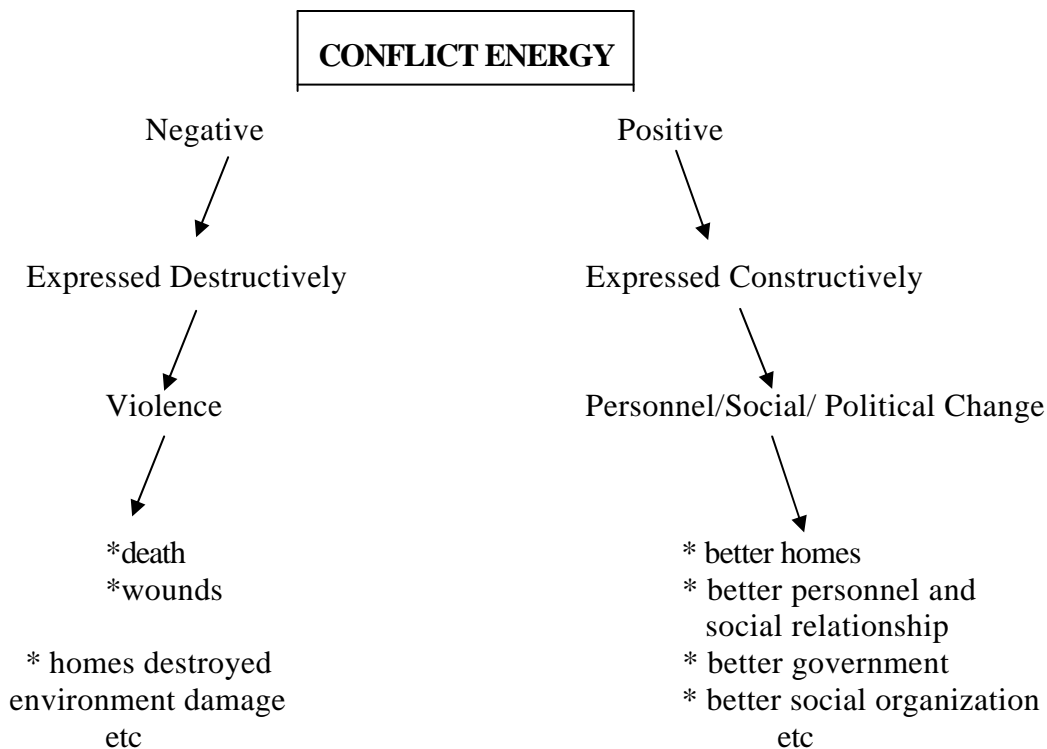


Figure 2: Conflict Energy (Source: Centre for Peace Initiative and Development (2003), for UNDP/NAPEPTOT).

During curriculum planning process, conflicts may emerge when the excess energy among the participants are expressed constructively or destructively. (See figure 2). When the parties involved harness their excess energy and opinions or ideas on the ongoing curriculum planning in a constructive manner, a better workable and productive curriculum is given birth to. Conversely, when curriculum planning participants express their excess energy in a destructive manner, it often leads to rancour, rejection of useful opinions and all other attendant consequences of destructive conflicts which endanger the educational system, its curriculum and also cause environmental crises and unproductive school products. Hence, the acclaimed cooperative and collaborative curriculum planning becomes tense, traumatic, political and catastrophic.

Conflict energy expressed destructively during curriculum planning breeds misinterpretation of opinions, facts and misjudgment of values and situational entrapment in which the conflict becomes unduly magnified. Such situation endangers curriculum survival. A true cooperative curriculum planning exercise is a market place of ideas, knowledge and suggestions which are divergent in nature, but

should however be harmonized. It is the constructive handling of the manifestations of conflicts that leads to the curriculum development while the destructive attitude towards conflicts many a time leads to faulty curriculum design.

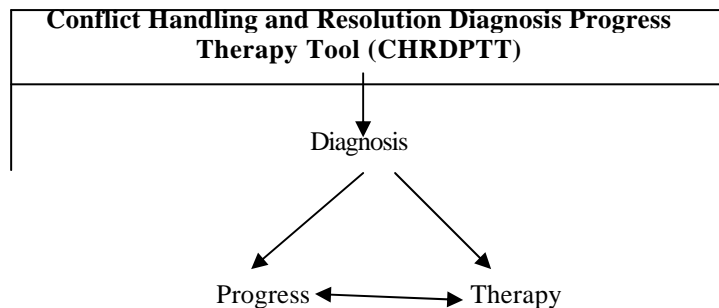
Moreover, the meager resources that hardly can take care of the needs of the curriculum planners during curriculum planning process could be a cause or source of conflict. Usually, when every resources are made available to the participants in cooperative curriculum planning and process, conflict situation may subside. In another case, if the relationship between the participants in the curriculum planning is frustrating, they might resort to conflicting positions, attitudes, and behaviour. This is manifested by inconsistency in their group interaction and contributions. At the zenith of this kind of conflicting situation, some members involved in the curriculum planning could become inactive or abandon the work entirely. The writer warns here that the relationship among the participants in curriculum planning should not be taken as a casual one, instead it is an instrumental relationship that is supposed to yield viable expected outcomes - workable curriculum document.

Handling and Resolving Conflict among the Participants in Curriculum Planning

Most often, those involved in conflict handling are faced with the challenge of how to terminate conflict, how to settle conflict, how to manage conflict and how to resolve conflict amicably. In the time of conflict resolution, it is conceived that the conflict has been totally dealt with finally. This is "finality rule" in conflict handling and resolution. Available literature opined that the concept of conflict resolution means both the wound and scars produced by a conflict has been renounced. Notwithstanding, the old wound would go but new ones are bound to be created.

In curriculum planning and academic exchange and forum therefore, conflict should be managed thus:

1. Define the conflict by:-
 - (a) Naming the conflict
 - (b) Facing the conflict
 - (c) Feeling the conflict
 - (d) Releasing the conflict.
2. Explore the conflict history by asking:-
 - (a) What are the events causing the conflict?
 - (b) Is there any previous disagreement between the parties?
 - (c) Has there been any failure in the previous conflict resolution? (Optional)
3. Examine the conflict context by asking:-
 - (a) How does the physical environment of the conflict look like?
 - (b) What effort has been made to resolve the conflict?
4. Identify the primary parties by:-
 - (a) Listing the parties connected with the conflict.
 - (b) Examining the differences between the parties and harmonize.
5. Observe the personality status of the parties by:-
 - (a) Examining whether one party looks superior to the other party.
 - (b) Identifying the resources at each party's disposal.
6. Apply intervention procedure - In this paper, Diagnosis Progress Therapy (DPT) is adapted. This is presented in what is termed "Conflicts Handling and Resolution Diagnosis Progress Therapy Tool. (CHRDPTT).



D- Diagnosis: Investigating the history or the incidence surrounding the conflict situation in the curriculum planning process -Item 1 -Item 5 of conflict management above describes the "D" (Diagnosis)

P - Progress : The attitudinal state of the conflict between or among the participants involved in the conflict is vividly analyzed while the conflict resolution is being carried out.

T- Therapy: The solution to abruptly end the conflict situation is prescribed. In all, it is argued that conflict should be dealt with using any means that could prevent conflict escalation.

2. Conclusion

This paper has examined the concept of conflict, conflict analysis and resolution approaches in the context of cooperative and collaborative curriculum planning. All the areas of concentrations in the paper are to build a healthy curriculum planning environment and peaceful coexistence among the identified participants in curriculum planning. The selection of values in curriculum planning is very much a judgmental procedure, and curriculum planners must be up to the task in that light to avoid or reduce conflicting arguments to the barest minimum.

Each party involved in the curriculum planning must clearly understand himself and the environment within which the interaction takes place, and also know and admit his limitations. It is needless for any participant involved in curriculum planning to claim to be what he is not. Meanwhile, in togetherness, they are all charged with the responsibility to ascertain that the curriculum elements are properly developed from the cultural environment so that the national objectives will be actually achieved through the curriculum.

3. Recommendations

In order for conflict situation not to degenerate into scars and wounds during curriculum planning, and also for peace to reign among all, the main recommendation put forward in this paper is the adoption and adaptation of Diagnosis Progress Therapy (DPT) for handling and resolving conflict as discussed in this paper. This is similar to Diagnosis Progress Therapy (DPT) put forward for the parties in conflict by Alade (2010). However, in this case, any of the parties involved in the conflict during the curriculum planning process may not necessarily be out of his/her mind, but be under the force of conflict energy which may either be constructive or destructive as explored in this paper.

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