

# The Adoption of the Georgia Quality Core Curriculum: A Historical Analysis of Curriculum Change

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## INTRODUCTION

I do most anxiously wish to see the highest degrees of education given to the higher degrees of genius and to all degrees of it, so much as may enable them to read and understand what is going on in the world and to keep their part of it going right.

(Thomas Jefferson, 1795)

From the dawn of the public school in America, the mission of providing quality education to the students being served by our schools has been an enduring priority. It is through public education that Thomas Jefferson's blueprint of an aristocracy of talent rather than of inherited power and wealth has remained a realistic ideal (Hechinger, 1993). To Jefferson, the preservation of our democratic nation depended upon it (Tanner & Tanner, 1995). According to Dewey (1900), "All that society has accomplished for itself is put, through the agency of the school, at the disposal of its future members" (p. 7). For many, the hopes and dreams of the future are placed on our schools and their ability to provide a quality education to our children. "Our society has a vital, collective stake in the informed intelligence of every citizen" (Bagley, 1938, p. 251).

Although over the past two centuries Americans have increasingly recognized the importance of a well-educated society, decisions regarding what and how to educate have not remained constant. American public education is a social, political, and economic enterprise, orchestrated over time by politicians, businessmen, parents, teachers, and other influential individuals in society (Garrett, 1994). As such, the social, political, and economic changes that have occurred in our nation have resulted in continually changing ideas about schooling in America. The shift from an agricultural society to an industrial society resulted in several changes in our educational system, including an increased demand for skilled laborers and the need for widening access to public education. The Progressive Movement of the early 20th century resulted in lasting initiatives to expand the function of school to include preparation for work, family, and community, as well as post-secondary education. The end of slavery and the gradual progression of African-Americans toward full citizenship has resulted in increased equity in schools and numerous legislative actions aimed at reshaping public education. The launch of Sputnik in 1958 resulted in massive funding for the advancement of mathematics, science, and modern foreign languages in schools. These educational reforms and numerous others were partly the result of changes occurring in the larger society. Our schools are nested in the larger culture and reverberate social tremors (Cuban, 1992). Educational reform is one of the avenues through which this country addresses broader issues and is often a symbol of our nation's internal struggles with national problems (Odden, 1995).

Of all reform efforts aimed at improving public education, those directed at changes in the curriculum have been paramount.

The school curriculum, having the function of determining what schools teach, is seen as a primary way to change education and influence the type of citizens produced by our schools. Beginning with the expansion of subjects in the 1800s, to the current push for a national curriculum, the call for curriculum change has continued. Changes in state and locally-mandated course requirements, increased graduation standards, increased attention to the curricular impact of testing and textbook decisions, and state involvement in the development and implementation of new curricula have all figured into present educational reform efforts (Elmore & Sykes, 1992).

Throughout the 20th century, the school's purposes and its curricula have been a matter of intense societal debate (Longstreet & Shane, 1993). "Controversy in educational discourse most often reflects a basic conflict in the priorities concerning the form and content of curriculum and the goals towards which schools should strive" (Eisner & Vallance, 1974, p. 1). Debates over curriculum matters lead interested groups to push for curriculum reform. Presently, curriculum reform is a common expectation shared by diverse groups all across the nation (Klein, 1994). Professional groups, state governments, and federal agencies all engage in developing curriculum policy to shape the curriculum delivered in American public schools.

During the last 20 years, organizations such as the National Commission on Excellence in Education, the National Educational Standards and Improvement Council, the National Assessment of Educational Progress and national organizations from various academic disciplines such as the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics have significantly contributed to the formation of policies developed to shape curriculum in American public schools. Beginning in the early eighties these national organizations and others like them started a wave of school reforms with renewed emphasis on educational excellence at the federal and state levels. The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development formed a national network of schools to redefine general education (Doll, 1996). The National Science Board proposed a multi-billion dollar investment to revamp the school curriculum in science, mathematics, and technology (Tanner, 1995). The National Commission on Excellence in Education's released the report *A Nation at Risk* (1983), which identified our nation's "mediocre educational performance" as the cause for our nation being at risk of surviving as an economic power, and a wave of educational reforms aimed at improving education in America arose. The call for education to remedy political, social, and educational woes was not new, yet educators and politicians both jumped on the "bandwagon." The National Commission on Excellence in Education in its report offered recommendations such as providing a standard basic curriculum, strengthening graduation requirements, raising student standards, and holding schools and educators more accountable. Educational policies patterned after these

recommendations soon followed. Governors and State legislatures across the nation responding to *A Nation at Risk* passed legislation creating state educational standards. Texas, for example, developed the Essential Elements state-wide curriculum (McNeil, 1995). Connecticut developed the Common Core of Learning (Massell, 1997). Tennessee, under the direction of Governor Lamar Alexander who would later become U.S. Secretary of Education, passed the Comprehensive Education Reform Act. Minnesota developed the Outcome-Based Education program (Firestone & Bader, 1992), and Georgia created the Quality Core Curriculum. Many states began accountability programs and required more in history, English, science, and mathematics to graduate from high school (Tanner & Tanner, 1980). Several states extended teacher preparation programs and student discipline policies during this period (Rich, 1991). Tennessee passed one of the nation's most ambitious career-ladder and incentive-pay programs (Christiansen, 1984). Thirty-five states changed their high school graduation requirements, 22 approved curriculum changes, and 6 states created programs to award teachers based on merit (Collins & Dewart, 1985). The idea that tougher better schools would boost our sagging economy was the consensus among national political and business leaders (Cuban, 1995). With the release of the *Nation at Risk* report and other national efforts during that period, the mid-1980s became an exceptional period of state activity to improve public education.

### Education in Georgia

During this time of educational change, the educational system in the state of Georgia was considered to be one of the worst in the nation. National reports released by the Department of Education ranked Georgia 49<sup>th</sup> out of 50 states in per-pupil spending and 20<sup>th</sup> out of 22 states on performance on Scholastic Aptitude Tests (Collins & Dewart, 1985). In regards to Georgia's rankings, *The Atlanta Journal Constitution* (1984, January 10, A/01) stated, "Georgia's figures were more ignominious than most." The Georgia Department of Education reported that Georgia ranked 42<sup>nd</sup> in average public school teachers salaries in the 1982-1983 fiscal year. Also, the average 4<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup> graders' scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills in the 1982-83 school year fell below the national average. Financially and academically, the public schools in Georgia appeared to be in serious need of reform.

Even prior to the Department of Education's report, however Georgia's educational policymakers recognized the need to improve education in the state. In Georgia's Department of Education report, *Investment in the Future* (1984), plans to improve education were proposed. The Georgia Board of Education identified six tasks to be accomplished over the next decade. Those tasks paralleled the recommendations made in the *Nation at Risk* report. They included strengthening high school requirements and identifying basic curriculum content and expectations for what students should learn in each grade K-12. The development of a state curriculum guide was seen as a major effort to facilitate curriculum improvement in each school system. The Board of Education's mission to develop a basic core curriculum for grades K-12 in Georgia later became part of the Quality Basic Education Act (Q.B.E.) passed unanimously by the Georgia General Assembly in 1985. Part Two of the Q.B.E. required the Georgia Board of Education to develop a statewide basic curriculum that currently is

titled the Quality Core Curriculum (QCC). The Q.B.E. was Georgia's sweeping response to the inadequate educational conditions in Georgia. The Act developed numerous new educational and teacher incentive programs, expanded the state's testing programs, increased graduation requirements, and established the Q.C.C. and reorganized state educational funding to better equalize per pupil expenditures (Firestone & Bader, 1992). Like several other states during this period, Georgia recognized the need for actions to improve its educational system and passed legislation modifying the curriculum as one of many avenues to accomplish this goal.

### Methodology

This study was a historical study and accordingly used the methodology utilized in historical research. In historical research, several guidelines are suggested. According to Davis (1991) these guidelines include: 1) the accounts reported are supported by valid historical evidence, primary sources whenever possible; 2) the appropriate context of the story is considered when interpretations are given; 3) significant turning points, events and people are treated in depth sufficient to the development both of their value to the story and its interpretations; 4) contemporary interpretations or judgements are not imposed on past events; 5) "symbolism and stereotypes are avoided" (p. 80); and 6) perspectives on proposals, developments, deliberations are presented evenly. Historical research should promote understanding by providing information on "the interplay of people, traditions, places and epochs in situations where both antecedents and consequences of action are open to scrutiny" (Reid, 1986, p. 57).

Following the guidelines of Davis (1991), primary sources will be used whenever possible. "Any knowledge of history which is good for anything must be found on the mastery of original authorities" (Freeman, 1886, p. 158). The two categories of primary sources include manuscripts and published material which can range from handwritten communications to minutes of an official meeting (Brundage, 1989). Materials of political history generally divide into narratives giving an account of the events, record of the events themselves, and writing of reflections upon the event (Elton, 1970). Records kept by the Georgia Department of Education, legal records of bills reformed and passed by state legislature, and comments from state lawmakers concerning their rationale for voting against or for educational reform, minutes from committee meetings, and interviews constitute such material and will be essential data sources for this study. When needed, secondary sources will be utilized to document the research in this study. There are a great variety of secondary sources useful in historical research that range from short essays to books, to multi-volume works of collective knowledge (Brundage, 1989). For this study, secondary sources include relevant books, journal articles, newspaper articles, and dissertations on curriculum reforms in the twentieth century, educational reform in Georgia, the Q.B.E. and Q.C.C., and other periodicals. The primary and secondary sources were drawn from the University of Georgia Library, Georgia State University Library, State University of West Georgia Library, Rutgers University Library, Cornell University Library, Georgia Department of Archives and History, Georgia Department of Education, Georgia State School Board, Georgia Secretary of State

Office, Georgia State Governor's Office, Georgia Library Learning Online (GALILEO), internet databases, and personal interviews.

As with any type of historical study, the data presented is based on available resources. Newspaper articles are used as a secondary source and may not always contain accurate information. Additionally, the sources of information that were selected to be preserved by the various libraries and state departments researched, may not have contained completed records of all of the individuals that were a part of this curriculum change process. It is probable that many behind the scenes, unidentified participants were actively involved in this change process. Yet, due to their not being regarded as the persons responsible the completion of the task, credit for their actions were attributed to others. This a limitation of studies of this type.

Mackenzie's (1964) curriculum change model, developed out of the analysis of 30 case studies of curriculum change, will constitute the framework through which this study will document and explain the formation of the Quality Core Curriculum (See Figure 1). Mackenzie model was selected for this study for this study for several reasons. Rather than taking a broad view of educational change, Mackenzie's (1964) model focuses solely on curriculum change. Mackenzie's (1964) model represents a schema for curriculum change that views the process of curriculum change as operating within a broader cultural context with pressures being exerted upon each element in the process. The manner in which the social and political context of the 1980s effected curriculum change in the states support this schema. Additionally, the model has been successfully used to describe curriculum change in the 1960s, the 1970s, and the 1980s. Those studies found the model to be a useful

"instrument for conceptualizing the process of curriculum change" (Tanner, 1969, p. 571). The model "seeks to conceptualize the curricular change process as a whole in such a way as to take its relevant aspect into account" (Mackenzie, 1964, p. 400).

According to this model, curriculum change occurs in a cultural context through the efforts of internal and external participants utilizing their sources of power and methods influence through various phases in a process to influence the determiners of the curriculum to alter the curriculum in a desired ways. Examining the influence of cultural context on the change process is an integral part of using this model. Focal points of change in this model (e.g. teachers, students etc.) are considered the determiners of the curriculum. Those individuals and groups who are influential in relationship to the curriculum change are the participants in curricular change. It is through their sources of power and methods of influence that participants achieve a change. The process of change begins with criticisms and moves to proposal of resolutions to criticisms and then to implementation of those proposals. When the proposals influence the determiners of the curriculum the change process is complete (Mackenzie, 1964). The arrows on the figure below indicate the relationships among the cultural context, participants, sources of power and methods of influence, phases in the change process, and determiners of the curriculum.

Mackenzie's model was created in 1964 and was based on the results of a study of curriculum change efforts being made by local school systems. For this study, the model is being used as a framework for examining a state level effort to reform curriculum and modifications in the categories of participants were necessary

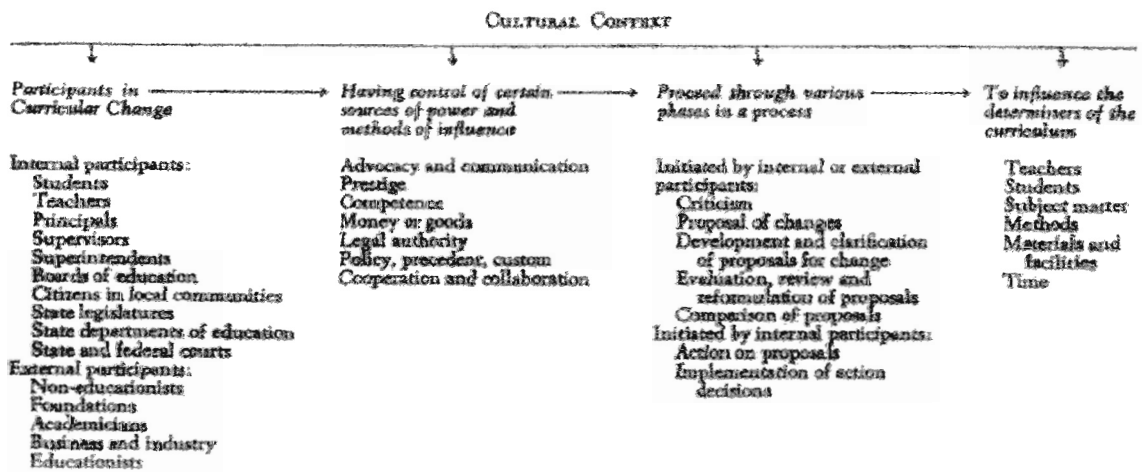


Figure 1. Mackenzie's Process of Curriculum Change Model

From "Curriculum change: participants, power, and processes," by G. N. Mackenzie, 1964. In Miles, M. (Eds.), *Innovation in Education*, p. 401.

to properly document all the participants in this change process. State legislature category was changed to state elected officials to include the others state elected officials who were heavily involved in this change process. Governor Joe Frank Harris, Lieutenant Governor Zell Miller, the State School Superintendent Charles McDaniel, in addition to the General Assembly were significant to this change process. In many states in the 1980s governors and other state officials were spearheading the reforms initiatives within their state. In Georgia, this was certainly the case.

### Georgia's Quality Core Curriculum

In 1985, the Georgia General Assembly passed unanimously Senate Bill 82, the Quality Basic Education Act (Q.B.E.). Part Two of the Q.B.E. required the Georgia Board of Education to develop a statewide basic curriculum, the Quality Core Curriculum (QCC). Section 20-2-140 of the Quality Basic Education Act mandated the State Board of Education to "establish competencies that each student is expected to master prior to the completion of his public education." Based on those competencies, the board was to "adopt a uniformly sequenced core curriculum for grades kindergarten through 12." The legislators further went on to state that "all local units of administration shall include this uniformly sequenced curriculum as a basis for their own curriculum" (*Journal of the Senate*, 1985).

In line with the mandates of the Quality Basic Education, the Board of Education created the Quality Core Curriculum task force to spearhead the develop of this Curriculum. The Quality Core Curriculum task force along with Georgia Department of Education personnel, local school personnel, and other citizens developed a draft for the Quality Core Curriculum in 1987. The Quality Core Curriculum draft was based upon the Basic Curriculum Content for Georgia's Public Schools (BCC). This was a previously designed state curriculum created by educational leaders in all disciplines that was approved and distributed to all teachers serving Georgia schools in 1985. The Quality Core Curriculum draft was circulated twice to local school systems for comments and recommendations in late 1986 (State School Board, Memo, July 1988). After receiving feedback on the draft, the recommendations were reviewed by content committees and appropriate changes were made. The Quality Core Curriculum went into effect in August of 1988. The Quality Core Curriculum specified objectives for 13 Subject areas for students in grades K-12 in Georgia's public schools. Table 1 lists the 13 subject areas of the Core Curriculum.

At each grade level, the Quality Core Curriculum identified a set of concepts to be mastered as well as a skills continuum (Hutchenson, 1989). On a quadrennial basis, a review of the adopted competencies was to take place by a task force "broadly representative of educational interest and the concerned public" (*Journal of the Senate*, 1985, p. 2420). The State Board of Education was assigned the duty of making the changes to the Quality Core Curriculum it deemed necessary in the best interest of the State and its citizens. An evaluation of the extent to which the core curriculum was implemented was also part of the Quality Basic Education Act.

### Quality Core Curriculum

Subject Area	Assigned Grades
Dance	K-12
Drama	K-12
English Language Arts	K-12
Foreign Language	9-12
Health and Safety	K-12
Junior Reserve Officer's Training Corps	9-12
Mathematics	K-12
Music	K-12
Physical Education	K-12
Science	K-12
Visual Arts	K-12
Social Studies	K-12
Electives	11-12
Vocational Education	6-12

Table 1: Quality Core Curriculum

Note: From *Georgia's quality Core Curriculum for Grades K through 12*, Georgia Department of Education, 1988, p.6018c.

Since 1988, the Quality Core Curriculum has remained the guiding curriculum force in Georgia. On November 13, 1997, the State Board of Education adopted the Quality Core Curriculum (QCC) as revised by committee of Georgia educators and citizens. The revised QCC. received national recognition for its content standards. The standards received high ratings for being clear, specific and grounded in the content. National Council of Teachers of Mathematics representatives worked with Georgia officials to develop standard Mathematics standards; this part of the QCC received the highest rating (Massell, 1997). New resources and additional staff development training are some of the methods used to assist teachers in implementing the changes in their classrooms. Major revision in the QCC included: standards for American Sign Language; standards for English Speakers of Other Languages; extending the Visual Arts matrix; revisions of additional Mathematics and Sciences courses.

### Conclusions

The national and state social and political context in was a strong influence on the process of the adoption of the Quality Core Curriculum. Reports of declining SAT scores, the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) release of *A Nation At Risk*, the Education Department's reporting Georgia as having

one of the worst education systems in the nation, all created a climate for educational change in Georgia. Early in the 1980s national reports urged states to reform education and gave recommendations for those reforms. By the time Georgia began reform efforts, many states had already passed similar types of legislation (Mancino, 1993). In fact, Georgia was one of the last states to pass broad educational reform legislation. Education Secretary Bennett was “disgusted” Georgia had not made reforms earlier (*Atlanta Journal Constitution*, June 30, 1986, A/01). Generating a state reform for Georgia in was deemed essential. The passage of the QBE and the adoption of the Quality Core Curriculum represented Georgia answer to the demands of that period.

The participants of most importance to this change process were the state elected officials. Governor Harris and the General Assembly of Georgia were more directly responsible for the passage of the QBE and the mandate for the Quality Core Curriculum than any other group of participants. While other teachers, principals, superintendents, business and industry representatives, and other participant groups had vital roles in the adoption of the Quality Core Curriculum such as writing the recommendations that became the QBE Act and designing the Quality Core Curriculum, without their creations becoming law, they would have been of little value. The important role of government officials and businesses in this change process represented nature of educational reform in the 1980s.

In this change process, the use of advocacy and communication as sources of power and methods of influence were most important to bringing about the adoption of the Quality Core Curriculum. The governor and all other participants of this change process used advocacy and communication to influence the actions of the general public and the General Assembly. Press conferences were held, political rallies were conducted, and numerous letters were written to ensure the QBE Act would be passed.

Once convinced to pass the QBE the legal authority of the General Assembly allowed the legislature to make adherence to the QCC mandatory. This source of power significantly contributed to the success of the change process as well. Prior to the adoption of the Quality Core Curriculum, teachers had discretion as to whether to teach a recommended course or not (*Atlanta Journal Constitution*, December 31, 1987, A/18; Educational Review Commission, 1984). When the State Legislature made the adoption of the Quality Core Curriculum mandatory for all schools, schools had no choice in the matter. The State Legislature further ensured the implementation of the curriculum by correlating it with state-mandated tests. The provision made by the State Legislature bolstered their legal authority guaranteed success of the change process.

The prestige and influence of the change participants was another significant reason for the success of the change process. The change participants were able to use communication and advocacy to generate massive state-wide support for the QBE legislation in part due to their prestige and ability to influence participants (*Atlanta Journal of Labor*, April 26, 1985). Prestigious participants such as the Governor, Joe Frank Harris, and business leader John McClendenin, President of Bellsouth Corporation and of Atlanta Chamber of Commerce President, spoke to many different groups urging their support of the QBE (*Atlanta Journal*

*Constitution*, January 10, 1985, A/01). Those and other prestigious participants of this change process utilized their power and influence to sway the citizens for Georgia to overwhelming support the Quality Basic Education Act (Mansell, 1997). This support was demonstrated before and during the 1985 Legislative sessions further influencing the State Legislators to vote for the passage of the QBE Legislation. The outcome was 100% support by senators and representatives for the QBE. Bill.

The process of this curriculum change followed a very similar sequence to that identified in Mackenzie’s (1964) model. Criticisms sparked proposals for change which went through development and clarification and then through further reformulating until action was taken and the change was implemented. The only phase that was somewhat omitted was the comparing of proposals. There was only one change proposal introduced, the QBE Act. This proposal, after having been reviewed and reformulated, was acted on.

In this curriculum change process, the determiner of the curriculum sought to be influenced by the adoption of the QCC was the subject matter. The content of the curriculum was the primary focus. While other changes were made through the QBE Act including changing state funding, teachers’ salaries, and educational resources in efforts to improve Georgia’s educational system, the state’s curriculum was to be altered by mandating its content. Typically, changes in curriculum are most frequently referred to as changes in subject matter (Mackenzie, 1964). Georgia, like many other states in the mid to early 1980s, felt that creating a quality education system required raising student standards and standardizing the content of the curriculum (Firestone & Bader, 1992). A change for the better meant, first and foremost, a change in curriculum content.

The search for effective curricula is a continuing process that reflects trends and issues affecting schools and society (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998). When it passed legislation creating the Quality Core Curriculum in 1986, Georgia, like many other states during that time, was also seeking avenues to address the trends and issues affecting the state at that time. Most modifications occurring among the curriculums of public schools are in part a product of the changed social situation and an effort to meet the needs of the new society that is forming (Dewey, 1900). For Georgia, there were many societal forces which worked to change curriculum in public schools including legal decisions, state and federal policies, accrediting agencies, testing procedures, and influential professional groups and associations (Cuban, 1992). The curriculum changes that occurred in Georgia’s schools as a result of the influences of such forces reveal a great deal about who possesses the power and influence to change education and the processes necessary to bring about reform.

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