

A note on the Cumulative Curriculum Project

During 1990-1991 Frank Moretti and I worked hard on developing the Cumulative Curriculum Project with encouragement from Mal Nechis and Sam Matsa from IBM ACIS and Don Nix and others at IBM Watson Labs. This was a recursive process of learning how to articulate and scale a basic idea to meet feasibility and funding expectations. In Spring 1991, we submitted a final iteration of the proposal, seeking an initial budget allocation of 2 to 3 million dollars, which then went through a sequence of evaluations within IBM. One by one, we would get word that the proposal had passed this and then that one. That April I had flown to Chicago to give a talk and Frank Moretti and my wife surprised me as I came out of the baggage check, Frank-style with a magnum of champagne. We had passed the last internal evaluate with enthusiasm, with the project docketed for formal approval at the next meeting of the IBM Board.

But as Yogi said, "It ain't over 'till it's over." The awaited meeting of the Board quickly approached with more portentous business to dispatch than approving our Cumulative Curriculum Project. John Akers informed the Board that years of steady growth and profitability by IBM were at an end. The company faced imperatives of retrenchment and adaptation to rapid changes in the marketplace, hence no new external commitments were to be funded, no matter how promising they might be. For a short time, high hopes turned to despair, but then the Tishman Family, generous funders of the Dalton School, salvage a major part of the project with their gift making possible the Dalton Technology Project.