

Working Together in a Curriculum Laboratory

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Instructional leaders in public schools as well as college faculty members will be interested in this account of the way in which a curriculum materials laboratory is set up to serve faculty members, students preparing to teach, and teachers in the Iowa schools. We share with you, as an in-service experience, this visit to the Curriculum Laboratory at Iowa State Teachers College, Cedar Falls, where Guy Wagner is director.



Courtesy Iowa State Teachers College

THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY there are available vast resources of curriculum materials and learning aids. The task of bringing the cream of these materials to a central workshop and organizing them for ready use is the primary function of the Curriculum Laboratory at Iowa State Teachers College. Organized in 1946, it has grown in useful service, not only to the students and faculty of the college but to school systems throughout the state.

The Curriculum Laboratory is not a kind of museum to which interested persons come to look at a fine collection of instructional materials. Nor is it just another reference library where prospective teachers and teachers-in-

service examine professional books. The director of the Laboratory and his staff have collected, organized, and made available these materials. But they also have and are making their public acquainted with the rich resources and are promoting many activities that make the Curriculum Laboratory a dynamic, busy workshop.

Variety Lends the Spice

The Laboratory is open from 7:45 AM straight through the day until 9 PM. The director of the Laboratory, the curriculum librarian, or one of the student assistants is always on hand to answer questions and help locate materials. Throughout the year literally

thousands of different questions are brought to us. As would be expected, there are many questions which are asked over and over. For instance:

Where can I find a good daily program for first grade?

Do you have any report cards emphasizing achievement in other than academic fields?

Can you help me work out a plan for an instructional unit in science at fifth grade level?

Do you have any physics textbooks that incorporate current knowledge regarding atomic energy, radar, and jet propulsion?

Less common questions, but more likely to give sparkle to the day's work, are:

Where can I find suggestions for using familiar, inexpensive materials in developing a mathematics laboratory?

Is there any place to get pictures of real live American Indians?

Where can I find suggestions for ninth grade general science students to improvise their own laboratory equipment?

Do you know how to make electric maps?

Where can I find help in making individual progress charts in arithmetic?

Where can I find information on dual swimming meets?

Everybody's Workshop

Frequently, committees from college classes or local school systems in the state confer at the round table in our Laboratory. Some of these committees meet only once and for a short time; others return for numerous meetings. In one instance a local school system had a six-person committee here on pay for two weeks.

Committees are free to select from the files and shelves as many materials

as they wish. They often take these materials to adjacent classrooms where they may confer undisturbed. The director of the Laboratory and/or specialists from various college departments are called in on occasion for consultative purposes.

At the beginning it was necessary to make a decision regarding the freedom to be given students and in-service teachers in their use of the Laboratory. It was recognized that the staff could more quickly locate materials and certainly more accurately refile them. On the other hand, it appeared equally logical that a better workshop spirit would prevail if the workshoppers could feel free to browse and select needed materials at will. The latter policy was adopted.

Actually it has resulted in a great saving of time for the Laboratory personnel inasmuch as those who use the Laboratory facilities quickly catch on to the shelving and filing system. Considering the fact that the Laboratory is now serving an average of nearly 200 persons each day, many of whom will use a large number of publications at a single time, this self-service plan is obviously a time saver.

Service on a Wider Scale

The Laboratory has also participated in an interesting service to the schools for American children in the American Occupied Zone of Germany. In the fall of 1947 the director of the Laboratory was appointed official curriculum consultant to these schools. In this capacity his chief function has been to keep the director of the Dependent Schools Service in Germany supplied with up-to-date curriculum guides and various

kinds of instructional material, especially of the vertical-file type. These, in turn, have been made available to the teachers in the American schools. Direct reports from the administration and from several American teachers in Germany indicate that their relatively meager supplies have been helpfully supplemented by this service.

Information via the Mails

A further service performed by the Laboratory is that of answering correspondence related to curriculum problems and instructional materials. As this type of service is becoming known to the state, there is an increasing number of such letters. In addition, letters are received from other states and such far-off places as Alaska, Korea, Venezuela, and Hawaii. As a rule these requests are for selected bibliographies.

Illustrative of these bibliographies are: kindergarten and primary guides, textbook series available in elementary school English, industrial arts, courses of study, reading readiness tests, junior high health workbooks, courses of study for high school English, supplementary reading material for third grade, units for primary grade science, and materials for planning a course of study in human relations in the junior high school.

Typical of other request letters are those which have asked for information on such subjects as: materials to help me prepare a talk on, "It's Fun to Teach," professional articles for use in the correction of mirror writing, criteria for the evaluation of textbooks, and ideas for planning programs for special days.

Productivity Is Encouraged

The actual production of curriculum materials to date has probably been satisfactory, considering the short time the Laboratory has been in existence. Many students have prepared reports of various kinds for classroom presentation. Many others, notably in the field of home economics, have prepared resource units worthy of inclusion in the Resource Unit file. The Laboratory staff has produced a number of bibliographical lists. Several state committees preparing the new Iowa High School Courses of Study have spent weekends using the Laboratory for their conferences and as a research center. In-service groups have produced various types of curriculum materials, although with few exceptions these materials have been limited in scope and of only local significance. As the Laboratory is now organized, it appears its production activities will be on the increase.

To sense the over-all range of Laboratory services, it would be necessary to follow individual staff members to college classes where they serve frequently as resource visitors. Many college instructors of courses in the professional sequence ask us to discuss with their students topics pertinent to curriculum development and instructional materials. These classes are invariably followed by meetings with student committees and individuals who have selected projects toward which our Laboratory materials and services can make worthwhile contributions.

Range of Materials Is Broad

In general, the material in the Laboratory reflects what is going on in the

classrooms of the nation. Some of the materials such as curriculum guides and courses of study are designed for teacher use only. Flat pictures, educational games, and like materials are for use by the pupils themselves. Much of the material has been prepared by the teachers and reveals both the philosophy and practices of given state and local school systems.

The materials included in our Laboratory are, in general, typical of those found in other curriculum laboratories. A few areas, however, may be less common. For instance, we have incorporated a rather complete file of child accounting forms obtained from selected schools throughout the country. Our file, "Library of Occupational Information," may also be unique. Too, we have obtained and classified a substantial number of curriculum materials at the college level, making it possible for the faculty at Iowa State Teachers College to examine their courses in the light of similar courses in other institutions of higher learning.

To properly measure the value of the various types of materials, it is necessary to understand that the major contributions of our Laboratory are to the pre-service program of the students on the campus. However, by now it is clear that certain areas have proved of interest and value to teachers as well as our college students.

Among some of the often-called-for materials are: courses of study and curriculum guides; child accounting forms; resource units; daily lesson plans; sources of educational records, radio transcriptions, and motion pictures; sources of charts, maps, and other graphic materials; sources of free and

inexpensive publications; textbooks and teachers' manuals in all fields; reading readiness materials; science experiments with simple apparatus; superintendents' annual reports; administrative handbooks; student publications; remedial reading materials; educational games; pamphlet series for collateral reading; equipment and publishers' catalogs; flat pictures; bibliographies on numerous topics; pictures of classroom situations; literature on occupations; materials in the field of child development; study guides; test and evaluation instruments; high school schedules and elementary school daily programs; and suggestions for constructional projects.

This Is the Set-Up

The Laboratory is organized into five major shelving divisions and seventeen major filing divisions. These divisions have been determined by a system of logical classification, or natural family groupings. Sub-divisions have been determined by the same principle.

Materials in the shelving divisions may be found by use of a card catalog; while materials in the filing divisions are readily discovered by the use of a tab system on folders suspended on metal frames within the file drawers. Each item filed is labeled to correspond identically with the file drawer and folder which contains it. This insures accuracy in refiling.

The elementary school textbooks are arranged so that the curriculum areas appear in alphabetical sequence. A red dividing board separates each curriculum area while green dividers separate the series within each curriculum area according to the senior author of the series. This system virtually eliminates

error in returning books to their appropriate places on the shelves.

The secondary textbook section follows a similar plan, but with the subject areas within the larger curriculum areas separated by green dividers. For instance, in the science textbook section, the agriculture, biology, chemistry, general science, and physics textbooks are separated by green dividers.

The elementary school workbooks are also classified alphabetically according to curriculum areas. A series of sloping display shelves are built over a series of horizontal shelves. The first workbook in a series is placed on the display shelf and directly below the remaining books in the series are housed on the horizontal shelf. Each workbook has a small label in the upper right-hand corner indicating: subject, senior author, and grade level. Because secondary school workbooks are not prepared in a series, they are located in a section of the filing system and classified according to subjects.

The Center Is Still Growing

Plans are underway for expanding the Curriculum Laboratory into a five-room suite. The present room in which it is housed will be used for the curriculum library and individual study room. The rooms to be added include an office for the Laboratory staff, a committee conference room, a production center, and an audio-visual workshop. These rooms are in a contiguous unit.

The conference room will enable committees of various sizes to confer with greater freedom. Furthermore, their discussions will in no way be distracting to persons reading research.

As the production center is now envisaged, appropriate equipment will be available so that many kinds of curriculum materials may be readily produced. We anticipate the development of such materials as daily programs, child accounting forms, curriculum guides, time-lines, pupil-made slides, graphs, booklets, posters, maps, community resource charts, cartoons, local-interest reading material for children, games, experience charts, and constructional projects.

The audio-visual workshop is to be under the direction of a specialist. We now plan that the workshop will have these interrelated functions:

1. Serving as a place where "the wrist motion" techniques of machine operation may be practiced under the guidance of a trained operator.
2. Organizing a program designed to assist the faculty in utilizing audio-visual techniques in their own classrooms.
3. Providing facilities and services so that systematic instruction in audio-visual methods may be given to all pre-service teachers on the campus.
4. Promoting a special program of more intensive training in audio-visual education for students desiring to specialize in this field.
5. Encouraging school people throughout the state to utilize facilities and consultative services of the workshop.

As the term *workshop* implies, emphasis has been and will continue to be placed on the process of *working together* as well as on the field of teaching materials. It is a fundamental tenet of the Curriculum Laboratory that *people* represent our best materials and resources, and that by working together we will continue to learn much from each other.

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