

Materials of Instruction in Problem-Centered Teaching

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This article identifies and analyzes several problems which arise with regard to materials of instruction for use in problem-centered teaching. Sara K. Srygley is assistant professor, School of Library Training and Service, Florida State University, Tallahassee. Theodore Q. Srygley is director of instruction, Florida State Department of Education, Tallahassee.

A THIRTEEN-YEAR OLD BOY, actively engaged in an eighth grade school program, was tackling his assignment in arithmetic. He approached it obviously with a sense of duty in completing a most unpleasant task. "Insurance," he groaned. "What do I care about insurance? What's it to me?" But because he was accustomed to "fitting in" with the school program, he picked up his textbook and earnestly began to work on a problem in insurance which had little meaning for him.

RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

His question, "What's it to me?" is a familiar one to all teachers who have worked with adolescents. They know from practical experience the resistance offered by growing boys and girls to school experiences followed from page-to-page in a logically constructed textbook, with no regard for their special needs. They know the difficulties involved in attempting to teach ideas, concepts or skills when those who are to learn have little readiness and only an artificial, imposed "need to know."

There is much research to support the value of problem-centered teaching; such findings are too well known to need summary here. A series of studies now being conducted by staff members of the Horace Mann-Lincoln Institute of School Experimentation is designed to identify and suggest solutions for the problems teachers face in choosing and using materials in a modern program of education. Their findings may open up new sources of help in an area long neglected.

Chandos Reid has described the current findings of this study in her article, "Instructional Materials and Problem-Centered Teaching," in *Teachers College Record*, October, 1950. Especially helpful are her listings of broad purposes for which materials need to be designed within any problem area. She also gives eleven guideposts for use in developing newer materials of instruction.

Implications for Materials

A survey of educational literature describing the problem-centered cur-

riculum suggests several implications for materials. Among the conditions essential to the success of this method of teaching are:

- Provision of a variety of materials—such as films, recordings, people, books, magazines, newspapers, field trips—to avoid monotony in learning and to insure the best medium of communication for each situation.
- Provision of a variety of materials suitable for varying levels of ability, considering not only degree of success in reading but also in learning from seeing motion pictures, hearing radio programs, etc.
- Provision of a variety of materials in terms of content, to serve in problem solving and in furthering individual interests.
- Acceptance by all concerned that the process of identifying a problem, searching for available materials, evaluating these as a basis for choosing the best for a purpose, analyzing what the materials contribute to the solution of the problem is more important than “covering material” and repeating verbally what it says.
- Acceptance by all concerned that teachers planning a problem-centered curriculum need freedom to take children where they can learn best and to bring into classrooms people who can help children with their problems.
- Provision either school-wide or system-wide, depending on the size of the unit, of resource people in such areas as music, art, speech and materials, to help the teacher and the pupils.

SOME PROBLEMS IDENTIFIED

Purpose of this article is to identify some of the problems teachers inter-

ested in problem-solving teaching face in the choice and use of materials. Observations are based upon the experience of the writers in a state-wide program of education. It is believed that recognition of these problems by supervisors and administrators is essential for their solution. No attempt is made to suggest solutions, since, if real gains are to be made, the people affected by the problems must be involved in their solution.

Failure To Make Accessible What Is Available

One of the most apparent barriers to effective use of materials is the failure to provide even minimum funds to purchase the instructional materials already available which might be useful to teachers. Curriculum leaders, education professors and supervisors talk consistently about the necessary tools for modern teaching. It is a most unusual school in which teachers really feel that they are free to ask for and expect to get the numerous printed and multi-sensory materials which would contribute to their success in teaching.

This is a serious handicap in a problem-centered curriculum, in which the search for and the evaluation of resource materials are as basic in the educational experience as knowing what the materials communicate. It also affects the more traditional teacher, who oftentimes is trying to do “text-book” teaching with few textbooks that are in respectable physical condition or in recent editions.

In solving this problem, there is little help in the area of identifying how much money *should* be provided for materials at the various grade levels and

for various purposes in education. Estimates available in statements of standards seem to have little basis in research and to be inconsistent with what is actually needed or with current market prices for instructional equipment and materials.

This failure to provide adequate tools for teaching is startling in America, where so much emphasis is placed on the latest and best in automobiles, household appliances, drugs and other goods consumed by the general public. It suggests that educators have not been effective in stating what is really needed for a good program.

Failure To Provide Time for Teachers

The failure to allow public school teachers at all levels time for evaluating, choosing and planning the use of instructional materials is clearly reflected in the teaching process. Curriculum directors, supervisors, librarians and teachers stress the necessity for teacher cooperation in building the school's materials collection and in planning for the best use of what is accessible. It is apparent that this process requires time and an energetic, fresh approach by the teacher.

Few schools recognize this principle in actual practice. While high schools have for years provided an "off" period for teachers, they have not seen the necessity for planning periods for groups of teachers to work together. Elementary schools are just now struggling with the question of how to provide an "off" time for rest and relaxation. Planning periods within the school day for elementary teachers are generally unheard of.

College teachers and administrators have long believed that 12 semester hours of teaching are a full load, along with the time necessary for planning, evaluation, pupil conferences and research. It seems inconsistent to expect teachers in elementary and secondary schools to teach every hour and to do their planning and study after a seven- to eight-hour day.

It seems logical to deduce that tired teachers are not too eager to study instructional materials in a creative manner after a long day of continuously working with people.

Failure To Provide Services

Teachers and pupils seriously concerned with problem-solving need many services in the field of materials. A resource person is needed with special training in locating, evaluating and acquiring materials and organizing them so that their use is facilitated. Perhaps more significant, the person should know how to work with teachers and pupils to develop cooperatively a useful materials collection. In some situations this resource person is called "librarian," in others, "materials specialist." In some situations several people serve as resource persons in specific types of materials for which they are responsible.

Busy teachers need services and assistance in gathering and choosing the best material available. Boys and girls need experiences with expert guidance in techniques of identifying and evaluating materials. This means that every elementary and secondary school should have the services of a good materials specialist. Few schools or school systems can afford several peo-

ple with specialization by type of material, but every school system should be able to provide at least one general materials specialist. As important for this person as knowledge of materials will be skill in curriculum development, the teaching-learning process, guidance, and human relations. Whatever their titles may be, materials specialists have a common function of helping teachers develop boys and girls.

Failure to provide adequate services in materials is one of the causes for limited use of materials. Lectures, directives and bulletins urging improved use of materials seldom overcome this handicap.

Competition Among the Specialists

The fight that continues among materials specialists themselves is one reason for inadequate provision of materials services. Competition among specialists who claim an exclusive right to specific types of materials has confused administrators as well as teachers. Competition for budget, for teacher time, for pupil interest have resulted. Materials specialists with titles like "librarians," "audio-visual directors," "television specialists," have sparred, rather than cooperated, with each other. In some situations this has resulted in a disorganized materials program, with no full time resource people available throughout the day and with no one central place where materials are disseminated.

This type of situation defies several principles of materials administration. The person or persons to give leadership in materials must be available to teachers and pupils throughout the

day. But regardless of the number of people involved in leadership, there should be coordination of materials and services, so that teachers and pupils may find in one place in a school an index to what is available and help in its evaluation and use. There must be cooperation rather than competition in any area of specialization.

Vested interests of specialists in the materials area may be one prime factor responsible for ineffective use of materials by teachers.

Need for Suitable Quarters

Problem-centered teaching requires space for activity and for purposeful learning. Classrooms must be large enough, with flexible furniture, to encourage small group and individual work. Space and equipment for the use of films, filmstrips, recordings, maps, discussion techniques are essential.

Materials centers must be large enough to accommodate children *when they need to come*, rather than *when they can be scheduled*. These learning laboratories must be designed for group discussion, evaluation of all types of materials, individual or group research.

In many modern schools, the limited facilities for dissemination and use of materials are a serious handicap to teachers attempting problem-centered teaching.

Need To Improve Materials

As suggested by the Horace Mann-Lincoln Institute of School Experimentation study, there is need for improved materials of all types. This study is making a positive approach in

attempting to suggest what is needed. The ASCD Committee on Instructional Materials has an opportunity to contribute in this area. More opportunities for producers, publishers and editors to work with teachers, supervisors, principals and boys and girls should result in better and more useful materials.

From the writers' experience, materials such as these seem badly needed: (a) Materials of many types useful in helping boys and girls identify their real problems; (b) Materials of many types dealing with problems sized to the learner; (c) Materials of many types, useful and purchased on a broad enough scale to make them available at a reasonable price; (d) Materials of many types, dealing with the real problems young people face in growing up, designed to help them arrive at generalizations which will guide them in making personal choices.

The problems discussed suggest several possibilities for educators. First, we must face realistically the problems which, for solution, are dependent on citizen education. Provision of adequate finance, teacher time, materials specialists and better school quarters will be realized as citizens demand them. Second, we must recognize that the best use of materials in problem-solving teaching can be accomplished only when teachers have time for planning. Third, there must be recognition of the need for experimentation in the production as well as the use of materials. The improved use of materials in problem-centered teaching is a cooperative venture, requiring time and effort of all who are affected. All those concerned with instructional improvement should recognize that the provision of adequate materials is one sure way to encourage teachers to experiment with new methods of teaching.

Folklore Contributes to the Curriculum

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As an aid to learning, folklore has much to offer in children's literature, in improvement of reading, and in social studies. Elizabeth Pilant is assistant professor of English, Ball State Teachers College, Muncie, Indiana.

AS AN EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGIST, I am convinced that folklore (the oral literature of the childhood of the race) is a priori the literature for children everywhere and at any time in history. Folklore, even when recorded in cold print, has the qualities which make it most appealing to the young—conversational quality, folk speech, folkways, folk beliefs, swift dra-

matic action. As the oral literature that has been preserved by the community with or without the help of art writers, it is pretested for popular appeal, for familiarity of concept, for meaningful vocabulary and speech patterns. That does not mean that the folklore of any group anywhere is necessarily adapted to the children of any other community nor that all folklore of any community

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