Trends in the Production of CURRICULUM GUIDES

Reporting on their recent survey of curriculum guides produced by school systems in the United States, the authors note: (a) general tendencies in curriculum development and (b) significant trends within subject areas.

Our recent survey of curriculum guides produced in school systems throughout the United States for the three-year period 1951-1953 had a dual purpose. First, we wished to discover the practices and trends in curriculum development as reflected in the current output of publications; and, second, to compare them with tendencies revealed in a similar survey made for the period 1949-1950. As each guide was examined, the data were recorded on a work sheet which was substantially the same as the one used in the earlier study. Each work sheet was supplemented by marginal comments and notes.

General Trends

The 796 curriculum guides which we examined were representative of all regions, of all types of school systems, and of all population groups. It appeared that the smaller cities had shown a marked increase in the production of curriculum guides in the last triennium.

A tabulation of the titles of the teaching guides showed a completely new trend. The term “guide” was included in the titles of 52 percent of the bulletins in the last triennium. The appearance of the term “suggested program,” which connotes voluntary use, rose sharply from 3 percent to 10 percent of the bulletins. These changes in title indicate an increasing acceptance of the view that the proper function of the instructional bulletin is to serve as an aid to be used voluntarily by the teacher, not as a prescribed course of study to be followed rigidly. Other meaningful words which formed a part of the title were “course of study,” 22 percent; “manual” or “handbook,” 10 percent; and others, 6 percent.

The total output of curriculum guides showed an increase of 46 percent over the preceding triennium which indicated a growing emphasis on the cooperative production of in-
structional bulletins. This average increase is reflected in the output of curriculum guides in art, business education and kindergarten. The volume of production in core, home economics, industrial arts, mathematics, safety and general bulletins rose moderately above the average. The output was approximately doubled in health and physical education, music and science. The output was tripled in guidance and nearly quadrupled in special education and vocational education.

While the output of language guides continued to increase, the rate was less than average. In the field of social studies the output actually declined 18 percent. This does not mean a falling off of interest in these fields. The extensive output of curriculum guides in language arts and social studies following World War II probably explains the present gradual retardation of the rate of production of teaching guides in these fields.

While the quality of paper, typography and design continued to show improvement, many physical defects persist because many school systems have failed to train personnel in the use of the common, simple processes, materials and tools involved in producing mimeographed or printed publications. Many of the publications are still crude, shoddy and hard to read.

Committee procedure in the administration of a program of curriculum development continued to receive common acceptance. Approximately 82 percent of the curriculum guides were produced by groups consisting of teachers, administrators, college professors and, in a few instances, laymen. The committees were of two major types: the general or central committee which had a coordinating and policy-making function, and the production committee which was responsible for the preparation of the manuscript. The teacher continued to play an important role in the leadership as well as in the production of teaching guides. The subject or production committee was headed by a teacher in the preparation of 33 percent of the published bulletins.

Unfortunately, there was too little evidence that, generally speaking, the production of a course of study was a by-product of a continuous program of instructional improvement. The organization of a long-range program of curriculum development was taking hold in some of the larger school systems that maintained divisions of curriculum and in some smaller school systems that employed a curriculum director. These school systems published several successive study bulletins to give the teachers continuing guidance.

The degree to which the curriculum guides were given a practical test was reflected in the number of revised and tentative publications. It was found that 20 percent of the guides were revisions of earlier publications and that 30 percent were specifically designated as tentative editions. It appeared that the school systems of the country were in the midst of a second
cycle of revision of the curriculum guides which were produced since the end of World War II.

Research involved in the development of curriculum guides was reported in 24 percent of the publications which was a sharp increase over 16 percent in the preceding triennium. Learning studies were reported in 64 publications, followed by research on curriculum appraisal, 48 publications; objectives, 16; grade placement, 8; individual instruction, 6; and time allotment, 5.

These quantitative data give no indication of the quality of actual curricular research conducted by the public schools. A superficial study of the reported research led to the conclusion that thorough investigations to determine what and how to teach were very uncommon.

The trend toward dividing a subject into units of work showed a slight decline in the last three years. It was too early to conclude that this was indicative of the beginning of a conservative trend. The functional quality of these unified experiences, however, was holding its own. Approximately one-half of them tended to be socially real: that is, they were based on experiences, centers of interest or aspects of social living.

Several school systems published bound collections of units of work for a variety of subjects to serve as source materials and for illustrative purposes. In addition, fifteen school systems published series of separate units of work. A tabulation of the titles of these separate units of work indicated an increasing interest in community study, personal development and economic education. Furthermore, the titles included such topics of recent development as atomic energy, civil defense, foreign cultures and international relations. These units, presumably, were given a trial in experimental form before they were incorporated in formal courses.

**Trends in Subjects**

Thus far we have discussed the general tendencies in curriculum development as they apply to all subjects. Each subject has its own distinctive characteristics. At this point the more significant trends in each subject will be reviewed.

The quadrupled output of guides over the preceding triennium was an indication of a recent upsurge of interest in the education of the exceptional child. Each publication was a specialized treatment with greatest emphasis upon the speech and hearing handicapped, the mentally retarded and the mentally superior child. Although the gifted child gets most of the headlines, attention is equally divided among the several types of atypical children.

There was in the past three years a marked increase of interest in the teaching of Spanish and French to children in the elementary grades. A conversational approach to the teaching of language was emphasized in some of the guides.

The current output of guidance bulletins tripled over the preceding study although it continued to be small in comparison with other subjects or areas. The recent emphasis upon the study or teaching of moral and spiritual values gave rise to the publication of several guides in this field during
the past three years. It was suggested that the teaching of moral and spiritual values should be correlated with all subjects. In addition, programs and activities presented dealt with these values exclusive of subject matter.

The total output of 86 guides in health and physical education nearly doubled the number produced in the previous three-year period. Although health and physical education were combined for purposes of classification, only 7 guides treated both subjects in one bulletin. Actually, health and physical education appeared as separate guides in 90 percent of the cases. The health guides were beginning to emphasize mental and emotional as well as physical health.

In the last triennium, 25 guides were produced in the field of industrial arts, which amounted to twice the output for the same period in the earlier study. General industrial arts was included in the titles of one-half of the publications. Other subjects in this area included shops, home mechanics, electricity, mechanical drawing, arts and crafts, and automotive service.

The treatment of home and family living as an integral phase of our culture continued to receive more emphasis. The correlation of homemaking with such subjects as art and music as well as the home experiences gained increasing acceptance.

In the teaching of the English language, there was an increase in emphasis upon reading, writing, speaking and listening rather than on form and structure; remedial reading on the elementary and secondary level; and the improvement of speech in all grades.

There was a sharp increase in the output of teaching guides in arithmetic for the elementary grades. The tendency to make number experiences more functional continued to increase. A marked trend toward experimentation and flexibility in mathematics for secondary schools with emphasis upon usefulness in life was shown in the past few years.

During the current triennium the proportional output of curriculum guides in science was twice as great as it was three years ago. Science for the junior high school stressed aspects of everyday living such as “keeping well” and “weather.” On the senior high school level the guides were devoted to the separate treatment of biology, chemistry and physics. Several systems published parallel courses in physics for those who intend to go to college and those who do not.

The organization of courses in the social studies into large teaching units continued to have the increasing acceptance of curriculum planners. The sequence of the social studies in the first six grades was based upon the expansion of the horizons of the learner, beginning with home and school and culminating in a view of the world. Nearly every secondary grade showed a scattered occurrence of all the regular secondary subjects. In the elementary grades geography as a separate subject has entirely disappeared in the teaching guides published in the past three years. It was fused with United States history in the fifth grade and with world history in the sixth grade. World geography was most commonly taught in the seventh and ninth grades.

During the past three years 24 guides
were published by 12 school systems which bore such titles as "general education," "basic education," "social living," and "core programs." The renewal of interest in the core curriculum reported in the last survey continued apace in the current triennium. With a single exception, all the newly published guides on the secondary school level were confined to grades 7, 8 and 9.

The publication of handbooks for the information of parents, a trend of fairly recent origin, continued at approximately the same rate as in the earlier study. Our collection included 17 new pamphlets attractively printed and illustrated with pictures and drawings. Among other things, the publications outlined the instructional program and the services of the school in a simple style and also contained suggestions for cooperation between home and school.

The continuous revision of curriculum guides is generally accepted as the function of the administrative leadership of a school system. It continues to be a cooperative process involving many teachers not only because it results in the improvement of teaching and learning but also because it is one of the most effective means of professional growth which reaches the largest number of teachers in a school organization.