

Why Curriculum Guides?

Curriculum guides that are suggestive and adaptable, that exemplify the values and goals of democratic education, can give practical support to the efforts of staff members and of pupils.

PREPARATION of curriculum guides, whether they be called this general term or something else such as resource units, learning units, or curriculum bulletins, is a popular type of in-service education project. Why is this true? What good is generally accomplished in this endeavor? What principles might be kept in mind by persons planning and working on this type of activity?

Engagement in this type of activity is a glowing testimonial to the increasing professionalization of the field of education. Fifty years ago few administrators and teachers would have been so presumptuous as to think *they* should help decide what ought to be taught in third grade arithmetic or third year French. Didn't the authors who wrote textbooks know and record what ought to be taught? Today in every school system we can easily find teachers who have strong ideas about what is right and proper to teach *their* classes in arithmetic, French, chemistry, or any other subject.

Results Expected

Teachers know that when they get together to plan how to improve a course of study or a part of it they always go

beyond the material and suggestions found in any one textbook. They know that through working together on curriculum guides certain results are generally likely to occur.

1. *Clarifying (in operational terms) statements of philosophy, purposes, and objectives.* Every teacher accepts the importance of educational philosophy and objectives in a school system and in his classrooms. Teachers vary greatly, however, in the nature and degree of their interest in dealing with high level abstractions such as those often found in published statements of philosophy and purposes. The application of philosophy to a particular grade level and course of study provides a real situation on which the classroom teacher is willing to work. He is willing to see how his classroom instruction can help achieve the goals indicated as important in the statement of philosophy and purposes. He might even be willing to point out where the philosophic statement is inadequate in terms of the goals and purposes he believes are important for boys and girls in his classes. Out of this type of work, then, we can hope to develop teachers who understand more fully the long range goals they hope to achieve for and with their children.

2. *Underlining the idea that good teaching is creative and imaginative.* Even today one may find new teachers entering the profession who have not had many opportunities to learn from creative and imaginative teachers. The "single text teacher" may still be found in American colleges as well as American high schools. Teachers who have been limited in their preprofessional contacts primarily to this type of teacher may overvalue the importance of mastering isolated bits of information for the purpose of doing well on true-false or other objective type examinations.

Teachers engaged in building curriculum guides use textbooks for ideas and content. Beyond this, however, they imagine what activities might be interesting to their children. They survey the unique resources in their community. They identify projects which will permit children to make creative use of arts or other media of communication. In all of this, teachers learn or relearn that good teaching is a creative and imaginative work.

In the process of contributing original ideas many teachers will see that children also will often be able to make suggestions about places to visit, speakers to invite, things to do, and other aspects of a unit of study. Thus teachers learn or relearn that the child's learning, too, is (or can be) a creative, imaginative work.

3. *Surveying and using unique local resources.* The study of basic problems which concern all people is often initiated most successfully with children through a study of how the problem is

handled in the child's community. A study of public health protection in a city certainly ought to include a visit to a modern dairy and/or water purification plant. Teachers new to the community (or even the state) find the surveying and listing of local resources very valuable in identifying persons or companies that might be contacted for trips, speakers, or other learning resources.

Preparing these types of materials for curriculum guides ordinarily results in teachers' making better use of such possibilities in their own teaching.

4. *Indicating the range of learning experiences that is needed.* Almost all learning experiences suggested for a curriculum guide will be judged by some teachers to be too easy or too difficult. And, of course, they will inevitably be both too easy and too difficult. Is a suggested reading designed for the student at grade level or for those in the same class who will be four years above or four years below the average? Is the art project challenging for someone who is gifted in art? Is the suggestion of writing and presenting a dramatic skit intended for the gregarious youngster who delights in being a "ham" or for the shy retiring child who finds it very difficult to answer a simple question when called upon in class?

As curriculum guide builders face up to questions such as these they are dealing with materials and procedures that can influence greatly their own way of working in the classroom.

5. *Identifying appropriate evaluation techniques.* As teachers and other persons interested in curriculum improvement work together on curriculum guides they become re-impressed with the need for varied testing and measuring devices. Certainly both standardized

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and teacher designed tests to determine mastery of factual content are needed. It becomes apparent, however, that other types of measures are needed if we are to observe and evaluate changes in behavior or attitude. There is much truth in the observation that "children produce what the school culture values" and there is reason to believe that children regard as important that which is measured and reported. Growth and development resulting through learning activities suggested in many curriculum guides cannot be measured by a conventional testing program. Careful teacher observation, check lists, and behavior journals might be examples of evaluation techniques needed to measure growth resulting from these individual or small group activities.

Achieving Integration in Learning

Integration is not something which can be guaranteed by curriculum guides or any other "outside of the learner" devices. Integration is a unique personal matter which occurs within the learner himself. Integration of learning (obviously an important part of the larger integration of personality) occurs within a social matrix. It occurs within a framework of values. It is influenced greatly by the operational philosophy of the culture, of which the school, for most young people, is a large part.

Fortunately, however, most young people grow up in a social matrix which orients toward a positive and upward growing integration of life. Home, church, school and other wholesome agencies such as the Boy Scouts help children learn and grow in a direction which convinces them they ought to become or continue to be trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, clean and rev-

erent. They are helped to develop the belief that knowledge should be used for socially useful ends.

A study of problems such as fire safety provides, in the opinion of many writers of curriculum guides, fine opportunities for children to learn about the interrelatedness of various fields of knowledge. They learn how to draw on ideas and teaching resources organized on a separate discipline basis (science, social studies, etc.) to solve big problems (fire safety) which cut across separate courses or teaching areas. In this process the child is helped to see that special areas and courses are simply specialized ways of looking at the big things, ideas or problems which are the stuff of which life is made. And he is helped to see that what he draws on to solve a problem and how completely he understands the answer are factors which he must shape for himself.

Achieving Continuity

Builders of curriculum guides often struggle long and futilely with the problems of trying to solve, in advance of the teaching-learning situation, all matters associated with defining scope and sequence of learning activities within a course or group of courses. Without doubt some good accrues to the persons who are forced to think through "what should come first and why." Continuity of content, however, in the mind of the learner can never be guaranteed by a single curriculum guide (or series) if provision is going to be made for the individual child to work at the growing edges of his learning.

The impossibility of being specific enough to provide for the full range of individual differences found in most classes has led to the creation of cur-

riculum guides that are stated in more general terms. The guides might specify, for example, that during the intermediate grade years children should learn to understand and use efficiently certain arithmetic concepts. The exact order and level of difficulty, of course, would be determined by the teacher as he works with the class. A guide might suggest the kinds of literature that should be included in one or more courses without being prescriptive about order or quantity of reading to be accomplished. General guides of this type are less concerned with the problem of content and sequence and are more concerned with clarifying the long-range goals to be achieved and in identifying activities or learning situations which can help students move toward these goals. The general type of guide is also more concerned with clarifying the philosophic framework within which all teachers should work.

"Threads of Continuity"

Building curriculum guides in the University School in which the writer works might be considered briefly as a test case illustrating how major concerns or "threads of continuity of experience" might be used as organizing centers throughout any number of guides. The school's statement of philosophy and purposes identifies three major cornerstones of the democratic way of life. These are: (a) respect for human personality in all of its infinite variation, (b) faith in living and working together for the common good, and (c) faith in the method of intelligence.

If these statements are to be more than "window dressing" in the introduction to a curriculum guide one should expect to find activities, projects, readings, etc.,

in the body of the guide which breathe life into these beliefs. The guide needs to provide for the wide range of personalities and abilities certain to be present in a class; it needs to identify activities which encourage cooperative group effort. Problems or issues on which there is no single right answer (e.g., what should be our foreign policy in the Far East?) need to be identified and labeled as worthy of the best thought that students can give to them.

The school's statement of philosophy and purposes also identifies several types of experiences which should be the concern of all teachers in every phase of the life of the school. Four of these are: (a) developing social sensitivity, (b) developing cooperativeness, (c) developing creativeness, and (d) developing self-direction. Here again we would expect all curriculum guides constructed in the school to provide general and specific illustrations of learning activities which can help develop these characteristics. This is not easy, since much tradition, particularly in academic classes, minimizes the need or value of being cooperative, creative, or self-directive. As all persons involved in preparing and using curricular materials keep these and other philosophic concerns in mind, the program acquires a continuity of purposes which permeates all aspects of school life.

Guides of this type are suggestive and adaptable. They are developed from a particular statement of philosophy and from a study of local resources made by local staff. They suggest ways a teacher or course might help students move toward achieving the major goals and purposes of education. They constitute a promising growing trend in current curriculum improvement work.

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