

# Curriculum News

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TEN years ago most of the curriculum news was coming from local school systems. Today a great deal of the curriculum news is being made in Washington, in the offices of large foundations, and in various local community groups. Never before have the schools received so many proposals for curriculum change from so many different sources. Never before have the schools been subjected to so many pressures for curriculum change.

Ten years ago local citizens' committees for education were scarce. Their chief concern was how to get enough money to employ the necessary teachers and construct the needed buildings. During this past decade the number of committees has increased at a rapid rate. As the committees helped to solve some of the pressing problems created by a growing population, they expanded their purposes to include a consideration of what the schools should teach. These local committees have become a source of many suggestions for curriculum change.

The past decade has seen a tremendous upsurge of interest in education on the part of large foundations. The Carnegie Corporation has sponsored the Study of the Senior High School by James Conant. This corporation now is sponsoring a similar study of the Junior High School. The same foundation has granted two and one-half million dollars to the Modern Language Association for the development of a foreign language curriculum. The Rockefeller Fund fi-

nanced the panel that developed the statement, "Pursuit of Excellence."

The Ford Foundation, through the Fund for the Advancement of Education, has financed a variety of experimental studies. Directors of this fund conceive of this money as being "venture capital" for American education. Accordingly, they have invested in experiments varying from the use of teacher aides to the use of airplane-borne transmitters to cover a six state area with educational television programs. The fund's latest creation is the multimillion-dollar Learning Resources Institute, designed both to tape educational television programs and to prepare accompanying text materials.

## Grants and Funds

In addition to an increase of foundation money designed to promote curriculum change, there has been an accompanying increase in federal funds available for this purpose. During the past year approximately two billion dollars was spent by the United States government for education.

Although much of this was a continuation of previous programs, there also were significant new developments. For the first time the U. S. Office of Education received sizable funds for educational experimentation. The National Defense Education Act made money available for the purchase of teaching

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equipment in the fields of science, mathematics, and foreign languages. These funds also provided for the employment of supervisory personnel in these areas.

The National Science Foundation received federal funds for the development of curriculum materials in science and mathematics. Already this foundation, with the assistance of some private foundation money, has developed a new program in physics by the Physical Science Study Committee (PSSC). Recently the National Science Foundation convened a meeting of scientists to consider the teaching of science in the elementary school. At the present time the School Mathematics Study Group (SMSG) has developed an experimental program for junior and senior high school mathematics. They will start writing their program for grades four, five, and six next summer.

Problems of coordination in the ex-

penditure of these federal funds are developing since the funds are administered by 18 different governmental agencies. For example, the U. S. Office of Education has the responsibility for financing experimentation in curriculum. The National Science Foundation, on the other hand, has been given the funds for curriculum development.

Experienced curriculum people recognize the hazard of separating these two aspects of curriculum development. Furthermore, the U. S. Office of Education is administering the NDEA funds with a minimum of help from specialists in subject fields. At the same time the National Science Foundation is developing the curriculum without the assistance of anyone other than specialists in the various fields of science and mathematics. Teachers are called in to write the material, but not to participate in policy decisions.

It seems apparent that the large num-

ber of uncoordinated sources of recommendations for curriculum change will mean an ever increasing number of proposals for curriculum change in the next decade. The person who is working in the field of curriculum development may well ask what the effect of all these proposals will be on the school program. Time alone can give the complete answer to this question. One of the immediate effects may be an unbalancing of the curriculum. Certainly both the NDEA and the work of the National Science Foundation have the effect of creating a greater emphasis on science and mathematics. A further concern is that many of the programs developed may not be psychologically sound. The results of the work so far would indicate an effort to move subject content down in the grades. One could wish that there were adequate experimentation to validate this move. To be sure the specialists working with

the project will be able to incorporate the significant content. However, we have no evidence, for example, where in the curriculum the concepts and the materials developed by the National Science Foundation are appropriate to the maturity level of the child. Not only does the subject-matter specialist often lack such experimental psychological data, but also he is usually further handicapped in that neither his experience nor his training helps him to see his subject in relation to other subjects.

A result of the use of federal funds and foundation grants for curriculum development has been a movement toward greater similarity of educational programs from community to community. This becomes apparent as one physics curriculum is used throughout the country, or as communities boast, "We have a Conant high school." The tendency to standardize curriculum is



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also increased by having airborne transmitters sending the same television lesson to children in a six-state area at the same time. Now the new Learning Resources Institute promises a standard taped curriculum from elementary school through junior college for the entire nation.

There is no doubt that the many recommendations regarding curriculum change are indicative of real interest in the schools by a broad segment of our society. It is also heartening to see the interest of subject-matter specialists in assisting with curriculum revision. These expressions of interest are to be valued and cherished.

Whether or not the many suggestions for curriculum change will promote better programs of education depends to a considerable extent upon the way in which local school people deal with the proposals and those who make them. The curriculum leader must constantly appraise the proposals against a background of basic values and beliefs. The Statement of Beliefs of ASCD should be of assistance in this. The curriculum leader needs not only to be familiar with the best available research regarding the nature of the learner and the learning process but also to be able to apply the research in evaluating curriculum proposals. He must be able to interpret this appraisal to fellow teachers and to the public.

ASCD, through the work of its various committees, is striving to assist the curriculum leader in this task. Various publications provide him with needed information. CAPCI has encouraged the preparation of the following brief statements, or working papers: "Balance in the Curriculum," "Individual Differences," and "Evaluation of Learning."

Many CAPCI related activities within state and regional groups are proving of

value to participating members. For example, Victor Lawhead is chairing an Indiana CAPCI Committee which is making a survey of promising practices in the three areas of CAPCI in Indiana; Alexander Frazier is chairing an Ohio CAPCI Commission that is preparing a pamphlet entitled, "10 Ways To Meet Individual Needs in the Regular Classroom."

Some curriculum leaders may feel overwhelmed and discouraged with the variety of recommendations they are receiving for curriculum change. We need to remind ourselves that the difference between a problem and an opportunity is in our state of mind. The great interest in the curriculum of our schools should enable us to develop effective teams of teachers, specialists, psychologists, and research experts. If we can effectively utilize the talents of these individuals and if we can capitalize on their interest and the public's interest in improving our schools, we will steadily improve the quality of education in the next decade.

—ARTHUR J. LEWIS, *assistant superintendent in charge of elementary education, Public Schools, Minneapolis, Minnesota.*

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#### People

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he applies himself intelligently, can soon be in demand on the conference circuit—despite the fact that our knowledge in this field is still limited, mostly of a descriptive nature. In fact, another problem quickly develops—how to select and manage conference commitments in keeping with one's own energy and professional goals. We badly need more study of this hazardous problem.

—ROBERT R. SMITH, *chairman, Division of Education, San Francisco State College, California.*

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