

Guidelines for Regional Curriculum Planning

JAMES E. EISELE *

SOCIOECONOMIC demands of the 20th century have left an indelible mark on American education. Equal educational opportunity for all is clearly a mandate which must be met *now*, not at some future date. Every city, county, and state in this nation is obliged to make these opportunities available without delay.

Furthermore, equal educational opportunities must be created within the framework of an outmoded, antiquated taxation system. This tax structure can barely support the status quo, given the increased population of younger and younger Americans, to say nothing of supporting the idealized type of education envisioned by many Americans for the late 20th and 21st centuries. Within this setting, the accomplishment of major changes in school system organization to facilitate equalitarian, integrated education for all meets many obstacles.

Translated into concrete terms, the problem which society puts before educators is to provide an education which is sensitive to the needs of all persons at reasonable cost. A partial solution to this dilemma requires a high degree of sophisticated curriculum planning, utilizing the best that is known in this procedure. Such planning, to be economically feasible, cannot be accomplished by local school districts alone.

The cost to the local district for curriculum development which significantly improves instruction for all students is simply prohibitive when the school district is much smaller than a 10,000 pupil population. The same results, however, can be accomplished by cooperative arrangements among several school districts for some phases of curriculum planning which cannot be provided feasibly and economically at the local level. This article describes a significant effort in this direction as it relates to certain selected guidelines for curriculum planning.

The Board of Cooperative Educational Services of the First Supervisory District of Erie County, New York, established in 1962 a program of curriculum development, "To reduce the time gap between educational research and classroom practice, and to help teachers to bring greater depth and flexibility to the classroom."¹ From its initial service of providing a 16 mm instructional film library for a few school districts, the program has grown to a regional complex of

¹ Justus A. Prentice. "A Cooperative Board Provides Regional Services." *Educational Leadership* 24(6): 551; March 1967.

* James E. Eisele, Associate Professor, Department of Curriculum and Supervision, University of Georgia, Athens

curriculum services and programs which serve over 80,000 public school pupils and over 3,200 classroom teachers plus some 250 administrators. The extent and kind of services and programs provided are significant, as are the ways they are implemented according to the curriculum guidelines set forth in this article.

As indicated, the initial attempt to provide a curriculum service was in the form of a 16 mm instructional film library. Today this library contains over 4,000 film prints, plus a small variety of 8 mm single-concept loop films, which have been distributed to teachers who have made nearly 50,000 requests in a single year. These deliveries are made with three delivery vans owned for this purpose. To supplement the 16 mm film holdings is a video tape library of one- and two-inch tapes for which reproduction rights have been acquired and master copies retained for duplication. At present this library contains over 1,000 hours of video tape programs. In addition, an extensive library of audio tapes is maintained and stored at this center. An integral part of the video tape library is the duplication of the master tapes which are delivered to teachers along with films.

Other services include: original visuals for instruction, produced by four graphic artists; a curriculum laboratory which houses many kinds of instructional materials and devices for examination or loan, in-service courses, and workshops; computer retrieval programs for retrieving individually tailored curriculum guides; and consultative services in several areas of curriculum development.

The staff of the curriculum department, always expanding and changing, consists of professional educators, a librarian, professional artists and media specialists, and civil service personnel for technical and clerical positions. The director and assistant director of the department are curriculum generalists who are selected for their background and training in curriculum development.

How are these programs and services implemented and developed according to sound principles of curriculum development by the personnel of the department? While

the quality and quantity of curriculum services and programs offered at this center may be unique, it is really the effective implementation of these services and programs that, in the opinion of most staff members concerned, has made them successful. That guidelines for effective implementation of curriculum development processes have been established can be assumed. However, some guidelines have been more useful than others in the implementation of a regional curriculum development program. Guidelines which the staff members have found most essential to the success of the program are offered here as assistance to persons who wish to move in the direction of regionalism in curriculum planning.

Guidelines for Regional Curriculum Planning

Many authors have presented sound principles to follow in planning the curriculum. Names such as Alexander, Saylor, Alberty, Krug, Parker, Edwards, Doll, and Taba stand out, as well as many others who have made a significant contribution to the field. In many cases the guidelines they have offered were developed through and for single school district planning and were confined to general curriculum construction.

Other guidelines have emerged as a result of broadening the base of the curriculum planning program to include several school districts and through broadening the view of curriculum planning to include all efforts leading toward the improvement of instruction. The guidelines which appear most relevant to this broader base and view are not necessarily new; however, they do seem to have had a significant effect on the success of one regional program of curriculum development.

• *Regional Curriculum Planning Must Be Service Oriented.*

The improvement of instruction is not something that can be mandated! Contrary to many persons' beliefs, this is an essential point to remember. Instruction can be viewed as a process of teacher decision making; and

this decision making cannot be significantly improved merely by ordering or requiring such improvement. This principle is especially relevant when viewing a regional organization, which is, by necessity, farther removed from the classroom teacher than is the local school district organization.

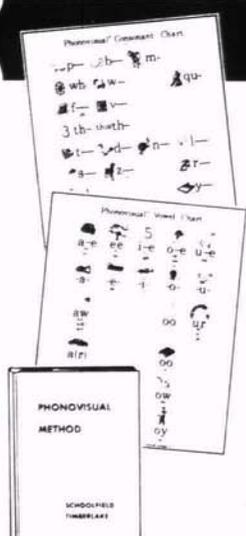
"Service oriented" implies that decision making can be substantially improved, on the other hand, if the regional organization can provide supportive systems which the teacher needs to make decisions about teaching and learning. The entire operation of the Cooperative Board is based upon this principle and the curriculum program is especially dedicated to providing a service to the classroom teacher.

Translating this principle into operation, the Cooperative Board program is based upon a careful assessment of teachers' needs. This assessment is frequently updated by the staff in working with teachers and curriculum specialists from the local schools. Further, the services which are provided are com-

pletely optional to the district teachers. Where desirable and necessary, assistance is given to anyone who wishes to utilize any part of the curriculum program. There is, in short, no line of authority between the provider of the services and the recipients. All phases of the program are designed for the benefit of the recipients and, in accordance with the second principle, are guided by the recipients.

• *Regional Curriculum Planning Must Be Originated by Those Who Will Use the Plans.*

Generally speaking, the one who best knows the needs of the classroom teacher is the classroom teacher himself. Even if it were argued that an "expert" is more cognizant of teachers' needs than are the prospective recipients of services, the likelihood of teachers' enthusiastically accepting an outsider's advice is doubtful. If the curriculum planner wants to provide a service that will be utilized, it must be based upon a realistic



Basic Materials: PhonoVisual Method book, Consonant and Vowel Charts

This well organized PHONICS PROGRAM is successfully used by over 120,000 teachers in all 50 states.

THE PhonoVisual METHOD

... supplements early development of all COMMUNICATION SKILLS:
SPEAKING • READING • WRITING
SPELLING • LISTENING

This is ORGANIZED PHONICS . . . a proven, effective, game-oriented program that's quickly and easily taught. The PhonoVisual Method is a parallel teaching supplement, not a substitute, to the sight method of teaching reading. It is a middle course between the old phonetic approach, with its attendant "word calling" without comprehension, and the sight approach, with its dependence upon memory.

Within the first few months of his reading experience, the pupil is given the power to attack new words. He does not have to stop and acquire each tool as the need arises. Independence and the speed of learning allow for a greatly enriched program of outside reading, spelling, creative writing and proper speech.

Approved for purchase with NDEA and ESEA funds

FREE loan of demonstration film: "Phonovisual in Action"
(16-mm sound). Write to: Dept. EL-8

PHONOVISUAL PRODUCTS, INC. 4708 Wisconsin Ave., Washington, D. C. 20016

In Canada: Educator Supplies, Ltd. 105 Falcon St., London, Ontario

assessment of teachers' needs which can only be ascertained by teachers themselves.

This principle, in fact, pretty much defines the role of the regional curriculum specialist as a coordinator who works with teachers to define their needs and then translates these needs into services which they will utilize. In performing this role, the curriculum specialist must be in constant contact with classroom teachers, other curriculum personnel, and school administrators. He must place an emphasis on the determination of needs through cooperative action with the recipients of the curriculum services. This implies a preoccupation with the needs and desires of classroom teachers, the subject of the third guiding principle.

- *Regional Curriculum Planning Must Be Teacher Oriented.*

The classroom teacher is his own instructional leader within the classroom where he spends the majority of his time. Programs and services designed to improve instruction should be planned for and by the classroom teacher. Even though Brickell² has disputed the importance of this approach with regard to certain types of instructional innovations, the classroom teacher must be regarded as the principal decision maker for instruction and, as such, efforts to improve this decision making, on any level, must be aimed at this key person.

This principle does not preclude all attempts to provide assistance for auxiliary school personnel; it simply places emphasis on the classroom teacher as the key instructional decision maker. Efforts to improve administrators' skills at facilitating teacher decision making are, for example, highly desirable. If the first two principles mentioned here are observed, this third principle is likely to be followed. When it is followed, use of the services provided is virtually assured. At least this has been our experience in this regional program.

- *Regional Curriculum Planning Must Be Realistic.*

² Henry M. Brickell. *Organizing New York State for Educational Change*. Albany: State Education Department of New York, 1961. pp. 20-26.

Perhaps a good word to describe the nature of successful regional curriculum planning would be "concrete." This means that the services and programs offered must be of immediate use to the recipients of such assistance. Concerns which are in the distance, or on the horizon, will not be as keenly felt by the classroom teacher, and their response to programs aimed at the solution of these long range concerns will not be as great as it will be to programs for solving immediate problems.

Obviously, long range planning is also highly desirable. The ideal approach is, of course, to seek improvements on the horizon by solving immediate problems. An example of how the Cooperative Board approaches this principle is its technique for encouraging the use of multi-media in instruction. Rather than a concentrated effort to justify or encourage this procedure, the staff developed an extensive film library to solve the immediate problem of a lack of instructional materials. Next, it added graphic artists to the staff to produce other materials, then a video tape library was begun, followed by an instructional materials center and an audio tape library. All these services could not possibly have been introduced at one time, and, if they were, it is unlikely that teachers could have responded to all the services simultaneously as well as they did to each one as it was introduced. This pattern can be seen repeatedly in the development of the Cooperative Board's curriculum program.

The principle of realism is a complex one for it refers to issues which are of "real" concern to teachers—definitely a difficult phrase to define. What is intended by this vague terminology is that regional curriculum planning must aim at the solution of problems which are not vague, which are clearly defined and are observable, and which are expressed by classroom teachers. Unless these criteria are met, the success of the program in terms of wide acceptance by teachers is seriously jeopardized before it even begins.

- *Regional Curriculum Planning Must Be Responsive to Change.*

Just as with any other facet of educa-

tion, only more so, regional curriculum planning must adjust itself to meet the changing demands of teachers. Local school districts are often hidebound by operating a program with a majority of professional personnel who can resist change with little effect to themselves because of tenure, seniority, tradition, etc. A regional organization, however, operates with a minimum of tenure personnel and a majority of nonprofessional personnel who would quickly be dismissed if their services were not used. This, of course, only partially explains why it does respond to change and not why it should.

The reason a regional curriculum planning program should respond to change is simply that in order to be useful it must be timely. An outdated program, supplying services which are no longer needed or used, is not helping to improve instruction. Therefore, even with professional personnel who may obtain tenure, response to change must become a criterion for retention. Fresh talent, infused into the staff occasionally, may help ensure this flexibility. Also, in the Cooperative Board program, the widespread use of outside consultants has aided and encouraged this pattern.

- *Regional Curriculum Planning Should Stress Quality Over Quantity.*

In a day and age when size is often a point of pride, a regional service must emphasize not quantity, but quality. Size, for a regional program, may even become a threat to its existence. If such a program becomes too large, it frequently invites feelings of jealousy and charges of dynasty building. On the other hand, no matter how small the program, its qualities will result in some improvement when the resistance is minimized.

Although this principle appears to contradict the time honored principle of comprehensive curriculum planning, a regional program cannot afford (not meant in monetary terms) to become comprehensive overnight. As the program gains the respect of its users, it will grow naturally in response to their demands. As these demands grow, the regional curriculum planner must strive to remove certain services from the operation and place them in the local district where it will then be justified by a greater demand.

In other words, if a regionally provided service is good enough to attract users, the overwhelming demand for the service will shortly make it an economically feasible operation for a local district. In this sense, a regional service must continually react to change, but may not substantially increase in size over long periods of time. This should be an important guiding principle, for cooperative regional arrangements are ideally suited to provide only those services which cannot be provided economically by a single school system. In fact, then, such a program should never become too comprehensive but should endeavor to provide quality services no matter how limited they should be.

The present decade probably will see the emergence of many regional programs arranged cooperatively between urban, suburban, and rural school districts. Some educators view this development as an imperative need for the present. Hopefully, many educators with foresight will rally behind such examples as that of the Cooperative Board in making their plans a reality and a success by observing some guiding principles which have emerged from the experience of establishing and operating a successful regional curriculum program. □



Copyright © 1969 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.