

MULTIPLE CURRICULA: A

A SURVEY of the literature yields numerous articles dealing with the potential impact of commercial software and hardware on today's schools.¹ Concurrently, we find that the insignificant portion of public school expenditures² directed into meaningful research provides evidence of the inability of public schools adequately to research and to develop their own materials. As salaries continue to rise for both instructional and non-instructional personnel, the cost of such research and development activity on a large scale is rapidly becoming less feasible. Thus it is apparent that a greater number of schools will find it increasingly desirable to purchase all or most of their curricular materials from commercial sources.

This article is concerned primarily with the means by which school systems will select such materials, the rationale utilized in making choices between and among the available materials, and the specific criteria applied in that selection process. Several references are made to "comprehensive programs" and "curriculum packages" throughout this article; in all cases the terms are used synonymously and refer to those curricula available for purchase by schools from education-oriented corporations. These curricula usually include basic curriculum outlines, texts and related materials for use by teachers and students,

¹ At least three well-known journals have devoted total issues to consideration of the potential impact of education-oriented corporations. For additional information see the following: *Educational Leadership* (May 1968); *Phi Delta Kappan* (January 1967); *Review of Educational Research* (April 1968).

² United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. *American Education*, November 1968; p. 33.

and in-service activities designed to acquaint teachers with the purposes of and techniques for their effective use in classrooms.

These packages offer an attraction that administrators find difficult to reject. At the same time, many educators are legitimately fearful of blindly accepting such commercial packages without careful scrutiny and evaluation. Care must be taken to ensure that all accompanying materials relevant to a particular comprehensive program are purchased; otherwise, the effectiveness of the program with students is likely to be seriously diminished.³ For example, a program that includes a basic text or texts and which also encompasses a wide variety of manipulative aids may become just another "textbook series" if the full range of associated materials is not made available to teachers and students.

Curriculum committees composed of classroom teachers, principals, supervisors, and other representatives from the central office staff no longer can be expected to develop courses of study or curriculum guides for implementation within school systems. The costs of researching, planning, developing, and producing curricula for individual school systems, the larger ones included, are clearly prohibitive. Of even greater importance is the realization that the complexity of society, the diversity of our communities, and the dynamics of population in terms of relocation and social mobility make such guides outmoded even before they are printed.

³ David A. Thatcher. "Teachers vs. Technicians: We Still Have a Choice." *Phi Delta Kappan* 49: 435-38; April 1968.

STRATEGY FOR SELECTION

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We must be intimately aware of the fact that the communities surrounding individual schools are not homogeneous entities; rather, they are an amalgamation of numerous subgroups into a single organism, definable by geographic boundaries. In actuality, within any community, a great deal of diversity is to be found. In some cases the existence of more than one racial or religious group provides some indication that the subgroups will possess different attitudes toward the school or varying beliefs regarding the objectives of the school.

In a situation where the population that comprises a particular community is very heterogeneous in terms of educational level and social or economic status, there are also likely to be conflicting demands made upon the school. No single packaged curriculum could include provisions for coping with all the varying experiential backgrounds from which children emanate, and the education-oriented corporations have yet to become fully aware of this fact. Wigren states:

At present, software is all too frequently developed in a vacuum rather than being tied to specific teaching and learning strategies, with the result that materials are developed which have only tangential or peripheral use because they have little relevance to basic instructional needs.⁴

Yet, it is imperative that a school district have readily available curricula that (a) will meet the needs of boys and girls who, because of familial mobility, attend many different

schools which are in and of themselves quite different, and (b) will be broad enough to encompass the tremendous diversity which exists within the walls of each school and within each classroom in that school.

We must also be highly cognizant of the nature of other individual differences that exist within the schools. Just as boys and girls bring individual strengths and weaknesses to their school experiences, so do individual teachers. Some teachers work best with standardized materials and use them with varying degrees of success in the classroom. Others prefer to utilize commercially prepared materials as a basis for some of the decisions made in their classrooms, but also desire the freedom and the opportunity to vary the programs to meet the perceived needs of children. Still other teachers move far afield from established programs in their attempts to individualize educational opportunities for boys and girls.

Developing a Framework

What is needed now is a sound basis for determining which of the numerous commercially available materials will best meet the needs of a local school system, a framework for selecting those materials that are most consonant with the objectives of the educational system. To determine effectively

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⁴ Harold E. Wigren. "We Must Harness Technology." *Educational Leadership* 25: 708-12; May 1968.

which of the multitude of materials best meets the tests established by local districts necessitates the development of a rationale for the making of decisions which are primarily educational in nature.

Utilizing the conceptual design proposed by the ASCD Commission on Instructional Theory in "A Model for Curriculum Development Decision Making,"⁵ this paper presents for individual school districts a framework which provides a basis for selecting packages in a multiple curricula approach to program development. Also implied here is the need for reasonably clear-cut guidelines and alternatives to ensure that selections made can be justified. So many publishing houses are currently producing packaged curricula that considerable difficulty is inherent in the process of selecting one rather than another.

For example, in the single area of social studies, well over one hundred curricula, many of which possess overlapping characteristics, are currently in the process of development.⁶ The situation in the area of language arts is no less complex, and the fields of mathematics and science are experiencing a similar profusion of materials. It is the degree of overlapping, as well as the variance currently manifested with regard to grade placement of concepts, skills, and understandings that complicates the selection process. Any framework developed must provide a reasonable basis for discriminating among curricula with similar characteristics.

The framework must also include, on a systematic and consciously planned basis, provisions for teacher input—an imperative for local adaptation. No curriculum available to a wide range of schools or school systems can possibly incorporate data relevant to the specific communities or sub-communities which comprise each school district. Certainly no broadly based materials of this type

can adequately anticipate and provide for the wide range of student abilities and interests that will exist within so large a population. Thus, a classroom teacher, charged with the responsibility for carrying out the educational process at the "front line" level, must have the freedom to bring to the classroom those concepts, generalizations, and ideas which seem appropriate for the students in that classroom.

It is quite possible, and perhaps even probable, that those responsible for the instruction of students will not be desirous of utilizing a single curriculum for an entire semester or academic year. So, all such curricula will have to be developed in a manner that will permit (and facilitate) independent use of individual units from within any set of packaged materials in conjunction with other materials deemed desirable by the teacher.

Last, but certainly not least, the framework must include a systematic means of evaluating the programs utilized in terms of their impact on children. This implies that, in a general sense, there are two areas in need of evaluation for which provisions must be made: the first is the general area of determining the extent to which the students internalized the facts, attitudes, and behaviors that were desired outcomes; the second is the extent to which the teacher adequately taught the material designed to bring about the desired knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors.

At the same time, teachers must be aware of the extent to which students develop attitudes or behaviors which are not anticipated in the stated objectives. The evaluation procedures must be clearly designed so that those utilizing the materials will be constantly appraising their nature and purpose, and at the same time will be appraising the degree to which the materials meet the requirements established by the philosophy of each teacher and the school district as a total entity.

Selecting Criteria

The process of selecting a few from among the numerous packaged materials that exist and which continue to proliferate should

⁵ Ira J. Gordon. "A Model for Curriculum Development Decision Making." In: *Criteria for Theories of Instruction*. Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1968. pp. 40-44.

⁶ National School Public Relations Association. "Social Studies Deluged with Reform Proposals." *Education U.S.A.*, September 16, 1968; p. 15.

be the major focus of curriculum committees of the future. A primary task for school administrators, curriculum consultants, teachers, and other involved individuals would be to reduce to intelligible criteria the goals of the local school system, thus making it possible for members of curriculum committees to select from the available packages those which most closely meet the predetermined objectives.

In so doing, numerous judgments will have to be made regarding the extent to which each of the wide variety of materials available meets local needs.

Selection of materials can then be based on the conceptual framework set forth and emphasized within the materials. For example, within the social studies, we can find curricula which are based on the inductive or deductive approaches, those developed from an anthropological or a sociological or an economic vantage point, and those which emphasize a psychological or a mechanistic view of world affairs. The content of language arts curricula, as well as those of mathematics and science, are also subject to consideration on the basis of the underlying conceptual frameworks on which their development was predicated.

Once the determination to select packaged curricula on the basis of the conceptual orientations that underlie their development is made, the questions facing school systems become somewhat clearer. Which conceptual orientations do we prefer? Should we have available series of curricula, each of which is based on a different conceptual framework? Which of the available packages most consistently utilizes and systematically treats each of the possible conceptual approaches? Which overlap to a degree that makes them undesirable?

The authors contend that a school system would best serve the needs of its students and instructional staff by selecting for purchase a number of curricula representing a variety of conceptual orientations for every area. Then each teacher could select for his use the one that would best meet the needs of his class, of a particular student, or of a special group of students within that class. It

is quite possible that a given teacher would utilize two or three such curricula simultaneously within a single classroom.

These packaged materials, if developed in such a manner that each unit is self-contained, would enable teachers to select a particular unit from one package and another from a different package. This would certainly provide greater flexibility of usage within the classroom and allow teachers to modify their materials as they deem necessary. Selection would be limited to those materials which logically, developmentally, and consistently follow a particular theoretical orientation, thus making it possible for the teacher to include additional materials that represent the teacher input referred to earlier.

The units which comprise the packaged curricula should also contain extensive "gaps"—open areas that allow for teacher input, consonant with and additive to the conceptual bases of the programs. In such cases, when utilizing a curriculum based on an economic orientation, the teacher might introduce instructor-developed materials designed to point out the degree to which local economic conditions have affected the political or cultural development of a particular community or region.

Perhaps a comparison with the field of medicine would be in order at this point. For the most part, the multitude of drugs available for use by physicians are produced by manufacturers with national distribution, and the same medicines, with few variations, are available to all doctors throughout the country. But it is the individual doctor's judgment that determines which drugs will be selected and the conditions under which they will be used. In essence the proposal set forth in this paper implies that the curriculum packages developed by commercial manufacturers are somewhat comparable to the drugs used by physicians. They represent the "medicinal treatments" of the education profession. It is also proposed that it should be the classroom teacher's judgment that determines the what, how, when, and where of those treatments. The conceptual basis for selection of those materials that is set forth

here is intended to serve as a set of guidelines within which the judgments made by the teachers might be effected.

Thus, new approaches may need to be incorporated in the selection of individuals who constitute curriculum committees. In addition to specialists from subject fields and from specific instructional or grade levels, the committees should also include specialists from such areas as human development, learning theory, and the utilization of instructional media. Conceivably, students could also be included who would provide feedback to the professional staff regarding their perceptions of the curricula under consideration.

In-service activities within school systems would then focus on ensuring that teachers have a thorough understanding of the potential effectiveness of using a given approach in specific situations and an awareness of the material available within each approach.

In conclusion, those who are aware of the rapidity with which the education-

oriented corporations are developing and marketing curriculum packages are aware of the need for an effective means of determining which of the many are most suitable for use in a particular school system. And few will deny that the commercial materials, backed by massive financial resources and growing pools of human talent, are more sophisticated and better researched than those developed by individual school districts.

The rationale set forth in this paper will provide educators with the most efficient and effective means for determining which commercial programs will best meet local needs and, at the same time, would help to ensure that the classroom teacher maintains his rightful place in the educative process—that of decision maker regarding those matters that are significant for the proper education of children. For in the last analysis, it is the human element—the relationship that exists between teacher and pupil—that will play a major role in determining whether or not Johnnie learns to learn. □

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