

Curriculum Laboratory

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A CURRICULUM laboratory is an established organization with staff, facilities, and materials for the study, planning, and construction of curricular materials. It provides a place to find information on curriculum and instruction.

Curriculum laboratories are found in some schools, many school district administrative offices, most teacher education institutions, and some state departments of education. Names may vary—curriculum laboratory, curriculum library, curriculum collection, or regional curriculum materials depository. Curriculum laboratory functions may be carried out in a learning resources center, an instructional materials center, a professional library, or an education library.

Curriculum laboratories have a wide variety of functions. This was found to be true in the 1940's when Drag¹ surveyed curriculum laboratories throughout the nation; in the 1950's when Church² contacted curriculum laboratory directors to develop criteria for evaluating curriculum laboratories; and in the 1960's when Arnett³ found great variation even within one state. The significance of this variety of functions is that curriculum

laboratories have survived since the 1920's because they have varied their functions to meet the requirements of their particular parent institutions.

Curriculum laboratories have been adaptable organizations disseminating the curriculum and instructional information needed in the form desired by their clientele. Thus some are really specialized publishing houses, others meticulously kept libraries; some have only curriculum guides; others have only textbooks; some have the whole range of instructional materials; some have tools and wood, cameras and film, precut materials and assembly plans, and a host of other materials for use in constructing instructional materials to implement the curriculum; and some add extensive displays in different curriculum and/or media fields which change from month to month.

A Curriculum Laboratory in Action

Functions of a curriculum laboratory can be seen by viewing the activities carried on in one.

Curriculum guides and instructional materials are selected by advisory teams in different subject fields. When they are received they are cataloged under a coding system appropriate for curriculum topics, with shelving numbers placed on the guides

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¹ F. L. Drag. "Curriculum Laboratories in the United States." Doctoral dissertation, Stanford University, Stanford, California, 1947.

² J. G. Church. "The Development of Criteria for Evaluating Curriculum Laboratories in Teacher Education Institutions." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, 1957.

³ H. M. Arnett. "Accessibility of Instructional Materials with Implications for the Organization of Curriculum Laboratories." Ph.D. dissertation, Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio, 1965.

and materials themselves and indexing provided on catalog cards.

Committees working on curriculum plans in different fields come in to look at materials for ideas and to see if a satisfactory publication is available so that they will not need to devise one of their own.

Teachers or supervisors come in for materials to guide classroom instruction. They may stop to view an exhibit of materials related to a subject such as geography.

A committee in a subject field visits the curriculum laboratory once each quarter for two years to develop a guide for preparing guides in that field.

When persons request locations of programs such as nongraded elementary schools, they can obtain a list from the curriculum laboratory.

The curriculum laboratory keeps clientele informed through a newsletter about reports on new curriculum developments and new materials that have been added. Special bibliographies and sets of abstracts are sent to persons in special fields. Such items of a general nature are circulated to other curriculum laboratories.

The curriculum laboratory has all of the Educational Resources Information Center documents on microfiche, and the accompanying indexes, in order to store a great deal of information in a relatively small space. It includes a reader-printer by which the documents can be read and paper copies of selected pages produced.

The staff members of the curriculum laboratory have special training in some curriculum areas and in curriculum laboratory administration. They work with curriculum committees and others using the laboratory facilities.

They are active in the affairs of the curriculum laboratory's parent institution. They advise persons on means of establishing curriculum laboratories. They are skilled in advising on how to produce curriculum publications. As new topics become of concern in education they are in the forefront of obtaining information related to those topics.

Much of the research on curriculum laboratories has been interrelated.

Research

Francis L. Drag completed an extensive investigation of curriculum laboratories. He wrote his study in two capacities—as Curriculum Director for the San Diego County Schools and as a doctoral candidate at Stanford University. His purpose was to inquire into the nature of curriculum laboratories in the United States. Basic to the study was “the problem of providing adequate curriculum laboratory services for the San Diego County Schools.”⁴

Drag synthesized the findings of the study into a plan for a county school system curriculum laboratory. He claimed that this plan and the recommendations made would “contain the essential principles by which curriculum laboratories in all types and sizes of school systems and educational institutions may be guided in their development.”⁵

An investigation of curriculum laboratories was conducted by Royce P. Flandro in 1957.⁶ The purpose was to discover the degree of development and the type of emphasis in curriculum laboratories in colleges of teacher education, and to ascertain possible future trends.

Flandro found that in colleges of teacher education in the United States there were laboratories which conducted curriculum study and revision along with the customary provision of curricular materials. Some of the tentative criteria as first formulated in the Church study were based on Flandro's findings concerning the roles and functions of such curriculum laboratories—their organization, administration, and staffing—and facilities and resources provided.

Flandro recommended that a study be made to develop evaluative criteria for curriculum laboratories. His investigation sought information concerning the basic functions of concern to curriculum laboratories.

⁴ Drag, *op. cit.*, p. ii.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

⁶ Royce P. Flandro, “Curriculum Laboratories in Colleges of Teacher Education.” Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Indiana University, Bloomington, 1957.

John G. Church developed criteria for the evaluation of curriculum laboratories in a study completed in 1957.⁷ He drew upon Flandro's functions to develop criteria. He also drew upon other studies for criteria. The criteria were sent to curriculum laboratory directors and leaders to criticize. They were revised and sent out again and again. They were then applied to curriculum laboratories in teacher education institutions and to one in a county schools office. It was found that when different persons applied the criteria to a curriculum laboratory, they obtained the same ratings.

In 1955 the director of the Curriculum Center at the University of Oklahoma wrote to 48 state universities and 60 colleges requesting data concerning curriculum laboratories.⁸ The investigation resulted in quantitative data concerning titles, time devoted to laboratories, staff, hours open, space, and types of materials. This information suggested additional criteria for evaluation of curriculum laboratories.

A study was conducted through the Curriculum Center of the University of Connecticut "to determine the facilities and practices that make the materials of a curriculum laboratory useful to those who are concerned with curriculum development and implementation."⁹ Data were analyzed under the following headings: materials (types, quantities, periodicals, preparation of bulletins); facilities and budget (shelving, number of rooms, types of rooms, budget, plans for improvement); utilization (circulation, publicity, cooperation, number using laboratories); and summary and conclusions (concerning materials, facilities, and utilization).

At St. Louis University, Sister Mary Clea Zembrodt conducted a study embracing the following purposes: (a) to determine the degree of need for a curriculum labora-

tory in St. Louis University; (b) to decide which materials should be included; and (c) to create a plan for developing a curriculum laboratory and collecting, classifying, and housing materials.¹⁰

Included in Zembrodt's study were explanations of (a) specific types of materials to be included in a curriculum laboratory, and (b) procedures to be used in selection of materials. Criteria were developed in the Church study which were based on her descriptions of materials and of selection procedures.

The definition of "curriculum laboratory" in this article was supported by a definition in an investigation conducted by MacWilliam.¹¹ She stated that the purpose of the materials and facilities of a curriculum laboratory was curriculum construction or study; also, a curriculum laboratory incorporated physical facilities and material and human resources. Her listing of functions of curriculum laboratories¹² was useful in formulating criteria in the Church study concerned with organization and management, policies for users, and activities.

Olson¹³ found as significant the problem of the administrative place of the curriculum laboratory in the organization of the institution in which the laboratory is located.

A study was made by Spitzer "to attempt to improve understanding of how the curriculum library serves and facilitates ongoing curriculum development."¹⁴ This study described the library services of the curriculum

¹⁰ Sister Mary Clea Zembrodt. "A Plan for the Development of a Curriculum Laboratory at St. Louis University Based on Teachers' Needs." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, St. Louis University, 1944. p. 382.

¹¹ Mary I. MacWilliam. "A Survey of Curriculum Laboratory Practices in Institutions of Higher Learning." Master's seminar study, University of California, Berkeley, 1947.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹³ Emily Ione Olson. "Teaching Aids Library: Organization of Materials." Unpublished master's thesis, Stanford University, Stanford, California, 1952.

¹⁴ Lillian K. Spitzer. "The Function of a Curriculum Library in a County-wide Program of Curriculum Development." Unpublished master's thesis, San Diego State College, San Diego, California, 1955. p. 1.

⁷ Church, *op. cit.*

⁸ Murray G. Phillips. "Curriculum Center Questionnaire." Curriculum Center, College of Education, University of Oklahoma, Norman, 1956.

⁹ University of Connecticut School of Education, Curriculum Center. *The Material Resources of Curriculum Laboratories*, Curriculum Bulletin No. 1. Storrs: University of Connecticut, 1951. p. 37.

laboratory in the San Diego County Schools. The Spitzer study suggested the adaptation of organizational procedures to the types of materials used in curriculum construction.

Marian Lucia James conducted a doctoral study which provided a comprehensive review of the literature in the field up to 1963 and the most recent study of curriculum laboratories in teacher education institutions throughout the nation.¹⁵

In 1936-37 state departments of education and other organizations were surveyed by Bernice E. Leary¹⁶ to identify special divisions or departments whose principal function was curriculum making and to determine what activities they carried on and what resources were available for their use.

Helen Mae Arnett analyzed the factors which made elementary and secondary level instructional materials accessible for students in Ohio teacher education institutions.¹⁷ She reported meritorious practices which could be emulated to effect better organization of these instructional materials. Forty-five different types of instructional materials were available. Most used, in this order, were: textbooks, curriculum guides, materials supplementing textbooks, units, and trade books. The curriculum laboratories were open an average of 51 hours per

week. She suggested that a study should be conducted applying the criteria developed by Church to the "best" curriculum laboratories in the United States.

As functions of curriculum laboratories continue to change, new research will need to be conducted. To keep posted on new research in this field, one can read issues of the *California Curriculum Newsletter* which is sent to the office of each state superintendent of public instruction and to many curriculum laboratories.

Not reviewed here are articles which have appeared in periodical literature on curriculum laboratories. The earliest published article on the curriculum laboratory as such was written in 1932 by Henry Harap.¹⁸ He described it as a place which contains all the "raw materials" needed in curriculum building. The "laboratory is to classroom practice what the architectural office is to the finished structure." It is interesting to note that this earliest article and a most recent article were in state education department publications. The recent article concerned the work of a curriculum laboratory under a new title, a "Bureau of Reference Services," in preparing abstracts to be included in the U.S. Office of Education Educational Resources Information Center system.¹⁹

Curriculum laboratories, sometimes under different names, will continue to serve as key sources of curriculum and instructional information. □

¹⁵ M. L. James. "The Curriculum Laboratory in Teacher Education Institutions: Its Essential Characteristics." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Connecticut, Storrs, 1963.

¹⁶ B. E. Leary. "Curriculum Laboratories and Divisions, Their Organization and Functions in State Departments of Education, City School Systems, and Institutions of Higher Education." U.S. Office of Education, Bulletin 1938, No. 7, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1938.

¹⁷ Arnett, *op. cit.*

¹⁸ H. Harap. "The Curriculum Laboratory." *New York State Education* 19: 634; April 1932. New York Education Department, Albany.

¹⁹ J. G. Church. "A Working Model for Curriculum Information Services." *California Curriculum Newsletter* 12: 1-3; June 1968. California State Department of Education, Sacramento.

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