

Materials for Black Learners

JAMES B. BOYER *

EFFECTIVE instruction in elementary and secondary schools requires the use of varied approaches, selected materials, and consumption of adequate research. Only through such factors can we maintain the standards which we have set for American education. There are other concerns, to be sure, which must be included in a more effective instructional program, but recent years have demanded a more realistic program of instruction for learners from minority groups, particularly for black learners. At every level, those persons responsible for directing and coordinating the curriculum in the schools have turned their attention to the use of curricular materials which include minority groups as a move toward the goal of enabling greater academic achievement.

In this context, curricular materials are those visual and/or audio items which are incorporated into the interactive phase of the instructional act to increase clarity and to enhance achievement. Many curricular materials until recently were quite negative in their effect on black learners because black people were consistently excluded from textbooks, instructional films, filmstrips, educational television, and other supplementary materials.

With the thrust of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's, and other factors affecting the curriculum, has come an avalanche of materials from publishers, educational researchers, and producers which emphasized the position, interests, needs, and

history of the black American. Called by many names, these materials are often categorized by suggested instructional levels, or by their proposed suitability for use with minority group children.

What Is Relevant?

With few exceptions, the materials are less authentic than their topics and brochures imply and, for this reason, the selection process must be carefully executed. What is appropriate? What is most relevant? How does a principal, teacher, curriculum assistant, or supervisor choose those items which most enhance the learning process? Answers to these questions are becoming more difficult with each day. One of the reasons is that *all* black learners are not equally helped with the use of the same kinds of materials. Second, a teacher's use of the materials depends considerably upon the philosophical and attitudinal bases from which he plans, presents, and evaluates instruction.

This consideration, then, becomes the most significant element of the process. More important than the nature or the extent of the curricular materials selected is the philosophical base from which the teacher instructs black learners. Irrespective of the teacher's racial or ethnic background, selec-

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tion and use of specialized materials for predominately black learners must be accomplished with (a) sincere belief in the dignity and worth of black pupils as individuals and as learners, and (b) instructional behavior which communicates this belief in daily interaction with the learners.

In summary, then, the selection of materials is a *massive* process only because of the growing availability of audio and visual materials on black people in every phase of American life. It is a *significant* process because the use must suggest, in a variety of unique ways, that black students are interested, honest, and capable learners. The most appropriate materials are those which continue to *build the learner's self-concept* and, at the same time, allow him some freedom of self-expression in the utilization process. Because school is generally thought to be an expression of society at large, curricular materials for black learners must also share some resemblance to society.

The most relevant materials are those which communicate in their content that (a) black people are respectable, contributing citizens in varied endeavors; and (b) black people are *real human beings* capable of love, hate, fear, disappointment, anger, success, and achievement whether they are pictured in the ghetto, in the classroom, in suburbia, or in the rural corners of America.

Perhaps the most damaging curricular materials are those which, by their content, continue to dehumanize black Americans in politics, education, the creative arts, economics, and business. Selectors of curricular materials for black learners must learn and incorporate the "heroes" of the learners into the instructional planning. The production of curricular materials must seek higher levels of authenticity and must reflect all classes and sub-classes of black people—not just the "glamorously poor" alternated with internationally-known issues and famous personalities.

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