

The Resources, the Decisions

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IF WE were to itemize how much of 20th century technology and knowledge are present in our schools, we might realize that in large part we are existing in the previous century. We have not really begun to tap the products and insights of modern times; we are not utilizing to full efficiency the resources that are now available.

One can advance numerous reasons for our limited use of resources. Primary is the fact that we in education have defined "resources" too narrowly as consisting of textbooks, films, filmstrips, records, maps, and transparencies. We also have conceived only limited use of the resources identified. Our students experience resources in ways similar to students of a half-century ago. Yet some change is occurring.

What Are the Resources?

Defined broadly, resources are sources of supply or support. They provide means for accomplishing some task and supporting some action. Resources are all those variables that can assist us in making education productive.

One can organize resources into myriad categories: material resources, environmental resources, procedural resources, person resources, money resources, and knowledge resources.

● *Material resources* are perhaps the most commonly known: textbooks, supplemental books, maps, pictures, films, filmstrips, audio and video tapes, slides. These are recognized as common instructional resources. However, we still are confronted with the challenge of employing these creatively in the school situation.

● *Environmental resources* can refer to the environment both outside and inside the school. Most American schools occasionally use their communities as resources for field trips and independent investigations. Yet the majority of schools in America do not use their school environments in ways much different from those of a half-century ago. Certainly, we have some open space schools, but these are not in the majority. Neither are many of these open space schools capable of altering at will their spacial characteristics to meet changing student needs and demands.

● *Procedural resources or tools* for decision making are expanding for our use. Here educators are beginning to make increasing use of management techniques. They are identifying strategies for analyzing the increasing numbers of resources and making judgments as to their educational contributions and how they should or could be introduced into and utilized in the educational system. Educators are increasing their use

of models to guide them in coordinating the total educational effort. These models are resources with great potential.

● In the past, *person resources* primarily have been individuals in the community who expressed willingness to speak to a class on some special topic. Today, schools are commencing to view consultants from numerous fields as valuable resources. Individuals from the colleges, and not just colleges of education, are providing advice and guidance to educators in decisions relating to effective management of the school system as well as to effective use of resources and content in the classrooms. Professional consultants can furnish expert assistance to assure that schools effectively involve students in their learning. Even though schools are initiating increasing use of consultants, such use is still sparse when compared to that by industry.

Schools are coming to see that person resources exist within their own ranks. However, most schools are hampered by schedules and rigid roles in fully utilizing members of their professional team possessing particular expertise.

Regarding the person resource, school people need to realize that the greatest resource available is man's mind. This is the resource that will generate effective and innovative uses of the other resources. As professionals, we need to allow ourselves sufficient time to conceptualize our resource utilization. We need to schedule time to research the use of resources to increase our perceptions and understandings regarding the productive use of such resources in the schools. Inventiveness takes time.

● The importance of *money resources* is evident. However, schools often consider only the initial cost of resources and accept the idea that they cannot afford them. More careful analysis of potential pupil use might provide a different perspective of expense. Besides ruminating money's availability, we need to consider it in relation with the other resources mentioned. The high price of some resources can be justified if we educators conceive of innovative uses. How many

ways is the film currently used in schools, other than presenting it to the entire class for viewing and discussing? Certainly we can be more inventive in such utilization.

● A final resource is that of *knowledge*. The immense realm of professional knowledge relates to both education and the rest of man's world. With the knowledge explosion, this resource is doubling about twice per decade. We need to devise means of effectively processing this knowledge to reduce the gap between discovery and new utilization in the school. If knowledge doubles every five or fewer years, school people cannot take ten to twenty years to process such learning within our system.

The Decisions

A listing of general categories of resources is unproductive unless one considers the types of decisions required for effective use of such resources. Utilization requires a mind-set that will recognize common resources, conceptualize uncommon use of the common resources, generate uncommon resources for unique and common student needs, and devise highly creative ways of analyzing and introducing resources into the schools.

Effective decision making relates to the leadership factor. Decisions will include collecting resources, evaluating them, and disseminating information about instructional resources. Decision making is involved in the use of consultants; in the use of monies, both state and federal; and in the use of resource persons from the community.

How does one involve himself in decision-making procedures? Most educators are unfamiliar with general procedures concerning the total school system. Most deal only with materials in their own classroom. Directors of the learning resource centers do engage in some global decision making; but more individuals need involvement, and procedures for involving them need formulation. We need to provide individuals selected for participation with the necessary skills for effective group action.

Decision making, whether in general or relating in particular to the use of resources, requires time. Most school system organizations do not provide adequate time for decision making relating to resources and resource use. Educators are not going to conceive innovative and far-reaching decisions at 4 p.m. after five hours of teaching. Also, they are not going to generate effective decisions if the time provided for the task is only three days per year.

Of course, when adequate time is provided, we need effective avenues of action for the making of decisions. We need to have generated models to guide particular decisions. We also need models to enable us to analyze the bases for our decisions. The steps for considering the manifold types of resources need to be carefully and clearly outlined.

Identifying the procedural steps, the

persons to involve, the avenues of activity is not the complete picture. What does one decide regarding a particular resource other than our need for it and the availability of purchase money? Decisions about resources need to consider feasibility, desirability, usability, and efficaciousness.

- Are the resources under consideration *feasible* in terms of having qualified persons available to use them? Are the resources feasible in terms of time necessary for their use? Are they feasible in terms of the space required for their employment? Are they feasible in terms of cost in relation to other resources and experiences that are available?

- Decisions relating to *desirability* reflect whether students, teachers, and the community feel the material or resource is crucial to the success of the program. The use of video tape for closed circuit TV in the

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school may be feasible in terms of money, time, and teacher expertise, but may not be desirable in terms of community reaction.

● *Usability* needs to be analyzed. Can the resource be used by the majority of students? Can most teachers effectively supplement their teaching strategies with the resource? Is the wearing factor of the resource good? Will it stand up to repeated use? This is perhaps a mundane type of factor to consider; nevertheless, it is realistic, and educators need to make decisions relating to potential use.

● *Efficaciousness*, as I use the term, refers to the resource's potential to produce desired effects: more knowledgeable teacher decision making, student interaction, student learning. Is this resource the most effective one for enabling the student to gain particular understandings or to apply certain skills? Will this resource provide students insights that could not be gained with the use of some other resource? Will this resource provide higher student motivation than some other resource? Will the resource trigger active student learning? Will this resource provide teachers with skills and perceptions to facilitate effective management and utilization of resources?

Persons making these decisions need to support their ranking of a particular resource as highly feasible. They need to support the efficaciousness of a certain resource to engage students in their learning.

Appropriate Mind-Set

The use of resources and the decisions generated depend upon our awareness of the current scene. Just how "tuned" into the 20th century are we? We need to be acutely aware of these "ages" of technology and knowledge explosions and their many possibilities for contributing dynamic resources for education.

Along with this awareness, we need to encourage a willingness to experiment, to search, to create, and to utilize innovative resources. We need to deliberate how we can

use person resources, material resources, environment resources, procedure resources, money resources, and knowledge resources to create "the electric environment" in which energy can provide a student with opportunities for effective interfaces with his world.

We need to synthesize novel ways of molding current resources into unusual and unusually productive combinations. We need to experiment with the balance of persons, media types, environmental situations. We need to allow students to monitor, control, and experiment with combinations of resource types to determine those capable of advancing their learning.

Questions

Editorials are to present opinions and to develop reader receptivity to theme articles. My basic thrust has been to provide some broad definitions of resources and to indicate some general guidelines relating to decisions. In addition, I have identified some of the decisions that may be necessary regarding resource use.

Editorials, as I view them, also are to trigger reactions, not necessarily agreement. However, I believe most educators would agree that the schools are not making full use of the resources currently available. How many schools have "wet" carrels for students at all levels of education? How many schools have students in dialogue with computers? How many schools have resource persons such as poets or mathematicians in residence or on constant call? How many schools employ consultants from the business and university communities on a regular basis? How many schools use flexible architectural designs with high adaptability? How many schools are employing "air" tents to house various student interactions?

We educators must have "both feet" in the 20th century; we also need to have our heads in the 21st century.

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