Collecting, Evaluating, Disseminating

Information About Instructional Resources

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A MODERN instructional program necessitates the use of comprehensive instructional resources. Such a breadth of knowledge, a variety of skills, and a diversity of attitudes exists that no one source of information will suffice. The standard textbook is being relegated to a secondary position as teachers and curriculum specialists begin to advocate more nonbook materials (for example, teaching machines and programmed materials, motion picture films, 8mm single concept films, video tapes, audio tapes, recordings).

Instructional resources include everything from printed materials, such as textbooks; to nonbook resources, such as the examples listed; plus facilities (space), time, and human resources. All of these can be found within the walls of a school plus outside the walls, in the community. To facilitate optimum use, there must be continuous effort to acquaint curriculum leaders with the techniques for gathering, assessing, and sharing information concerning these resources.

Data Collection

Instructional resources are where you find them. As simple as that sounds, it is true. The key is to remain alert so that they may be identified—wherever one may be. Following are examples of how resources may be located:

By reading widely. One can keep abreast of the newest techniques and materials by reading magazines, professional journals, newspapers, bulletins, and other types of literature.

By contacting commercial publishers. Publishers will send catalogs and brochures of educational information and will add your name to their mailing list for additional information as it becomes available.

By participating in professional organizations, meetings, and conventions. By doing so, one not only receives professional publications but also communicates with different individuals. Probably in no place else can as complete, up-to-date information be obtained as from a national meeting such as that of ASCD or AERA where innovative practices are discussed and new techniques demonstrated. However, this does not preclude the wealth of information available in

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local and state meetings, where continued personal interaction is possible with those who are using or have used specific resources.

By checking information clearinghouses. One example is the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC). ERIC acquires, abstracts, indexes, stores, retrieves, and disseminates nationally information concerning research-related developments. Many times ERIC will have information on developments that have not been published elsewhere.

By surveying individuals or groups. Follow-up studies of matriculated students and community surveys are excellent methods of obtaining information about instructional needs and resources. Follow-up surveys of students serve as guides for program evaluation and course revision, and community surveys can not only define needs but also place at one's fingertips a myriad of virtually untapped resources including people, materials, and real life laboratories. For example, this author once conducted such a survey of employers of office workers for the purpose of evaluating instructional resources being used. Not only was this accomplished, but reactions by the respondents clearly suggested needs for instructional resources not then in use.

Evaluation

Once information has been obtained, how are decisions made about its use? Scriven said evaluation is essentially the same "whether we are trying to evaluate coffee machines or teaching machines, plans for a house or plans for a curriculum." [1] There are always certain basic questions to be asked. For instructional resources, they may be stated as follows:

1. What does the resource do?

2. Does it aid in the achievement of an instructional goal or objective?

3. How well does it perform?

4. Does it perform better than a present resource?

5. Is it worth the cost?

Though these are the basic questions for evaluating a resource, a special project or class might add its own criteria. For example, the FAIS Project [2] asked the following additional questions about materials previewed for possible use in that program:

1. Are the many occupational groups represented?

2. Are people presented in nonstereotyped roles; for example, is the mother always a housewife and the father always a busy executive?

Evaluation of resources should place emphasis upon the person with whom the information is intended to be used and for what purpose, rather than on the medium. However, it is very difficult to evaluate resources for other individuals to use. Teaching is an art. Two teachers may not utilize a resource in the same way, nor may a teacher use a resource in the same way twice. Therefore, there are important limits on the generalizability of findings when one person evaluates a resource for another. Our experience in the FAIS Project certainly bears this out. Materials that the FAIS staff previewed and developed worked effectively with some teachers and failed with others.

The previously listed questions are not the only criteria for evaluation. The final criterion is the extent to which the information is made available and used by those who can benefit from it.

Dissemination

Two questions arise here: (a) how to organize the information in such a way as to give it the proper visibility and make it easy to disseminate; and (b) how to house the information so it becomes an integral part of the educational program.

[1] Michael Scriven. "The Methodology of Evaluation." In: Ralph W. Tyler, Robert M. Gagné, and Michael Scriven, editors. *Perspectives of Curriculum Evaluation.* Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, 1967. p. 40.

The first question will be answered by way of example. In 1970, the University of Florida Chapter of the Society of the Sigma Xi prepared a *Scientific Resources Directory* —a list of scientists who were willing to help local school teachers with their science classes.

Volunteer scientists chose one or more of the following five ways to participate:

1. Present lectures and demonstrations

2. Meet with counselors and student groups for career counseling

3. Provide part-time scientific work when possible

4. Serve as advisor to science clubs

5. Serve as project consultants for scientific groups.

These individuals' names were then indexed by department or college (for example, Forestry), by research subject (for example, anatomy and chemistry of fruit setting), and alphabetically by last names. Telephone numbers and campus addresses were listed for each participant.

The second question concerning the housing of information about instructional resources is critical. Unless the information is readily accessible for use according to the when and how of the user's needs, it is not likely to become an integral part of the edu-cational program. For example, if teachers are going to use it with their students, it should be located in the classroom. If counselors will be the primary users, it should be located in the counselor's office. If it is primarily for use by individuals at their own leisure, then the library or some other central facility should become the major dissemination point.

The mere existence of instructional resources and the cataloging of information about them is not enough to ensure their use. A number of factors might interfere. One of the major obstacles in community resource utilization is time—time to contact the person or organization, actual classroom time, and then the necessary follow-up.

Also, teachers are not always at ease calling on a stranger who may be considerably above or below their own educational or social levels. They may frequently find it difficult to communicate with these people (for example, a noted scientist). Further, these outside people may have little awareness of how to approach youth in a way so that learning will occur. However, regardless of the resource, book or nonbook, it must be used judiciously and selectively and directed toward the accomplishment of worthy learning objectives if its full potential is to be realized. □