

# Developing a Curriculum Inquiry Center

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**T**HE media materials center of the Teacher Education Laboratory in the Graduate School of Education at the University of California, Los Angeles, serves several purposes: (a) It houses curricula and materials for nursery, elementary, and secondary schools. (b) It makes a collection of materials available to students at various stages of their careers. (c) It provides services such as hardware for use in college classes and in the scheduling and showing of audio-visual materials for professors.

Yet it also serves a more distinctive purpose: *it helps to facilitate inquiry into curriculum*. This is the prime purpose of the UCLA media materials center and the one which we believe makes it unique. Because of this uniqueness, it has been named the Curriculum Inquiry Center.

## Services Provided by Center

The Curriculum Inquiry Center, which is considered to be a support system for the Graduate School of Education, has a collection of learning materials for preschool through secondary school levels. The collection includes materials in all areas in which teachers are prepared in the Teacher Edu-

cation Laboratory. Learning materials, for example, are to be found in all the standard curricular areas of the elementary and secondary school as well as some of the newer areas such as astronomy, Black and Chicano studies, ecology, guidance, space study, oceanography, and values.

The CIC<sup>1</sup> is also a depository for all adopted books in California. All texts on the list of adopted books for grades K-12 in all subject areas are housed at the center.

Hardware which is needed for using the learning materials kept in the center is available. Scheduling and showing of films and other media for the faculty of the Graduate School of Education are also coordinated from the center.

The center houses a comprehensive set of criteria which has been developed for evaluating various types of products and guides. An extensive set of publisher and distributor catalogs is maintained so that the users of the center can readily refer to them to obtain information about recent products

<sup>1</sup> Curriculum Inquiry Center.

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on the market. Publishers are also invited to display their latest products at the center.

## Purpose of the Center

The purpose that makes CIC unique is an educative one: to facilitate inquiry into curriculum. Inquiry into curriculum can mean a variety of things to different people. The center attempts to facilitate inquiry into curriculum by encouraging users to become knowledgeable and to raise questions about educational materials and the criteria that have been developed to evaluate them.

The instructional materials market reflects the explosion of knowledge. Not only have the more traditional curriculum areas, such as reading and arithmetic, changed in what materials are available, but areas new to the curriculum have been introduced: economics, anthropology, and human relations in the elementary school; and oceanography, communication skills, and consumerism in the high schools. New concepts, new media

to use in communicating with and instructing students, and new instructional strategies have greatly expanded what may be included in the curriculum.

Some of the currently available materials have been carefully evaluated, by the developers, for learning impact upon students; others apparently have not been evaluated at all. Thus, some programs can be used with considerable confidence about what students will learn; others would have to be used without any confidence in what might be learned as a result of using a specific program.

This array of materials places a considerable burden upon those who have to purchase and use curriculum and instructional materials with students. Educators with these responsibilities could benefit from a center designed to assist them in inquiring into curriculum and instructional materials.

One way in which the center facilitates inquiry into curriculum is to have the user become aware of what materials are on the

market. This aspect of inquiry directs the operation of the center in several areas. Through our representative sample of learning materials, educators may become informed about the array of learning materials from which they may choose. Publisher and distributor catalogs also keep educators aware of available materials. If the user of the center cannot find specific learning materials, he can turn to the catalogs to locate them or to determine if materials in the area in which he is interested exist on the commercial market today.

Publishers and distributors may also display their most current materials; these displays remain at the center for a limited time.

A second way in which the CIC facilitates inquiry into curriculum is to make available all the existing criteria by which learning materials and curriculum guides can be evaluated. The user is encouraged to study the criteria and then to apply an appropriate set to any learning materials he is considering. A variety of sets of criteria exists today for judging learning materials. Since there is little agreement as yet among scholars in the field of curriculum as to the form and substance these criteria should have, the center maintains copies of all that have been developed.<sup>2</sup>

The personnel of the CIC consider the

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of how one set of these criteria might be applied, see: M. Frances Klein and Louise L. Tyler. "Curriculum Boon or Bane." *Elementary School Journal* 72: 225-29; February 1972.

providing of criteria to be a very critical aspect of facilitating curriculum inquiry in these days of proliferation of learning materials, accountability demands on the teacher, and decentralization of authority in schools. Decentralization frees money for, and places the responsibility upon, each faculty to buy learning materials at the local school level, rather than through district or statewide purchases. If teachers are to be held accountable for student learning, then the selection of learning materials must be made carefully and rationally, with a full knowledge of what students may and may not accomplish with the materials. The published criteria can play a significant role in helping to meet effectively these current conditions and issues in education. The center strongly encourages users to apply existing criteria, to modify them as usage demands, and to create new ones as they are needed.

Third, the staff facilitates inquiry into curriculum by disseminating information. This is done through a learning module and published reviews of materials. The module consists of a sound filmstrip directed primarily toward classroom teachers. It is designed to assist them in evaluating learning materials which they may be considering for purchase. A publication is distributed from the center periodically which critiques various learning programs. Other publications which review materials are also available in the center, such as *The Social Science Consortium Data Book*, current issues of *Social Education*, and issues of the *Curriculum Advisory Service*.

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**Charles M. Galloway**, "Personalized Teaching for Individualized Learning," 1973. 50 min. **\$6.00.**

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**Neil V. Sullivan**, "Forces Affecting Educational Decisions," 1973. 50 min. **\$6.00.**

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## Criteria for Selection of Materials

In order to fulfill our purpose of facilitating inquiry into curriculum, housing materials, and providing service to the Graduate School of Education, learning materials are purchased with several criteria in mind: relevancy, currency, breadth, and representativeness.

*Relevancy:* Relevancy is considered in two different aspects: social concerns and curricular trends. Schools need materials that reflect the cultural pluralism of their community, nation, and world. The CIC staff thus purchases materials on Black, Chicano, and Indian history as well as on Asian and African cultures. Materials are also purchased which deal with problems of urban areas, social unrest, and human interaction.

Curriculum is not a static field. New courses and topics are constantly being added to make school curricula more relevant to student and societal needs. The CIC staff purchases materials with high relevancy according to curriculum trends. For example, products attempting to develop productive thinking, products dealing with international education or a mankind perspective, products based on interdisciplinary studies such as ecology, and materials designed to foster inquiry skills are purchased.

*Currency:* This criterion means that, given the same kind of materials, those with later publication dates are selected.

*Breadth:* The application of the breadth criterion requires that materials be purchased from as many different curricular areas as are represented in elementary and secondary schools. Selected materials at the preschool level are also purchased for the collection, since preschool education is rapidly becoming a concern of public schools.

*Representativeness:* Finally, the criterion of representativeness requires that examples of the various types of learning materials which are currently on the market be purchased. Thus, multimedia kits, study prints, filmstrips, sound filmstrips, cassettes, films, film loops, and transparencies as well as books are in the collection. □

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