

Outside Curriculum Resources

Franklin P. Morley

The role of an outside resource is to be an *outside resource*—something different, something better, something more effective, something more powerful, something more broadly based, something more plentiful, something more research-validated, something more representative of the larger world than an inside resource.

Philosophical Decision Making

Philosophically, one can believe that there are no outside curriculum resources that are different from or better than those which are available within the school system. If you are one who so believes, then psychologically, you would choose *not* to use outside resources.

On the other hand, you will choose to use and will in fact use outside resources effectively if you *really* believe that such resources bring to you, your staff, your students, and their parents something different from and better than that which anyone on the inside can generate.

Recently, when I checked with some of my colleagues in the Metropolitan St. Louis schools about the use of outside resources, I found a full range of attitudes and practices existing. One instructional supervisor in an outlying, small town said, "We do not use other agencies." He then went on to describe how a project on the individualization of math instruction was developed by his own staff through the "sharing of ideas and materials at and across grade levels."

Somewhat at the other extreme, an administrator in charge of instruction for a suburban district bordering on the city of St. Louis described a math development project in which outside agencies played a role in *six* of the seven phases of the project:

1. A citizen committee, using outside test score analysis, helped to make the needs assessment;

2. A teacher committee produced a systematic development of K-12 objectives in light of the needs assessment;

3. Contacts with a regional educational laboratory and with foundations helped to marshal the financial resources to enable staff and students to achieve objectives;

4. An outside agency supported the arrangement of a traveling specialist to work among the schools;

5. Math labs and other special materials produced by outside agencies were added to math centers in schools;

6. Outside resource people, along with local staff, conducted in-service training for teachers on the use of new methods and materials; and

7. An outside agency assisted local staff in both formative and summative evaluation of the whole project.

Interestingly enough, an elementary curriculum specialist in the St. Louis City Schools described a 1975 project, "Language Arts for Grades 4-8," in which, over a two-year period, the needs assessment, goal setting (within the citywide philosophy), program development, implementation, program support, and evaluation were all handled by an intricate network of curriculum committees and curriculum services. The important difference was that all of these groups appeared to have been composed of local district staff.

Undoubtedly, citizens and outside agencies other than curriculum division staff had some supportive roles at some points in the

above process. However, it would appear that a school system as large and as well established as that of St. Louis has sufficient personnel and technology to handle curriculum development without extensive use of outside agencies. Probably the resource the St. Louis system most often seeks and secures from outside agencies is additional money.

Pattern in St. Louis

The pattern that emerges from my small survey is something like this:

- Small town school systems are most comfortable in making the most of their own resources and avoiding entanglements with outside agencies.

- Suburban districts draw heavily upon a variety of educational, governmental, commercial, and publicly supported community institutions that have special expertise and/or social power capable of adding an extra effectiveness and broader relevance to the instructional programs offered to youngsters and adults.

- Large city school systems are well tooled, self-directed machines that tackle a horrendous job in the midst of powerful and unpredictable forces. Such systems deliver district-designed, carefully targeted daily dosages of education and training to masses of changing populations exhibiting very different reactions, from extremely loyal pro-school crusades to vindictive, anti-school guerrilla warfare both inside and outside the school. Under such conditions, I would guess that city schools involve only those outside resources over which they can maintain sure-handed control by one means or another. They have no need of cultivating another unpredictable element in what is already an erratic milieu.

Superiority of Local Resources

Schools are in the business of fostering individual developmental growth. Like the sunshine and the rain, resources for developmental growth are best when they are as everlasting and unconditional as possible.

Using these two criteria for judging the best kinds of outside agencies for assisting in curriculum development, we are led to conclude



What outside resources can best aid this child in his exploration and enrich his learning experiences? Photo: Joe Di Dio, National Education Association.

that those local resources that are constantly and openly accessible to students, staff, and parents would be most supportive of the developmental growth of these persons over their extended association with any given local school district.

What outside agencies are we talking about? Certainly, among others, we are talking about the homes in local neighborhoods; the local government and its municipal services; libraries, museums, and other nonprofit agencies; social services and clubs of the area; churches; private schools and colleges; as well as local business and industry, including all forms of mass communication, transportation, and recreation. As school staff members put their minds to the effective use of the broad spectrum of *local* resources available, they probably will add more richness, relevance, and reality to curriculum development than they can realize through the use of any other set of outside resources.

"Is That All There Is?"

Can a school district become all it should become, that is, can it foster the fullest individual developmental growth of its constituents by using only the resources available within its own boundaries?

There are philosophies and social forces operating today that lead some individuals to answer "yes" to the above question. However, many professional educators, myself included, believe that confining one's efforts to the use of local resources *only* would provide a too narrow, too traditional, too parochial context for

the fullest individual development of future adults.

From a *process* standpoint, one cannot argue against the active, broad involvement of students and staff in the use of local resources. But from a *content* standpoint, confinement to local resources might foster inflexibility, myopia, naïvety, and inexperience in our students—characteristics that would ill equip them for dealing with the challenges of life in their rapidly changing world.

How Much Exposure?

The central issue in curriculum development today is: How broad and varied an exposure to ideas, values, and customs do we want to include as part of the educational context in which youngsters will develop? Is not this the real issue in the controversies involving agencies such as those which produced *Man: A Course of Study* (MACOS) and *Biological Sciences Curriculum Study* (BSCS) materials? The April 1976 issue of *Scientific American* pointed out that:

From the professional perspective, designing a school curriculum is a technical enterprise that is best organized by experts, so that the curricula will provide the student with the best available information. From a local perspective, however, public education also transmits values and beliefs. Since such values and beliefs are very much family matters, parents must be involved. Clearly science education is no longer exempt from that perspective.¹

Mood of Caution Prevails

Like the old Vermonter who counseled the automobile tourists to choose their rut carefully, since they would "be in it for a long time," curriculum specialists seem to be saying to themselves, "Let us choose carefully the outside agencies with whom we associate so that we won't be sorry one or two years down the road."

If I sound confused, I am. The all out efforts in curriculum development during the 1960's produced many disappointments and left many of us confused and cautious about how to proceed. My honest feeling is that most of us are reflecting very soberly on the mistakes we appear to have made, in the hope that we can achieve sufficient insight to avoid repeating some of the same errors in the future.

This is a time of reassessing curriculum change. The local and national mood leads us to reassess priorities, consolidate gains, and—with a healthy skepticism—to reformulate a sounder, more direct means for bringing about improved student performance in our schools. This reassessment effort is evident in the actions of a diverse array of people, from the classroom teacher, the principal, and the central office specialist, to state departments of education and the National Institute of Education (NIE). In a recent report, NIE stated as one of its major findings that generally:

... people are *not* asking "Should curriculum development be done?" Instead, they believe that discussion and investigation should be addressed to the questions: "For what types of desired educational improvement is curriculum development most effective?"; "What forms can curriculum development take?"; "How should curriculum development be done?"; and "Who should be involved in curriculum development?"²

Alternative Arrangements

I can think of four categories of arrangements, each of which can be an effective use of outside resources.

1. We can contract for educational services in much the same way as many of us contract for the services of architects, lawyers, food caterers, and bus drivers. We do this because we have decided that we cannot competently and economically provide these services for ourselves. Thus, we obtain them in exchange for money.

2. We can join in a membership group that either buys or develops the special services we need. The Cooperating School Districts of the St. Louis area do this to support our educational television channel, our film library, and a computer service center. In this arrangement, a district must be ready to commit itself to

¹ Dorothy Nelkin. "The Science-Textbook Controversies." *Scientific American* 234(4):33-39; April 1976.

² National Institute of Education. *Current Issues, Problems, and Concerns in Curriculum Development*. Washington, D.C.: the Institute, 1976. p. 20. For information, write: Jon Schaffarzick, Chairman, NIE Curriculum Development Task Force, 1200 19th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20208.



Students at Lincoln Junior High in Belleville, Michigan, use resources available at their school's Media Center. Photo: Anitra Gordon.

cooperative, active participation both in the development and utilization of special resources.

3. We can use the work-study, off-campus type of arrangement by which we legitimize some remote, satellite station as an extension of the learning environment. There are career education programs, vocational training programs, and advanced college credit opportunities that fall into this category. Under these arrangements we delegate our educational role to someone else.

4. We can make collaborative arrangements with outside resources that provide mutual benefits for the parties involved. Some notable examples are collaborations between the city recreational department and the schools; between the YMCA's and the outdoor educational programs of the schools; between the universities and in-service education; or, more specifically, between such organizations as the state economic education council and the social studies departments of the schools.

Collaborative Use of Resources

Given the increasing scarcity of resources and the expanding populations throughout our nation, the best bet for any community these days is to improve the collaborative arrangements made by competing groups for the use of resources. Just this past year or so the Cultural Educators Roundtable of Metropolitan St. Louis was formed to do this for 14 cultural agencies in our community.

Franklin P. Morley is Assistant Superintendent for Instruction, School District of the City of Ladue, St. Louis, Missouri.

At a conference of the Midwest Region of the YMCA, I received the following guidelines for successful collaborative efforts:

Conditions for Entering into Any Collaborative Effort

1. *Insufficient Resources:* We lack certain resources that another party can supply.
2. *Optimizing Achievement:* We cannot get done what we want to get done *by ourselves*.
3. *Increasing Power:* We need more power and can find some way to utilize other power to get a larger part of our job done.

Conditions Necessary for Carrying Out a Collaborative Effort

- Jointly defined task
- Identification of abilities
- Specific time limits
- Identification of mutual cost
- Sanction by both agencies
- Linkage to other power sources
- Practical first steps focused on success.

Final Thoughts

The use of outside resource agencies is a high risk venture, probably a higher risk now than in the 1960's. In addition, there may be a tendency for schools to want to reduce the exposure of their students, staff, and curriculum to the influences of outside resources.

My advice to educators is: Be more cautious but do not become isolationists. Choose wisely among the alternative arrangements by which you can tap outside resources. In some arrangements all we risk is money. In others, we risk time, talent, and reputation as well.

Ecologically, economically, and educationally, I strongly urge the consideration of collaborative arrangements with like-minded agencies in local areas in order to provide direct, additional, positive impact on the developmental growth of students, staff, and curriculum.

Professionally, it is our responsibility to keep informed about and to use selectively the various resources of state and national educational agencies. For our own personal and professional growth, I also recommend that we maintain active participation, with our colleagues, in professional groups at the local, state, and national levels. [E]

Copyright © 1976 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.