

A Changing N.I.E.: New Leadership, A New Climate

Jon Schaffarzick and Gary Sykes

Shifts in funding priorities at the National Institute of Education may indicate significant changes in the types of activities N.I.E. will support in coming years. For example, less emphasis will be placed on curriculum development activities and more upon research and strengthening others' development capabilities and efforts.

An emerging shift in funding priorities at the National Institute of Education is likely to alter significantly the types of activities NIE will support in the years ahead. The particulars of this shift are not yet entirely clear, but signs of change are evident.

During most of its short life, NIE has devoted a sizeable share of its modest budget to curriculum development and related activities. Now, however, in response to both internal and external events, including the conclusion of several large-scale development projects that NIE inherited from other agencies and recent national controversies over the proper federal role in curriculum development, NIE is shifting its emphasis from sponsorship of full-scale curriculum development projects to support for basic and applied research and efforts to stimulate, facilitate, and coordinate the R&D work of other educational agencies. The clearest current indicators of this shift—a new Institute policy addressed to “instructional program improvement” and a complementary new policy on “fundamental research”—are reviewed below.¹ First, however, we should recount the factors and issues that have influenced this change.

NIE's Past Role in Curriculum Development

At its birth in 1972, NIE received as a legacy a prominent federal strategy for improving education: curriculum reform. This strategy originated in the late 1950s with the National Science Foundation's Course Content Improvement Program, which supported such development projects as the Biological Sciences Curriculum Study (BSCS), the Physical Science Study Committee (PSSC), CHEM Study, the Elementary Science Study (ESS), and the School Mathematics Study Group (SMSG).

The strategy spread to other federal agencies (for example, the Office of Education, which sponsored such programs as “Project Social Studies” and “Project English”) and became institutionalized with the creation of the Regional Educational Laboratories and R&D Centers in the mid-1960s. NIE inherited this strategy in the form of several large-scale development projects already underway at the Laboratories, the Centers, and other

¹ Copies of these two new policies may be obtained by writing to the National Council on Educational Research, Room 729, National Institute of Education, 1200 19th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20208.

institutions, including the University of Mid-America. These projects have yielded some notable programs, including Individually Guided Education,² Experience-Based Career Education,³ a variety of innovative mathematics and reading programs developed at SWRL⁴ and RBS⁵ among other places, and CEMREL's Aesthetic Education Program.⁶

Also resulting from this federal reform strategy has been a systematic approach to curriculum development, characterized by SWRL's Richard Schutz as "programmatic R&D"⁷ and featuring such arrangements and procedures as collaboration among subject matter specialists, researchers, and practitioners; extensive pilot-testing and field-based evaluation; inclusion of demonstration and dissemination activities; and support for training and implementation. Principal aims of this approach to educational reform have been to enhance product quality and to ensure the use of resulting programs in as many American classrooms as possible.

² Individually Guided Education (IGE) is a comprehensive school organization system, including curriculum components, which has been developed at the Wisconsin R&D Center for Cognitive Learning. For further information about this project, contact Dr. Richard Rossmiller, Wisconsin R&D Center for Cognitive Learning, 1025 West Johnson Street, Madison, 53706.

³ Experience-Based Career Education (EBCE) models have been developed at four Regional Laboratories. For details on these models and their implementation, contact: (a) Dr. Louis Maguire, Research for Better Schools, Suite 1700, 1700 Market Street, Philadelphia 19103; (b) Dr. Rex Hagans, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 710 S.W. Second Avenue, Portland, Oregon 97204; (c) Dr. Robert Peterson, Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, 1855 Folsom Street, San Francisco 94103; and (d) Dr. Harold Henderson, Appalachia Educational Laboratory, P.O. Box 1348, Charleston, West Virginia 25325.

⁴ For example, see the "Metropolitan Mathematics Program" or the "Communications Skills Program." For information, contact Dr. Richard Schutz, Director, Southwest Regional Laboratory, 4665 Lampson Avenue, Los Alamitos, California 90720.

⁵ For information about the "Systematic Progress in Reading and Literature Program," one of RBS's development projects, contact Dr. Louis Maguire, Research for Better Schools, Suite 1700, 1700 Market Street, Philadelphia 19103.

⁶ The Director of CEMREL's "Aesthetic Education

Whatever its merits, this strategy has been expensive. A relatively small number of projects have consumed the lion's share of the NIE budget, with development activities⁸ accounting for 72 percent of the total budget in Fiscal Year 1975, 58 percent in FY 1976, and 43 percent in FY 1977. The costs of "programmatic R&D" have turned out to be quite high, ranging from \$1.5 million to \$10 million per project.

As the figures indicate, NIE's allocations to development have gradually but steadily declined, with concomitant modest increases in support for research, dissemination, and policy-related activities. This decline reflects both the scheduled completion of the inherited development projects and the Institute's decision not to initiate much new full-scale development. With the exception of a handful of new projects, such as the Education and Work Group's⁹ "Career Awareness Through TV" and the extension of some inherited projects, NIE has started few large development efforts.

The appointment of NIE's new Director,

Program" is Dr. Stanley Madeja, CEMREL, Inc., 2130 59th Street, St. Louis 63139.

⁷ See: Richard Schutz. "Beyond Curriculum Development." NIE Curriculum Development Task Force. Unpublished paper. Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Education, November 1976.

⁸ The category entitled "development activities," in the definition that has been used by NSF, NIE, and other federal agencies in categorizing their funded projects, includes many activities beyond strict "curriculum development." Such activities include applied research, policy studies, evaluation, dissemination, and demonstration of specific products. In fact, almost the only activities excluded from this catch-all category are fundamental research and general demonstration, dissemination, and implementation projects.

⁹ The Education and Work Group is one of NIE's six program units. The other areas are Basic Skills, Educational Equity, Finance and Productivity, Dissemination and Resources, and School Capacity for Problem Solving. As this article was written, Dr. Graham and her deputy directors announced an intended reorganization that would reduce the number of program units while broadening the scope of each. If HEW approves the new plan, which now is being developed in greater detail, the new program titles will be Teaching and Learning, Educational Governance, and Dissemination and Research Services.

The Education and Work Group's "TV Career Awareness Project" is under the direction of Norton Wright, KCET, 4400 Sunset Drive, Los Angeles 90027.

Patricia Albjerg Graham, and other top level staff, along with the increased availability of funds for new initiatives, has occasioned a critical reexamination of the Institute's priorities. Actually, part of this reappraisal began prior to Dr. Graham's appointment, in response to increasing public concern over the nature and effects of recent federal support for curriculum development. Because such concerns have shaped and focused deliberations within NIE over the past year or two, an understanding of the emerging policy shift's genesis requires some familiarity with this broader climate of opinion.

Curriculum Reform and the Public Mood

Various research and evaluation results, articles in scholarly journals, shared experiences, and certain highly visible events over the past few years have surfaced a number of issues and views about the success and social significance of the past two decades of federal investment in curriculum reform. For example, the "textbook controversy" in Kanawha County, West Virginia; the debate waged in Congress and in numerous local communities over NSF's "Man: A Course of Study" (MACOS); and the Rand Corporation's studies of program implementation¹⁰ have all played a role in alerting policymakers to key points of variance. All told, the reviews have been mixed.

For many, the central questions have concerned the impacts of the federally-backed revision efforts. For example, some have argued that federal involvement has contributed to a "nationalization" or "homogenization" of the nation's curricula, while others have claimed that increased diversity—the provision of more alternatives from which to choose—has been the result. Likewise, many have charged that in chasing after federal "carrots"—in the form of training institutes, implementation support, grants for developing innovative programs, and the like—local teachers and administrators have contributed to the dilution of American education and to a fragmented curriculum that is partly responsible for the test score declines. Others have countered that federal curriculum reforms have led to long-overdue improvements in content and pedagogy and to badly-needed incorporation of advances in knowledge and technology.

Issues surrounding the reform movement's impact on participation, power, and decision-making also have been central to the debate. Some critics contend that federal intervention has produced an elite corps of "career curriculum innovators" with a strong self-interest in continuing to stoke the engines of curriculum reform. This elite, some worry, has collaborated with federal agencies to gain a considerable and illegitimate influence over the nation's curricula. Proponents of an active federal role, however, have argued that government projects have succeeded in enlisting the nation's leading scholars and technical experts, who traditionally have cared little about elementary and secondary education, in the vital job of continuously monitoring and improving the school's curricula. Furthermore, these supporters assert, the centralization of curriculum reform has improved quality control (through the involvement of "the best minds") and has prevented the wasteful duplication of effort inherent in innumerable state, district, and school level reform efforts.

These positions, of course, are caricatures, capturing the rhetoric but not the subtleties of the debates. What has been notable about these controversies, though, is the depth of feeling they have revealed. Involved here has been not simply a dispute among academics over the efficacy of a policy or program, or a conflict among competing parties protecting their own interests by invoking alternative conceptions of the public interest. Indeed, these have underlain the debate, but at the heart of the matter have been differences in fundamental convictions over issues of right, legitimacy, entitlement, and control in educational decision-making, and over the goals and purposes of education. These controversies have coincided roughly with NIE's own reappraisal of priorities and have occasioned an effort to ground NIE's curriculum development policy in a systematic, wide-ranging review of such fundamental educational issues.

The NIE Curriculum Development Task Force

In September 1975, NIE's policy-setting National Council on Educational Research (NCER)

¹⁰ Paul Berman, Milbrey McLaughlin, et al. *Federal Programs Supporting Educational Change*. Santa Monica, California: The Rand Corporation, 1975.

requested that the Director (then Harold L. Hodgkinson) establish a Curriculum Development Task Force. The Task Force's original charge was to organize focused, informed discussion of critical curriculum issues among representatives of all interested parties. Later, in the spring of 1976, NCER further requested the preparation of a clearer, more explicit set of guidelines to govern the Institute's development activities.

In consultation with the Council, the Task Force planned and conducted a series of activities that served to involve the many elements of the education community in an exchange of views and a discussion of policy options. NIE staff met with representatives of 37 professional and lay organizations, mailed "Guides for Public Discussion"¹¹ to a sample of members of 77 organizations, convened a national conference,¹² and sponsored four regional public meetings.¹³ The Task Force also reviewed pertinent literature and commissioned papers from 27 scholars, practitioners, experienced curriculum developers, and policy analysts.¹⁴ In early 1977, this work culminated in a report from the Director to NCER, summarizing the Task Force's findings, setting forth a series of policy options, and making policy recommendations.¹⁵

¹¹ A set of ten "Guides for Public Discussion" was developed for NIE by Henry M. Brickell of Policy Studies in Education, New York. These guides highlighted key NIE curriculum policy issues, summarized relevant background information, outlined alternative positions on each issue and arguments for and against each view, and provided "ballots" that could be used in registering policy advice to NIE.

¹² A report of NIE's Curriculum Development Conference, held November 17-19, 1976, in Washington, D.C., has been prepared by Nel Noddings. Copies are available from Jon Schaffarzick and Gary Sykes, Room 815, NIE, 1200 19th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20208.

¹³ The four regional public meetings were held in Philadelphia (organized by Research for Better Schools); Kansas City (organized by the Kansas City Metropolitan Community Colleges); Portland, Oregon (organized by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory); and San Francisco (organized by Far West Regional Laboratory for Educational Research and Development).

¹⁴ The Task Force commissioned three types of papers: (a) scholar's analyses of specified curriculum topics (authors: William Boyd, Larry Cuban, Marjorie

New Policies and New Postures

Following discussion and recommendation by its Program Committee, in March of 1977 the Council adopted a new NIE policy on "instructional program improvement."¹⁶ The new policy establishes equalization of educational opportunity—with specific reference to minorities, women, the non-English speaking, the poor, and the geographically isolated—as the primary purpose of NIE's instructional program improvement activities. This means that the bulk of NIE's support for "development" will be directed to the equalization of educational opportunity.

Additionally, the new policy establishes priorities among the Institute's possible roles in contributing to the improvement of instructional programs. (These priorities do not apply, of course, to NIE's work in other areas, such as basic research, general dissemination support, and policy analysis.) The priorities in instructional program improvement are: first, applied research; second, activities to strengthen, facilitate, and coordinate *others'* development efforts and capabilities; and third, "prototypic development" of new instructional programs. The "full-scale devel-

Gardner, Herbert Kliebard, Ralph Tyler, Tyll van Geel, and Decker Walker); (b) analyses of key federal curriculum policy issues (authors: Donald Barr, Paul Brandwein, Joseph M. Cronin, Thomas Green, and Jerrold R. Zacharias); and (c) reflections on "lessons" learned from experience by 15 distinguished curriculum developers and researchers. Copies of the papers' abstracts are available from Jon Schaffarzick and Gary Sykes at the address given earlier. Most of the papers will be published in a book scheduled to appear in mid-1978.

¹⁵ "NIE's Role in Curriculum Development: Findings, Policy Options, and Recommendations." Prepared by Jon Schaffarzick and Gary Sykes and submitted by Harold L. Hodgkinson to the National Council on Educational Research on February 8, 1977.

¹⁶ The term "instructional program improvement" replaced "curriculum development" in the new policy's title to indicate that the policy applies to *all* types of "development" of *all* types of materials *and* plans/programs for use in instruction and learning, but that it does not apply to basic research (defined in the policy as "conclusion-oriented systematic inquiry, intended primarily to contribute to knowledge").

opment"¹⁷ of new instructional programs—a fourth possible role, which has dominated NIE's past program improvement efforts—is allowable only when the Council and Director agree that the three higher priority activities are clearly insufficient to equalize educational opportunity. (Under some "exceptional circumstances" such as a Congressional directive, however, the Institute could

"In the face of pressing problems, Americans tend to demand instant panaceas that may be impossible to deliver. We need first to develop far greater understanding of educational phenomena before we can realistically attempt to improve practice."

sponsor full-scale development not clearly related to the equalization of educational opportunity.) The policy clearly directs the Institute to emphasize those activities least directly involved in the actual creation of new programs and materials, but does not prohibit absolutely activities that are more central to full-fledged "development."

In effect, then, the policy constrains NIE to respond to critical, national instructional needs in ways that are less directive, while timely and suited to the demands of the problems at hand. The policy thereby affirms the following conception of the central NIE role: to strengthen, through sponsorship of applied research and other R&D activities, the capacity of the educational system to produce and use needed instructional programs. NIE will become, in this conception, the agency of last resort in the actual production and distribution of curricular materials, but will actively sponsor a broad range of activities to stimulate and improve the "system's" curriculum development capabilities.

In a related move, NCER also commissioned an inquiry into issues of sponsorship for fundamental research.¹⁸ This report,¹⁹ prepared by a committee of prominent scientists and educators constituted in June 1976 by the National Academy of Sciences in cooperation with the National Academy of Education, strongly urged that NIE balance its applied and practice-oriented activities with more support for fundamental research. In September 1977, NCER adopted a policy that

essentially ratified this report's recommendations. The policy requires that NIE allocate no less than 20 percent of its budget to fundamental research by FY 1979, increasing to no less than 30 percent by FY 1985; that the Institute use grants to procure an important part of such research; that NIE seek the assistance of the research community in identifying research needs; that NIE report research results to the education community and support the utilization of those results to improve education; and that NIE recruit as a substantial proportion of its staff individuals who are knowledgeable about fundamental research, and who have ready access to and the respect of the research community.

The full implications of these complementary policies are not yet clear, but some general changes at NIE over the next few years are likely:

- NIE sponsorship of curriculum development activities will continue to decline, while support for fundamental research increases.
- The Institute will sponsor few "full-scale"

¹⁷NIE's four possible roles in contributing to the improvement of instructional program improvement are defined in the policy as follows: *Applied Research*:—"The conduct of decision-oriented systematic inquiry, the primary purpose of which is to improve educational practice"; *Efforts to Strengthen, Facilitate, or Coordinate Others' Work*:—"Attempts to enhance the abilities and performance of state, local, and private agencies in improving instructional programs through NIE sponsorship of such activities as creating and testing improved development procedures, providing information and analyses needed in development, assisting in the identification of problems and needs, and providing various incentives for the conduct of development"; *Prototypic Development*:—"Design and production, on a limited basis, of instructional programs developed only as far as necessary to determine effectiveness and to assist potential sponsors in deciding whether full-scale development is warranted"; *Full-Scale Development*:—"Complete design and production of instructional programs ready to be reproduced and disseminated for use in classrooms or other educational settings."

¹⁸In the second new NIE policy (on "fundamental research relevant to education"), "fundamental research" is defined as "disciplined inquiry whose purpose is to understand why and how education takes place. In fundamental research, the investigator is concerned primarily with gaining a fuller knowledge or understanding of the subject under study."

¹⁹National Academy of Sciences. *Fundamental Research and the Process of Education*. Sara Kiesler and Charles Turner, editors. Washington, D.C.: 1977.

development projects. In all but exceptional circumstances, full-scale development will be initiated only when essential to the equalization of educational opportunity.

- NIE will concentrate its development-related activities on the conduct and dissemination of applied research, and on efforts to strengthen others' development capabilities and to facilitate their work. Such activities might include creating and testing development procedures; the design of training programs for developers; assisting in the identification of needs, problems, and opportunities; supplying research syntheses; and other information useful to development efforts.

- In procuring research, NIE will make more use of grants and rely less heavily on requests for proposals (RFPs).

Why This Position Now?

The Curriculum Development Task Force's inquiry revealed little consensus among members of the educational community on such fundamental issues as the proper federal role in curriculum development or the effectiveness of curriculum reform as an educational improvement strategy. Several arguments ultimately emerged as most salient, however, in suggesting and justifying the emerging shift in NIE priorities. First, the National Academy of Science's report reiterated the long-term benefits of fundamental research, while pointing to the generally unimpressive results of short-term attacks on educational problems that are not grounded in a solid knowledge base.

In the face of pressing problems, Americans tend to demand instant panaceas that may be impossible to deliver. We need first to develop far greater understanding of educational phenomena before we can realistically attempt to improve practice. Empirical evidence from other fields²⁰ (for example, medicine and engineering) indicates that solutions to practical problems have frequently stemmed from the work of basic researchers. This indicates the need for a greater investment in fundamental research, and NIE is the federal agency whose mission is most directly related to sponsorship of educational research.

At the same time, critical continuing doubts about the legitimacy and effectiveness of large-

scale, centralized curriculum development warrant a moratorium on NIE sponsorship of such work. Particularly in areas where values necessarily play prominent roles (for example, social studies, social science, moral education and sex education), many perceive federal sponsorship of development, demonstration, dissemination, and teacher training activities as an illegitimate attempt to influence state and local control over the school curriculum in the service of certain elite values. This issue in particular has provoked deep resentment among many people, as well as Congressional concern that federal agencies cannot ignore with impunity.

Then, too, the expense of large-scale development projects concentrates a small budget, such as NIE's, on a relatively few projects. In the face of myriad problems and prospects, NIE intends to invest in a more diversified R&D "portfolio." Finally, the Rand studies of program implementation, to name but one prominent source, have cast doubt on the cost-effectiveness of centralized curriculum reform. Excepting some notable projects, many carefully-developed curricular innovations have failed to penetrate the classroom. In light of these challenges to curriculum reform and the results thus far of two decades of experience with this strategy, investment in applied research, facilitation activities, and some prototypic development seem most appropriate today.

As NIE assumes this new posture toward research and development, its staff and Council will be watching closely to assess the consequences. We will continue to solicit reactions from the educational community and to work closely with the members of this community to improve the quality of research and instructional program development, to optimize federal-state-local collaboration in education, and, ultimately, to improve both the quality and the equality of American education. [E]

²⁰ See, for example: J. Comroe and R. Dripps. "Scientific Bases for the Support of Biomedical Science." *Science* 192(9):105-11; 1976.

Jon Schaffarzick and Gary Sykes are both members of the Group on School Capacity for Problem Solving, National Institute of Education, Washington, D.C.

Copyright © 1978 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.