

Smith, and N. Filby, *School Class Size* (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1982).

Basals Evaluated

The Institute for Research on Teaching's Language Arts Project analyzed 1,959 selections in 34 basal reading textbooks to find out what contents students can learn from them. In analyzing the second-, third-, and fourth-grade textbooks, researchers focused on three types of content: subject matter (knowing something), functional (knowing how something works or how to do something), and ethos (knowing to do the right thing). They determined whether each basal selection offered stu-

dents an opportunity to learn substantive content in each of these three categories.

Only 57.1 percent of the selections contained subject matter content; 29.1 percent contained functional content; 12.3 percent contained ethos content. Only 4 percent of the selections contained content in all three categories, and only 16 percent contained content in more than one category.

Comparing publishers, Harcourt, Brace, and Jovanovich had the highest percentage of selections containing subject matter content (72.2 percent), and Ginn had the lowest (39.7 percent). Laidlaw had the highest percentage of

selections containing functional content (18.5 percent); Harcourt, Brace, and Jovanovich had the lowest percentages of selections containing functional content (13.8 percent) and ethos content (3.5 percent).

Such information is important to anyone involved in selecting reading textbooks. For more information see W. H. Schmidt and others, "Educational Content of Basal Texts: Implications for Comprehension Instruction" in *Comprehension Instruction: Perspectives and Suggestions*, ed. G. Duffy, L. Roehler, and J. Mason (New York: Longman, 1983).

Curriculum Trends: Mathematics

STEPHEN S. WILLOUGHBY

Home-Made Math Tests in Detroit and New York

Two of the nation's largest school systems are creating their own tests because leaders in those systems believe that problem solving and thinking should be central to a quality mathematics education, and they don't believe the available commercial test materials take problem solving seriously. Creating the tests is more difficult than buying them "off the shelves" but it may be the only way to get commercial test makers to move in directions advocated by most leaders in mathematics education.

Information regarding construction and use of these specially created tests may be obtained from Stewart Rankin, 308 School Center Building, 5057 Woodward Ave., Detroit, MI 48202, or Irwin Kaufman, 131 Livingston St., Brooklyn, NY 11201.

Math Texts Need More Than "Thumb Tests"

Research indicates that the textbook is the most important determinant of math content taught in the classroom. Although many educators have decried this situation, it is likely to remain so for the foreseeable future. With such in-

structional weight placed on it, how do we ensure the textbook's contribution to quality education?

The National Commission on Excellence in Education cites some main problems with textbooks today: too few experienced teachers and scholars are involved in writing textbooks and many are "written down" by their publishers to ever-lower reading levels in response to perceived market demands. Many books do not challenge students: a recent study by Education Products Information Exchange reveals that a majority of students have mastered 80 percent of the material in some textbooks *before* the books are opened.

Faculty members often use the inadequate "thumb test" in selecting textbooks (riffle through the book quickly with the thumb and reject any book that looks different or seems challenging to teachers or students).

To ensure the use of quality texts, the Commission suggests that publishers furnish evidence of the textbook's quality and appropriateness, based on results from field trials and credible evaluations. Consumers, at least, should ask for such information from publishers and give preference to publishers who have put substantial effort into developing and testing materials.

How to Evaluate Mathematics Textbooks furnishes evaluative criteria and is available for \$1.60 per copy (\$1.28 for NCTM members) from the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics,

1906 Association Dr., Reston, VA 22901.

Math Research Made Direct, Useful

While the quality and quantity of mathematics research has been greater than that in most other subject areas, it has had surprisingly little impact on classroom practice. A major reason often proposed for this lack of impact is the abstruse style and recondite statistics found in most mathematics reports.

Recognizing this problem, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics has published an easy-to-read booklet, *Classroom Ideas from Research on Secondary School Mathematics*, written by Donald J. Dessart and Marilyn N. Suydam. It reviews recent research findings on teaching algebra and geometry and emphasizes ideas likely to be immediately useful to the classroom teacher. Main ideas are highlighted in boxes throughout the booklet, making for easy and direct access by teachers. The authors explain concepts in depth but do not get bogged down with statistics; for those seeking such detail, a complete bibliography of original reports is provided.

Copies of *Classroom Ideas from Research on Secondary School Mathematics* are available for \$6.00 per copy (\$4.80 NCTM members) from the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, 1906 Association Dr., Reston, VA 22091.

Stephen S. Willoughby is Professor of Mathematics Education at New York University, New York, and President of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics.

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