

# Artifact Collection

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Supervisors will improve teaching if they supplement their classroom observations with analysis of the learning materials teachers use.

Contemporary supervisory practice relies almost exclusively on classroom observation for collecting data about teaching. Observation is an important and useful supervisory technique and should continue to dominate our data collection, but it overemphasizes the verbal aspect of teaching. Based on work with thousands of classroom teachers around the country, we estimate that students in K-5 classrooms spend over 70 percent of their day with teacher-developed or -selected materials. In grades 6-12, the time students spend directly with teacher materials can average between 40 and 60 percent of allocated instructional time.

To supplement observation of direct teacher instruction, we recommend *artifact collection*. Artifacts are simple objects, usually tools or ornaments, showing human workmanship or modification, as distinguished from natural objects. The term is important because it promotes a sense of being built, selected, or modified for direct use with or for people. Teaching artifacts include all instructional materials employed by teachers to facilitate student learning. They may vary from commercial textbooks, workbooks, supplementary texts, learning kits, and maps to audiovisual aids, films, dittoed material, study guides, questions sheets, worksheets, problem sets, quizzes, tests, and so on. In effect, they are all the materials that students use as a part of the learning experience. While all these artifacts are and should be an essential part of teaching, our concept of artifact collection deals almost exclusively with those materials on the latter part of the list. The "larger" the artifact, the more time and effort tends to be spent in evaluating and selecting it.

Textbooks, workbooks, supplementary books, and the like are ordinarily reviewed carefully at a building or district level before being purchased. Our

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concern is not with the quality of those initial selections but with their day-to-day use as teachers identify work activities for students. For example, artifact collection includes review and discussion of whether answering questions 1-15 on page 68 of the text or workbook is an appropriate seatwork activity.

### Collecting and Analyzing Artifacts

Because artifact collection is not an established practice in most schools, we

recommend that the teacher assume responsibility for collecting artifacts. Usually the collection period should be for an entire teaching unit or for an approximate three-week time block in a single class. Artifacts would include such things as copies of all dittoed or mimeographed teacher-developed materials; notes listing seatwork or homework assignments taken from commercially published works; copies of all quizzes or exams given during the col-

lection period; and lists of materials stored in interest centers, laboratories, or computers that were used by students during the teacher's allocated instructional time as a part of seatwork or practice activities. Also, random samples of students' efforts on these artifacts should be collected so that both the artifact itself and performance can be analyzed and discussed.

When the artifacts have been collected, the teacher and supervisor should meet to review, analyze, and discuss the materials. Up to this point, logic and common sense seem to prevail. It is fairly easy to get teachers to collect artifacts and to convince them of the potential usefulness of a joint review and discussion. The more difficult part is knowing how to review the materials objectively and helpfully.

The framework shown in Figure 1 is adapted from a similar one developed by Suter and Waddell<sup>1</sup> for use with health professionals.

These guidelines are organized under three key aspects related to quality: content, design, and presentation. They are necessarily general in order to include criteria for the broad spectrum of artifacts employed by teachers. They can be applied both to commercially produced items and to teacher-developed items. Because the guidelines are intended to be a comprehensive basis for analyzing artifacts, not every criterion can or should be applied to every type of artifact.

Moreover, in most cases, it would be too tedious to examine each individual artifact. It seems best to categorize the different types of artifacts and to deal just with random samples.

The concept of artifact collection and analysis should be introduced into all situations where classroom instructional improvement is a desired outcome. We have found one of its most positive benefits to be the high level technical-professional talk it generates between supervisors and teachers. Most people who have been involved in this type of activity report it as one of their most rewarding supervisory experiences. If they have appropriate perspective, we are confident that others will share this feeling. □

<sup>1</sup>E. Suter and W. Waddell, "Attributes of Quality in Audiovisual Materials for Health Professionals," *Journal of Biocommunications* 8 (1981): 5-11.

**Figure 1. A Framework for Analyzing the Artifacts of Teaching**

#### Content

The quality of artifacts should be determined by their content or essential meaning. Some considerations related to quality of content are:

1. *Validity*: Is the artifact materially accurate and authoritative?
2. *Appropriateness*: Is the content appropriate to the level of the intended learner?
3. *Relevance*: Is the content relevant to the purpose of the lesson?
4. *Motivation*: Does the artifact stimulate interest to learn more about the subject? Does it encourage ideas for using the material?
5. *Application*: Does the artifact serve as a model for applying learning outside the instructional situation?
6. *Clarity*: Is the content free of words, expressions, and graphics that would limit its comprehension?
7. *Conciseness*: Is the artifact free of superfluous material? Does it stick to the point?

#### Design

Analysis of artifact design should also focus on the content of the lesson or instructional unit. The quality of an artifact is the product of its design characteristics, relevance to instructional objectives, and application to content.

1. *Medium Selection*: Is the most appropriate medium used for meeting each objective and presenting each item of content (films, textbook, teacher-prepared handout, and so on)?
2. *Meaningfulness*: Does the artifact clearly support learning objectives? If so, is this apparent to the learner?
3. *Appropriateness*: Is the design appropriate to the needs and skill levels of the intended learner? Are time constraints considered in the artifact's design?
4. *Sequencing*: Is the artifact itself sequenced logically? Is it employed at the appropriate point in the presentation?
5. *Instructional Strategies*: Is the artifact format appropriate to the teaching approach? Does its construction incorporate sound learning principles?
6. *Engagement*: Does the artifact actively engage the learner? Does it reinforce the content with appropriate practice and feedback questions?
7. *Evaluation*: Is there a plan for evaluating the artifact's effectiveness when used by the intended learner? Can the success rate for the artifact be easily determined?

#### Presentation

Presentation includes the physical and aesthetic aspects of an artifact, as well as directions for its use.

1. *Effective Use of Time*: Is the artifact suitable for the time allotted? Is the learner's time wasted by such things as wordiness or extraneous information unrelated to the learning objectives?
2. *Pace*: Is the pace appropriate to the level of the learners, neither too fast nor too slow? Does the pace vary inversely with difficulty to content?
3. *Aids to Understanding*: Are directions clearly explained? Are unfamiliar terms defined? Are important concepts emphasized?
4. *Visual Quality*: Do the visuals show all educationally significant details? Is composition uncluttered? Does the composition help the learner to recognize important content? Are essential details identified through appropriate use of highlighting, color, tone, contrasts, position, motion, or other devices? Is the type size of any text legible from the anticipated maximum viewing distance?
5. *Audio Quality*: Can the audio component be clearly heard?
6. *Physical Quality*: Is the artifact durable, attractive, and simple? Are size and shape convenient for hands-on use and storage?

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