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Textbooks

CONNIE MUTHER

The Concept Development Trace

Because they are the most difficult to write, testing and questioning are often the weakest parts of any textbook program. Yet in many series, these portions are written by persons other than the content author; consequently, the possibility of mismatch and inaccuracy is increased. This is unfortunate because in too many classrooms the publishers' questions and tests determine success or failure for students. Therefore, whenever I evaluate a program, I begin with the testing. A technique called the *concept development trace* helps me determine whether the text presentation prepares students for a test.

To do a concept development trace, first identify a key concept, skill, or topic from your curriculum that is essential for students to understand. Choose something that is both difficult to understand and challenging for you to teach, something you could easily depend on the textbook to inform or instruct.

Second, begin with the unit test or, in the case of high school subjects, the

end-of-chapter or unit questions. Take the test yourself, writing down everything you need to know, including the test format. It is not necessary to write answers, just what you need to know in order to get the answers, including the test/question format.

Third, using the index or scope-and-sequence chart, find the initial presentation of instruction in your chosen topic, and begin reading there. Continue to read through all other references to that concept until you reach the test. While reading, pretend you are one of your students. Also, document your thinking by writing your reactions on the textbook pages, using bright highlight pens for quick references so anyone can retrace your reasoning and decision-making process.

Finally, retake the test to determine if what was tested was actually taught. Did the text provide what you needed to know in order to answer the questions?

If you find a mismatch between testing and instruction, your immediate reaction may be to reject this program. Don't. What if this program is actually the best? Therefore, repeat

this procedure on all other textbook submissions, comparing treatment of the same skill, concept, or topic.

The concept development trace is only one way to compare textbook programs and should never be the only method used. But if the concept, topic, or skill is presented inadequately, this technique will help you determine the quality of congruence of all text elements within a series: test questions, content, instruction, workbook, review, retesting, reteaching, whatever you want to include in your trace.

By choosing a concept, topic, or skill pivotal to your curriculum, you document for that one element which textbook will best match your unique student needs. By choosing a concept, topic, or skill you dislike or are unfamiliar with, you learn a variety of new ideas for how to teach it. With a concept development trace, the payoff is always well worth the time invested. □

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Supervision

EDWARD PAJAK

Research Trends in Supervision

During the early 1970s supervision in schools increasingly became associated with the observation of teachers in classrooms. This was partly a result of the popularity of the clinical super-

vision model and partly due to the importation of conceptual schemes from business and the military, where supervisors are mainly responsible for monitoring the activities of subordinates to make sure that they do as they are told.

This narrow interpretation of supervision ignores the work of Kimball Wiles and others who focused on the functions of district-level supervision not limited to classroom observation. Wiles emphasized that supervision was a collegial and professional rela-

tionship rather than a bureaucratic one.

Recent qualitative research studies have confirmed Wiles' insights. Sullivan (1982) and Donmoyer and Neff (1983) independently discovered through structured observation that the work of central office instructional supervisors is not always clearly defined but is characterized by face-to-face communication. Sullivan described the supervisor as an "information broker" or "communication hub" but was troubled that supervisors did not spend much time observing teachers. Donmoyer and Neff, in contrast, were pleased by the relative autonomy and flexibility that supervisors enjoy which enable them to "choose to behave in a quite unmanagerial way and still meet the requirements of their role."

In an interview-based study of supervisors who received state-level awards for outstanding service, Floyd

(1986) reported that "fuzzy" characteristics of supervisory positions may be an advantage. This professional latitude enables supervisors to fit their talents to the local district's particular needs. In other words, supervisors define and redefine their roles while they work with others. They can attend to tasks that may not be listed on anyone's job description, which are nonetheless important and might not otherwise get done.

Taken together, these studies lend credence to the concept of supervision as communication and service. Research that documents the advantages of flexibility thus contradicts a bureaucratic model that does not adequately reflect the inherent complexities of the supervisory role. □

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Hoffman Educational Systems	55
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Kraus International Publications	60
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Outcomes Associates	92
Pergamon Press	44
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