

. . . the curriculum materials unit offers a way to improve cooperation and efficiency in curriculum development. The time has come for instructional materials development to be treated as a separate entity. . .

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. . . the expertise in research, writing, and evaluation . . . are reasons for locating an instructional materials development unit in a department of teacher education.

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INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS DEVELOPMENT SHOULD BE ADMINISTERED SEPARATELY FROM TEACHER EDUCATION DEPARTMENTS

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Should the development of instructional (curriculum) materials be treated as a "step-child" of a teacher education or state supervisory department or as a "full-blooded" equal belonging to an organization designed for the specific purpose of developing, validating, and disseminating materials? This is not an age-old question, but one which has surfaced in light of the funding provided by the Vocational Amendments of 1968 and the present Amendments of 1976. Before teacher educators rush to defend the "step-child" theory, it would be well to take an objective look at some of the fallacies of this theory and some definite advantages of the separate instructional materials development unit concept.

In order to take this objective look, the reader might question why some materials may have been developed in teacher education departments and state supervisory units in the past. Was it to provide employment for graduate students or others? Was it to allow for staff recognition and/or promotion? Was it to keep certain people away from the classroom or supervisory process? Was it to force the imposition of personal or departmental philosophy upon other educators in the state? At this

point the reader can probably think of several other inappropriate motives behind the development of certain materials. While these questions are asked "tongue-in-cheek" and recognition is given to outstanding efforts of many people who worked on curriculum materials development in teacher education and state supervision, the point is clearly made that underlying motives can have impacting roles in curriculum development when it is a by-product or secondary thrust of an organization.

The time has come for curriculum materials development to be treated as a separate entity and as an equal to teacher education and state supervision in the process of improving the quality and quantity of instruction in vocational agriculture programs. To be treated as an equal, the curriculum materials development function should be housed in a separate unit which can function in cooperation with the teacher education departments and state supervisory unit within a state. At present, approximately twenty-two states (including the District of Columbia) operate curriculum labs or units as separate organizations.

Characteristics of an Instructional Materials Development Unit

While the units vary in size and function, most share common features. Usually the personnel in the unit represent several areas of vocational education. One or more people may be assigned to each area. Most units employ supportive personnel such as editors, typesetters, artists, and printers; and own the equipment necessary to produce materials in quantity. Curriculum specialists in the units utilize panels composed of teachers, state supervisors or consultants, and teacher educators to establish priorities, assist in development, review and validate materials, and aid in dissemination. In several instances, the unit is an extension of the state department of education but is located in or near a university campus.

Top priority is much more likely to be placed upon curriculum materials development in the special unit. This is one of the major advantages of the curriculum lab. The development of high quality materials is a lengthy and time-consuming task. When curriculum development is viewed as a secondary function of teacher education, there is often a tendency to place it on the "back burner" while using personnel to perform routine duties. In the curriculum unit, the specialist, however, has a much better chance to devote full-time effort to developing and disseminating curriculum materials.

Economy and efficiency of production are improved through the curriculum laboratory. In many instances, the curriculum

unit employs all personnel necessary to produce a finished product. Writing a publication is only half the battle. Once the final draft of the text is prepared, it must be edited, illustrated, retyped, proofread, prepared for printing, printed, collated, and bound. Having all of these functions in the same administrative unit is a major advantage itself. This centralization improves and simplifies communications between the author and the supportive staff. In most instances, having these services allows the curriculum unit to produce materials in quantity at a fraction of the cost of a commercial printing company and in a much shorter time. Teacher education departments, on the other hand, may have to wait on the more expensive university press or an outside firm to publish materials.

Professional development opportunities for the improvement of the curriculum materials specialist are more likely to take place in the curriculum lab than in a teacher education department. A program of continuing inservice education concerning the methodology of curriculum development and the mechanics of technical and creative writing can be conducted for all professional staff. New personnel coming into the field of curriculum materials development for the first time can benefit from the constant contact with other more experienced professionals who possess a knowledge of the problems and complexities the new person faces.

Human resources are present in the form of other curriculum materials specialists in the curriculum unit. Modern vocational agriculture content often overlaps with other subject areas such as distributive education, business and office education, and trade and industrial education. In the curriculum unit setting, the vocational agriculture specialist has ready access of specialists in these areas. This access allows the agriculture specialist to have a broader view of vocational education as a whole and to avoid extreme duplication of effort with other programs. At the same time, the specialists in other subject areas can assist the agriculture specialist in developing and validating materials in areas of off-farm occupational training.

Cooperation between teacher educators, state staff, and teachers throughout the state in the development and dissemination of materials may be improved through the existence of a separate curriculum unit. The reader must admit that differences of opinion, philosophy, and outlook exist between and sometimes within these groups in every state. It is only natural for the members of these groups to be defensive of their group's or department's ideas. The curriculum materials specialist, as a separate entity, can and should assume the role of mediator in working with these groups toward the overall objective of program improvement. By using a panel composed of representatives

from all groups, the specialist can easily receive input from all and can objectively view each group's suggestions. Since the specialist has no administrative or educational controls over any persons, she or he may be able to develop a more honest relationship with all parties and can work for better cooperation and understanding on the part of everyone.

Other resources for curriculum materials development may be more readily accessible to the curriculum materials specialist housed in a curriculum unit. The Mississippi, Oklahoma, and Illinois curriculum units serve as regional centers for the National Network for Curriculum Coordination in Vocational and Technical Education. Other state curriculum units provide state liaison representatives to the regional centers. The Network serves on a nation-wide basis to coordinate the development and dissemination of materials. It is a valuable resource for locating materials and obtaining information about activities in other states. Some curriculum labs may also have ties to two regional consortiums, the Mid-America Vocational Curriculum Consortium (MAVCC) and the Vocational-Technical Educational Consortium of States (V-TECS). These two organizations also may provide an abundance of material and assistance.

Funding for curriculum materials development may be more easily obtained by a curriculum materials unit than by a teacher education department. If a merger with the Research Coordinating Unit in the state can be arranged, as it has in Mississippi and other states, the funding provided by the 1976 Amendments can come directly to the unit with no need for a sub-contractor or its accompanying redtape and reporting schedule with which some of the readers, unfortunately, may by now be so familiar.

Dissemination of finished products is often easier and more completely accomplished by the curriculum unit. A state and nationwide dissemination plan may already be in existence. Funding for inservice programs may be more readily available, as well as postage and mailing facilities. In many cases, adequate space to store additional materials to serve as replacements is available at the unit. A full-time shipping clerk may be economically justifiable for the unit when such a person could not be hired for a teacher education department.

Other advantages of the curriculum unit as a separate entity can be briefly mentioned. In the unit the several specialists can feel a greater sense of unity and purpose toward their work. The overall work of curriculum development often becomes more visible to teachers and state leaders. The unit concept offers a centralized point toward which persons inside and outside the state can turn for information and assistance. Evaluation and follow-up on materials is possibly more likely to occur.

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