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Sabbatical Leave Report
Spring, 2006 Semester

Sabbatical tasks for Dr. Germaine Taggart during spring semester 2006 were to 1) investigate the process by which educators evaluate instructional resources utilized in school settings, 2) design instrument(s) that would aid educators with the task of evaluating instructional materials, and 3) field-test the instrument(s) with practicing educators during their process of resource selection. After initial research was conducted, the topic was narrowed to evaluation of textbooks.

Statement of Problem

Though the majority of teachers in the United States use textbooks as a framework for instruction, a review of the literature and survey of forty schools revealed a deficiency in materials that would assist educators in evaluating textbooks. Specifically, few textbook evaluation forms exist to guide educators in selecting a textbook that supports the needs of students.

The purpose of this project was to research, design, and create a textbook evaluation instrument. The intended purpose of the instrument was to assist educators with selecting textbook resources that follow standards, align with current curriculum goals, and meet the needs of the learning community.

Methodology

This study followed a prescribed practice of educational research and development suggested by Gall, Borg & Gall (1996). The following steps were included in the process: a) research and information collection, b) planning, c) preliminary development and refinement of the product, d) field testing of the product, e) final product revision, and f) dissemination.

The following activities were completed by the researcher as the modified Gall, Borg & Gall (1996) processes were applied:

1. A thorough review of the literature was conducted to research textbook evaluation models. Surveys (Appendix A) were sent to forty randomly chosen educators to assess the need for an instrument and to determine if existing models were being utilized.
2. Planning was exhibited by outlining components of textbook evaluation.
3. Ongoing development and refinement of materials and procedures for reviewing textbooks occurred with 30 educators. Content validity was established.
4. An operational field test will be conducted by 20 practitioners in spring 2007 through written feedback after using the instrument.

5. A revised instrument will be developed based upon the feedback gathered from the practitioners
6. Evaluation instruments were recommended for dissemination.

A needs assessment included a thorough review of the literature and a survey of the use of existing evaluation instruments (Appendix A) by forty randomly selected school administrators. Twenty-seven surveys were returned. The literature revealed a) expressed need by administrators for the use of an evaluation instrument to assist educator's evaluation of textbook sets prior to adoption, b) the existence of nonsystematic instruments, and c) few existing instruments from which to draw ideas. The top five concerns of respondents to the survey were that the textbook be standards-based, developmentally appropriate, be readable at the level of the students using the text, provide hands-on activities, and integrate a variety of disciplines. Interestingly, the reputation of the publishing company had little bearing on textbook selection. Only one administrator reported having an existing formal instrument that was used by faculty to evaluate textbooks.

Analyses of the data obtained from the initial survey were used to measure face validity of content and format of the instrument. A research-based evaluation instrument to assess the value of text sets was developed. The instrument was organized according to components indicated by the initial survey. A field test with 30 educators provided feedback for ongoing development and refinement of materials and procedures. At the conclusion of the field test, the results of data collected through written feedback were evaluated and modifications and revisions were made to the evaluation instrument.

An operational field test was scheduled to be administered in the spring of 2006 to determine the product's feasibility as an evaluation instrument. However, many schools had already adopted textbooks by the time the instrument was readied for an operational field test. Therefore, the instrument will not be operationally field tested until spring 2007 selection processes begin.

Literature review

Instructional materials for K-12 schools include textbooks, laboratory manuals, kits, software, CDs, and other multimedia materials that provide full guidance or supplemental materials for specific lessons. Such materials are a primary source for classroom teaching and learning. Professional development for teachers is often structured around instructional materials used in the classroom. The selection of instructional materials that reflect the learning goals of the national standards is an important issue.

Instructional materials are a primary source of learning in the nation's classrooms. Textbooks are often essential supplements to the limited amount of material that can reasonably be presented in the classroom time available to the teacher. Packaged instruments, materials (kits) for laboratory, multimedia presentations, and hands-on experiences are an enormous help to busy teachers at all levels, K-12. The closer

instructional materials adhere to the goals of state and national standards, the more likely the teacher is to succeed in achieving those goals.

Instructional materials influence curricula. They also affect the content of professional development workshops covering the adopted curriculum; in particular, inexperienced teachers who are preoccupied with the practicalities of teaching are interested in workshops directly related to their lesson plans (Loucks-Horsley, Stiles, and Hewson, 1996). Thus, the quality of instructional materials will directly affect the quality of teaching.

The review of instructional materials during a selection process, if well structured, can serve as an important professional development experience for participants. Review processes that require understanding of the standards and foster rigorous analysis of the materials can be powerful learning experiences (Brearton and Shuttleworth, 1999). Teachers engaged in such reviews can develop a better understanding of the content, the requirements for teaching, and the resources needed for standards-based instruction.

Current selection procedures, particularly those at the local level, often lack the capacity to sift systematically through instructional materials and identify those that align with the adopted standards. Evaluation procedures are needed to encourage evaluators to become knowledgeable about the standards and use them when judging instructional materials. Such evaluation procedures would, ideally, also be educational experiences for the evaluators. At present, the conditions surrounding materials selection may lead evaluators to review materials superficially and choose those that look attractive, appear to reduce budget outlays, simplify teachers' roles, or simply save time. For this reason, building the local capacity to select instructional materials that support the goals of state and national standards is of paramount importance.

Bibliography

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Plan for the reporting of results to both the faculty and administration.

During the fall of 2006, I will share the results of my research with the Teacher Education faculty and receive their feedback and recommendations regarding any changes appropriate to existing courses. I have also committed to a special sabbatical presentation on February 22, 2007.

Appendix A