Chapter 24
Academic Curriculum Collections in North America:
A Comparative Survey

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ABSTRACT

Casual observance of curriculum collections in academic institutions will show many similarities, but also many unique aspects and regional trends. What is the reason for these differences? Where can a new librarian looking to establish best practices for his or her own collection find benchmarks for comparison? In order to answer these and other questions, the author collected survey responses from librarians across North America who have responsibilities for the management of a curriculum collection. This chapter will present the results of the survey and use the data to draw conclusions about the connections that exist between collecting practice and the institutional environment in which the collection is located. Challenges and issues involved in collecting curriculum materials will be explored and future research directions suggested.

INTRODUCTION

The tools of practice are integral to teaching and learning in any professional program. For the students and instructors in teacher education programs, these tools are items that make up academic curriculum collections. Having been hired as a liaison librarian in education and given selection responsibilities for curriculum materials with no previous experience in this area, the author began investigating other libraries' curriculum collections, comparing them to each other and to the collection at her own institution. Some (like her own) had many sets of textbooks, teacher's guides, and workbooks in all of the standard K-12 subject areas, some had very few textbooks and many more kits, manipulatives, and lesson planning guidebooks. There seemed to be endless permutations and combinations of materials collected. Why are these collections so different? Where can a new librarian looking to establish best practices for his or her own collection find

benchmarks for comparison? It was the author's feeling that if one could correlate collecting foci with demographic and other information about a group of curriculum collections, it would help to point novice selectors toward the appropriate peer group for comparison. The author also hoped to learn what other selectors feel are the particular issues and challenges inherent to developing and maintaining curriculum materials collections and whether these concerns differ depending on the particulars and demographics of the collection and the population it serves or whether they are common regardless of these factors.

In trying to build on and update the excellent work done by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Education and Behavioral Sciences Section in compiling the data in their publication *Directory of Curriculum Materials Centers* (now in its 6th edition) and by modeling several other surveys done over the past five decades (Ellis, 1969; Boudreau, 1982; Teclehaiman & Patterson, 1992; Locke, 2007), the author developed a survey instrument to collect demographic data about curriculum collections and their user populations as well as data on funding and purchasing, collection content and organization, collection access, and selector opinions on current and future challenges and issues. This chapter will present the results of the survey, the author's observations on the implication of the results for purposes of benchmarking and comparison of best practices in collecting, and suggestions for future research to be done to further clarify the issues surrounding curriculum collections and to look for potential solutions to the challenges faced by selectors in this area.

BACKGROUND

As the author alluded to in the Introduction, informal investigation of curriculum collections across North America indicates that there is much diver-

sity in focus and collection strength from place to place. That being said, there is much commonality in the types of materials that are collected. This seems to hold true historically as well. One of the earliest recognized collections of curriculum materials created in support of a teacher education program dates to 1898 at Colorado State Normal School (now the University of Northern Colorado). The collection included textbooks (both current and historical), theoretical and practical guides for teaching, equipment, furniture, games, and toys (Roberts, 1990). Though this is a very early example, by the 1930's curriculum collections were becoming much more prevalent (Kohrman, 2012). In the ensuing years there have been a number of publications both offering advice on collecting curriculum materials to support teacher education programs and surveying the actual practices of curriculum materials selectors. In 2009 the ACRL approved the *Guidelines for Curriculum Materials Centers*, which state that curriculum collections should include: "textbooks, curriculum guides, children's literature, professional literature, reference materials, education periodicals, media materials, educational tests and measures, and digital content" (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2009b, Collection Categories section, para. 1). Are these recommendations being followed?

In a survey of collections at Midwestern institutions presented in an article in the *Journal of Teacher Education* Stull and Holley (1960) compared actual collecting practices with those being recommended in the literature. They found that in many of the materials centers in their sample, the collections were falling short of the advice given on the variety of items recommended.

From this survey it would seem that few teacher education institutions even approach in practice what has long been advocated in theory. After almost 15 years of talking about the multi-materials approach to teacher education, the typical mate-

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