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# Revitalizing the Curriculum Collection: A Collaborative Partnership Approach

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## Abstract

As K-12 education has increasingly focused on standardized testing, university curriculum centers have had to adjust their holding to offer more curricula-focused material. These collections can be vital for the development of pre-service teachers, who often need access to the learning materials that they will later use. This article explores the steps taken by a university library to revitalize a curriculum collection in order to offer more curriculum-based holdings for pre-service teachers to use.

## Keywords

**Revitalizing the Curriculum Collection:**
**A Collaborative Partnership Approach**

The nature of K-12 education has changed in the past three decades with an increase in higher-stakes testing (Vinovskis, 2019, p. 22). Curricula has adapted to this new reality. To that end, curriculum centers have had to adjust as well, sometimes amid budgetary constraints and questions about the viability of these collections (Locke, 2007, p. 198). A college or university curriculum center offers materials for pre-service teachers to utilize in class and while student teaching; like the school media center, it encourages using resources such as books, technology, and other items (Dickinson et al., 2004, p. 15).

This article describes an approach taken by Coastal Carolina University (CCU) to reinvigorate a severely neglected curriculum collection. With poor usage, a minimal budget, and a large footprint in a library starved for space, its future was continually in doubt. As 2019 saw the beginning of a monumental effort to review every physical item in the library, the librarians began making decisions in earnest as to its status. The refresh followed standards, while focusing on the high-level needs of teachers and students locally. These needs equated to an expanded focus on Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) materials, items that mirrored adopted textbooks and pedagogical tools, and materials that supported a more diverse set of students. Reinforcing partnerships with CCU College of Education faculty and developing partnerships with K-12 teachers in the local school district proved to be highly productive steps in understanding the needs of pre-service teachers, in-service teachers, and their students. A local grant program offered by the local higher education commission that fosters connections between educators throughout the county provided seed money for this endeavor.

**Literature Review**

The history and current status of curriculum centers (also called curriculum collections, curriculum materials centers, or CMCs) can serve as a guide to the much-needed refreshment of Coastal Carolina University's curriculum collection. Curriculum centers have traditionally functioned as a "warehouse for materials that can be used by pre-service teachers to encourage the development of resource-based teaching" (Dickinson et al., 2004, p. 11). In the 1940s, "educators, community leaders, and national leaders … called for laboratories, centers, or libraries at teacher training institutes where pre-service teachers could gain the necessary skills to develop their own materials and incorporate a

variety of media to motivate student engagement," leading to the creation of 145 curriculum centers (Kohrman, 2012, p. 17). These curriculum centers followed new educational theories to aid in student learning. They began to collect materials such as flash cards, manipulatives, educational games, and other items that offered a "fresh approach" to teaching and "increased understanding by students" (O'Brien & Walker, 2012, pp. 150-151).

However, as teaching became more professionalized, and the financial burden of teacher training institutes on state and local governments increased, many teacher colleges merged with universities (Alteri, 2012, p. 25). After these mergers, declining budgets and a lack of funding and administrative support led to many curriculum centers closing (Alteri, 2012, p. 35). The materials were then often moved to university libraries, which "changed the focus of collection use, from being an active teaching and learning area that replicated classroom and school library spaces, to being simply another library collection distant from the students' learning environments" (Locke, 2007, p. 194).

The decline in library funding and shift in focus from print materials to electronic resources has made keeping curriculum centers up to date with the necessary materials much more difficult, as they require frequent refreshing to keep abreast of new programs and changes in school curricula (Locke, 2007, p. 198). As with all library collections, curriculum centers must be able to manage "the continual changing nature, upkeep, and costs of technologies" when updating materials and tracking local curriculum changes (Kohrman, 2015, p. 5).

"Increased demand for accountability in teacher preparation" and rising standards for student achievement have helped contribute positively to the quality of curriculum centers (Osa, 2003, p. 132). The pressure on teachers to create better learning environments, and for pre-service teachers to be ready for the realities of a classroom, has opened up new funding opportunities for curriculum centers to update and maintain their collections (Osa, 2003, p. 132). Today, curriculum centers "should help to increase teachers' knowledge in specific instances of instructional decision making but also help them develop more general knowledge that they can apply flexibly in new situations" (Davis and Krajcik, 2005, p. 3).

The Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) Guidelines for Curriculum Materials Centers recommends curriculum collections include children's and young adult materials in all genres. They should be "consistent with the recommendations of

standard reviewing tools and include annual acquisition of award books and books from various notable book lists" (Association of College & Research Libraries, 2017, p. 8). Children's collections can be sorted in many different ways: into two sections of picture books and independent readers; four sections of children's, oversize, juvenile, and young adult books; or two sections of oversize books and everything else (Correll and Bornstein, 2018, p. 45; Hoffman, 2018, p. 3).

Teachers may use these books to facilitate reading in the classroom, but they may also use them to teach other subjects, which is why fiction and nonfiction books are both important. They can "draw children's attention, increase vocabulary acquisition, encourage higher-order thinking, and address learning standards" (Brownson, 2012 p. 52). Studies show that updating children's literature collections can increase their circulation, as they are more attractive and helpful to pre-service teachers and children (Correll and Bornstein, 2018, p. 45).

**History of the Curriculum Collection**

The curriculum collection at Coastal Carolina University originally had a wider mission as the media collection. It had a dedicated service point with a librarian who was the primary liaison to education and provided oversight for the collection, its usage, and outreach. It originally contained juvenile and young adult books, K-12 media items such as kits, manipulatives, and puppets, educational posters, topographic maps received as a federal depository library, compact discs, VHS recordings, and LP records.

In the late 1990's, the library narrowed the focus to collecting awarded items, for example, books receiving the Caldecott, Newberry, Coretta Scott King, and Horn awards or film and television productions receiving Academy, Grammy, Cannes, and Tony awards. The collection transitioned to DVDs in the late 1990's as that format became more widely adopted.

By 2003, acquisitions were primarily CDs and DVDs, both for award items and those requested by faculty. As part of a renovation, the collection transitioned from a dedicated room with a service point to one that was collocated with monographs and journals. The library first started adding copies of textbooks adopted by the local school district in 2005, identifying items during the public review process.

The collection underwent an extensive review in 2006, removing items that were no longer applicable or rarely used. The librarian retired in 2010, and their position was not replaced. After the departure of the media librarian, the library continued to purchase

award-winning juvenile and young adult books and CDs and DVDs as faculty requested them. Maps and posters received via the federal depository program were transitioned to online access.

In 2019, a comprehensive review project began that examined all the physical items held by the library. As part of this review, some media items were either removed from the collection or associated with other locations. Books in the general collection that were better suited to the curriculum collection were relocated there. Microfilm and maps of local interest were moved to the archives, and posters were removed entirely. K-12 media items, textbooks, and juvenile and young adult books were extensively reviewed, with some removed based on physical condition, applicability to curriculum, currency, and other factors as outlined by Gelber and Uhl (2013, p. 63). This resulted in a focused curriculum collection that contained only juvenile and young adult books, K-12 media items, and textbooks. When the general collection moved to an off-site storage facility on the other side of campus, the curriculum collection remained on site, in part because the cataloging and virtual browsing options for children's materials were not as robust.

**Condition of the Collection**

It was clear after the review project that the collection needed extensive updates to be useful to the pre-service teachers who study at Coastal Carolina University. The library made an informal report of the curriculum centers of CCU's peer and aspirant institutions, which provided some inspiration for what an updated collection should contain and look like.

***Peers and Aspirants***

Of Coastal Carolina University's six peer and five aspirant institutions, about half have curriculum centers located in the library; the remainder of those (all but two) have a curriculum center near or in the education department or college. Florida Gulf Coast University (peer) has a children's book collection in the library and an educational technology & curriculum resource room in the education department. Valdosta State University (peer) has an instructional materials collection with children's books, manipulatives, and pre-K curriculum materials. Appalachian State University (aspirant) has an instructional materials center with classes and workshops, children's and young adult literature, K-12 textbooks and curriculum materials, manipulatives, and professional literature, all located in its own area in the library. James Madison University (aspirant) has a staffed educational technology and media center that

appears to be partly outside of library control, although its books are described in the catalog. It contains K-12 textbooks, children's and young adult literature, paper die cutting and lamination equipment, and it overall seems more tech-focused.

Most curriculum centers at our peers and aspirants seem to include children's literature, local textbooks, and manipulatives. The larger centers have dedicated staff and include makerspace-like equipment for education students to use. The ideal setup would have loanable and reference materials held by the library, and craft and makerspace supplies held by either the education departments or the library's makerspace, which has its own staff.

**Funding**

As mentioned previously, the library purchased award winning juvenile and young adult books consistently, but it had not updated other parts of the collection for about ten years. This presented quite a budget challenge. While we are quite fortunate that our collections budget has been able to grow in order to address inflation, there were no funds available to undertake a wide-ranging update of the curriculum collection. We would have to seek external funding. We examined several sources and decided to try a grant program offered by the Horry County Higher Education Commission

(HCHEC). The HCHEC offers a seed grant program that allows university entities to pilot projects that may otherwise not be possible because of budgetary reasons. One key stipulation of this grant is that projects have the potential to impact all residents of the county, not just those at the institution. A refresh of the curriculum collection could positively impact many populations, such as pre-service teachers and faculty at CCU, and current teachers and parents of children in county, public, private, and parochial schools.

We thought that we could make a compelling case to use the grant money to update the collection, move it more in line with state standards, and develop a lasting relationship with the local school district. To secure buy-in, we solicited the support of faculty from the education departments and administration within the college (Hoffman, 2018, p. 5). Faculty support came from the chair of the department overseeing K-12 curriculum and from instructors utilizing the collection as part of their courses. The assistant dean of the college, who regularly conducts outreach with schools in the district, wrote an additional support letter. We also obtained a letter of support from the dean of the college. Finally, the university librarian wrote a letter of support and provided funds for the Amazon.com gift cards used to incentivize participation.

In the grant application, we utilized several themes to show why the collection needed updating and how grant monies could effectively be used in that regard. We acknowledged the collection was outdated but had enormous potential to serve as a point of collaboration between the university and the local school district. Furthermore, the collection had a wider audience than most others within the library. While pre-service teachers were the primary audience (75% of majors have placements with local schools), the collection was also open to in-service teachers and other non-affiliated users who could borrow materials as friends of the library. This service model meshed with recommendations by Kohrman, who writes that curriculum centers should consider sharing their resources with a wide range of outside constituents (2015, p. 4).

Our grant application was successful, and we received $15,000 from the local higher education commission to update the collection and $1,000 from the library to provide incentives to interviewees. The grant provided for a nine-month implementation period, during which we planned to conduct informational interviews with local educators and pre-service teachers, as well as identify and purchase materials for the curriculum collection.

**Intended Purchase Categories**

We originally intended to refresh the types of materials that were already existent in the collection, as the last substantive updates were from a decade prior. The refreshment would also prioritize purchases to account for changes in education and Horry County schools that were not currently reflected.

*Monographs*

Originally, the grant application addressed three categories of monographs. The first category was picture books, oversize books, and young adult materials, especially those covering STEM topics and new family units, diversity, kindness, anti-bullying, and other topics. The second category was middle level and young adult books which could be collected in sets and used for reading circles during placements. The last category was books in non-English languages.

*Media Items*

The media items category was split into four sub-categories. First were items that could be used in conjunction with oversize picture books, like puppets that match a story. Then, science kits, some of which could match those used by the local school district. We were also interested in acquiring physical objects for teaching STEM, such as biology models, solar system models, and engineering blocks. Lastly were the physical items used for teaching math,

such as tangrams, counting blocks, fraction bars, and protractors.

**Educator Interviews**

We aimed to interview educators from as many different positions and grade levels as possible to learn which types of items it would be best to purchase. However, given the size of the school district (45,000 students at 56 different schools), we quickly determined that was not feasible with the timeframe we had. We then shifted to the elementary schools (Grades K-5) as elementary-level materials saw the highest usage, and we could complete interviews in a timely manner.

In addition to interviewing elementary grade teachers, we included STEM teachers. The district considers STEM "special" in addition to art, physical education, music, and the library. It specifically designates one or two teachers per school to take primary responsibility for providing and reinforcing STEM learning. As STEM was an area where we needed to improve, this made a natural fit.

We also included school media specialists as a target population as they are responsible for purchasing books with their school library but do not have direct purchasing roles for materials used in STEM classes. We anticipated that they would provide valuable information as to which books could supplement the curriculum.

We had hoped to include curriculum coaches as well. Each school has one or two curriculum coaches that possess a wide range of knowledge on all curricula taught in the district, and we hoped they would be able to provide information that reflected all grades. However, the district did not supply a list of curriculum coaches, and as they were not identified on school websites, we decided to abandon this possibility. We wound up creating our own contact lists of classroom and STEM teachers from the directories provided on each school's website.

Finally, we targeted current interns (student teachers) in the district and Coastal Carolina University graduates employed by the district. These lists were easily available from the CCU College of Education.

We contacted potential interview participants via e-mail using a protocol that was approved as exempt by the University's Institutional Review Board. Potential interviewees were invited to participate in a one-hour interview to share their experiences with procuring items, their observations on students' and teachers' use of procured materials, and their thoughts on what items might be most beneficial to pre-service and in-service teachers. Those that participated were provided a $20 Amazon.com gift card. After a participant demonstrated their interest via a

sign-up form, we arranged for an interview time that met all our schedules.

During the interviews, participants were presented with the following questions. Some were specific to certain categories of educator, while others were meant for the entire group.

All participants

- What subject and grade do you teach?
- If you are a graduate of Coastal Carolina University, did you use the education collection at the library? Why or why not?
- What books and other materials do you use in class? What would be helpful for student teachers to have access to while completing their degree and student teaching?
- Are there certain materials beyond books you are required to use? What are they, and is there a publicly available list?

Media specialist-only

- What materials do teachers request that you purchase for them?
- In your experience, what kind of materials do students use?

STEM teacher-only

- What type of materials do students respond the best to?

Participants provided a wide range of helpful information for us. They assisted in better understanding the curricula that are adopted locally and the materials that are purchased to support them. In addition to popular reading materials such as graphic novels, the participants identified five primary categories of items that were of the greatest need.

### *Increased Non-English Books*

The local school district fosters a diverse student population, with approximately 5,300 students whose primary language is not English. Books in non-English languages not only help these students to become effective readers, but they can also assist in the learning of English as a second language. Furthermore, these books help native English readers to explore and understand non-English languages.

### *Kits That Match Those Used by the District*

In the past, the library purchased kits in ways that attempted to match curricula but did not automatically map to or clearly supplement a specific curriculum. It became clear during our conversations that having kits mirroring those in the schools would be most helpful. This would give pre-service teachers important experience in using them before they enter the classroom.

### Teacher Editions of Major Textbooks

Participants identified teacher editions of major textbooks as a key benefit for pre-service teachers, especially those in their intern year. While teachers do have their own editions for each textbook, usually they end up lending them to student interns. Not only would having all the textbooks allow for better understanding the curricula before the intern year, but it could also provide a way for both the teacher and the intern to have a copy during critical periods.

### Additional STEM Items

The importance of STEM to the curriculum is evident in most districts, including Horry County, where STEM is considered "special" and specific teachers are allocated to reinforce the concepts. In addition to traditional STEM items such as building blocks, math manipulatives, and role-playing items, participants indicated that items such as robotics kits and tablet-based learning tools like Osmo would be helpful, and mirror some of the learning activities conducted in the schools.

### Guided Reading Kits

Finally, participants indicated that a complete set of guided reading kits would help pre-service teachers try to understand their structure and purposes. Guided reading kits contain a variety of materials at multiple reading levels. Early readers begin at lower levels, and then as their skills progress, they move on to more challenging ones.

### Revised Purchase Categories

After the interviews, it was apparent that some of our planned categories needed adjustment. Breaking up some of the book categories by age group ended up being too limiting; we instead grouped categories thematically. We eventually ended up focusing on award-winning children's books instead of picture books, guided reading kits instead of middle-level books, non-English language books, and STEM books instead of book-specific kits.

It also became evident that we could not meet every need with grant funding. Project Leading the Way (PLTW), a robust collection of kits used by the district to support learning, was an example. Organized by grade level and outcome, these kits contain consumable items that need to be replaced regularly. As there was no mechanism available to address that expense, we deemed purchasing these items unsustainable. Adopted textbooks were another issue. Even though the Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) guidelines recommend collecting current textbooks, the prospect of purchasing all the teacher's editions, even at just the elementary level, was cost-prohibitive (Association of College & Research Libraries, 2017, p. 8).

### Books/Monographs

The original proposal provided for picture books, oversize books, and young adult materials, especially those covering STEM topics, new family units, diversity, kindness, and anti-bullying, among other topics. In a change, we replaced book sets for guided reading kits for levels A-Z. Each kit contained about nine books. The category of books in non-English languages remained unchanged.

### Physical/Media Items

Part of the budget originally allocated to physical and media items was reallocated to STEM-focused books, which many interviewees specifically requested. Other items remained unchanged from the original application: science kits that matched those used by the local school district; physical objects used for teaching STEM, such as biology models, solar system models, and engineering blocks; physical items used for teaching math, such as tangrams, counting blocks, fraction bars, protractors, and math textbooks.

## Identifying Resources

### Children's Book Awards

There are several book awards that the library already regularly purchases, but we used California State University Long Beach Library's list of children's books awards to find other award-winning books. Going through the list,

we identified the last three to four years of books in each award, compiled a list, and located ISBN and price information. Student workers then checked the list against the library's holdings to find new titles. We found this was an efficient way to choose diverse and prominent children's books. With a budget of $2,000 for this category, we purchased about 150 books.

### STEM-focused Children's Publishers

We identified two STEM-focused publishers: Arbordale Publishing and Nomad Press. Arbordale Publishing designs their books to fit state standards, and you can look up each state and see which standards an individual book matches in that state. We purchased a bundle of more than 150 books. To round out the collection, we also purchased books from Nomad Press, which organizes their books by broad topic and has a page for their science books. Altogether, we purchased 190 books specifically on STEM topics using a budget of $2,500.

### Books in Non-English Languages

When ordering children's books in non-English languages, we were constrained by what would be readily available in the United States. We used Amazon to find books in Spanish, Arabic, Mandarin, Portuguese, Russian, and Vietnamese (educators identified these six languages as the ones most commonly spoken

in the schools after English). There was some overlap in which multiple copies of a book were purchased in different languages, which could create an opportunity for multi-language story time. This category had a budget of $1,000.

### Guided Reading Kits

When choosing books for creating the guided reading kits, we discovered that Scholastic has a list where they break down books into suggested grade and guided reading level. This saved us some time in trying to match up other lists of graded books with vendors. Using the recommendations from the Scholastic site, we chose an average of nine books per level, taking care to select a variety of fiction and non-fiction books on different topics for each kit. The kits follow Fountas and Pinnell classification, a leveled literacy intervention where A-level books are for beginning readers, and Z+-level books are for upper-level readers. We purchased kits for levels A-Z, which covered kindergarten to grade 5+. We then divided the books into separate containers, one per level, for easy checkout. Additionally, the catalog description for each kit included the title and author(s) of each book in the kit, which ensured they would show when searching the catalog. We had allocated $1,500 to this category.

### Kits Specifically Mentioned in Interviews

We purchased VEX 123, Competition, Build Blitz, and Construction kits, which cover coding, engineering, and motorized robotics. We chose these kits because they were reusable and available directly from the companies. We decided against VEX kits with consumable parts, as our collections plan didn't include provisions for consumables. We also purchased OSMO bases and kits which turn iPads into educational games using peripheral pieces.

Other brands purchased included KiwiCo, Knex, Engino, LEGO, Playmobil, and Excellerations, and contained items like tessellating blocks, magnetic blocks, engineering kits, music sets, puppets, and biology models. To keep the number of vendors down, we purchased many items from Amazon and a single teacher supply store. The browse and category functions in the teacher supply store further helped identify STEM, Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), and other types of items that interviewees had not specifically mentioned. The kits had a combined budget of $7,500. We also allocated $500 for storage materials like boxes.

### Discussion

As items were still arriving and librarians were cataloging and shelving them, the library liaison to the education department and the library marketing coordinator began to promote the refreshed collection directly to students though activities such as tabling new

children's books, building kits, and activity boxes in the building that houses the education department. The tabling team passed out more than one hundred fliers at a single event, and interest in the collection seemed high, as most of the passing students in this building were pre-service teachers.

Several classes have utilized the collection since it was updated. Some have focused on children's literature and used reviews to make lesson plans around books or sets of books; others have used the collection to create lesson plans for theoretical classes. All of these classes have encouraged pre-service teachers to utilize the materials.

In non-classroom use, item usage data confirms an increase in usage of the collection, though it is not possible to see if that is a trend at this point. Table I shows usage (defined as in-library uses plus out-of-library loans) for the time period of July 2022 to March 2023 compared to a similar period in the previous year. We chose July 2022 as it was the first month when most recent acquisitions were available to be loaned.

The monumental increase in textbooks unfortunately cannot be explained, as the number of textbooks added as part of this process was relatively small. However, we are satisfied with the increased usage of both kits and juvenile and young adult books. Coupled with increased outreach, we expect these numbers to grow (albeit at slower rates) in the coming years.

We realize more work needs to be done to help pre-service teachers become aware of the possibilities of the collection. Now that all of the latest items are processed, the library can promote the collection as a whole to pre-service teachers and education.

**Plans for the Future**

The curriculum collection will remain onsite until the timeline for the move to the new library building is more concrete. This helps with discovering these items, since it can be more helpful to browse for these materials than to find them in the catalog. After the new library building is completed, the current building will undergo full renovation. The current plans include a dedicated room for the curriculum collection, with an adjacent classroom. This will create opportunities for more effectively incorporating the collection into classroom instruction, especially since the current setup has it shelved on the quiet floor. The new room will have tables and chairs for students in addition to the attached classroom space. This will increase the utility of the collection during instruction sessions and will provide overflow space for times when education faculty bring their students to the library.

The library has also discussed getting additional crafting items that may be useful for pre-service teachers, such as die cutters and laminators. These items can be housed in the new room for the curriculum collection or in the makerspace in the new library building. The advantage to setting the makerspace as the home for the crafting materials is that the makerspace has staff that can assist with the equipment, which will not be the case for the room housing the curriculum collection.

A final item to consider is future budgetary allowances for the collection. While we are waiting to see if our initial work has resulted in sustained usage of the collection, it is difficult to ask for additional funding, especially when funding is limited to begin with. We aim to create a plan that forecasts potential needs in the future and the budget allowances required to meet those needs. In the meantime, new acquisitions outside the scope of the initial grant funding, such as requests by faculty to purchase newly adopted curricula, are coming out of the general library materials budget.

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**Tables and Figures**

**Table 1**

*Collection Usage Statistics*

| Location | 7/22 to 3/23 Usage | 6/21 to 3/22 Usage | Change (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Juvenile/Young Adult Books | 778 | 590 | +32% |
| Kits* | 67 | 11 | +509% |
| Textbooks | 171 | 7 | +2343% |
| TOTAL | 1016 | 608 | +67% |

*Kits include all manipulatives, STEM items, and guided reading kits.