

The Vixen and the Lioness

A vixen with her seven kits
Went out to get some air
And as they scampered all about
They found a lion there
A-resting in the long tall grass
And cuddling with her cub
The vixen thought to speak out loud
The lioness to snub

“Why you look smug, oh haughty dame
You look to be in heaven
But you’ve just one for progeny
While I have all of seven
I wonder why you feel so proud
When all you have is one
Can you imagine all my pride
For all that I have done?”

The lioness did lift her head
With steadfast calming gaze
Then stood up tall and walked away
Ignoring vixen’s phrase
And then she wrinkled up her nose
And formed a noble quote
She turned to face the vixen there
Who had such cause to gloat

“Yes, look at your collection
Of children all about
They certainly are foxes
Of that there is no doubt
And what have they to boast about
With all the things they’re tryin’?
My single cub has precious worth
For he’s a noble lion!

Like the fox and her kits, there certainly is no shortage of “progeny” in available instructional resources. Publishers and published materials abound in a variety of formats, including text, multimedia, and digital. With the multitude of items available, it is increasingly difficult to find the “lions” or genuinely high quality resources that can really strengthen instruction and promote academic achievement and relevant learning experiences for all children

The Utah legislature created the first Utah State Instructional Materials Commission in 1907. This commission, comprised of appointed educators and lay citizens, was charged with the responsibility to make recommendations to the State Board of Education regarding the quality of available core-related resources. These recommendations are then posted on a publicly available website where all patrons of education can examine them. The goal of this recommendation process is to ensure that Utah schools are able to acquire the very best instructional resources, and avoid those of inferior content or quality.

The Commission directs content specialists at the Utah State Office of Education (USOE) to organize committees of teachers and administrators from districts and schools to come together to review materials submitted from publishers. Each committee focuses on a particular curricular area and examines materials to see that they correlate with core standards and objectives approved by the State Board of Education. Committee members come from various geographic locations in the state, and represent various grade levels and student populations. Much effort is expended to see that each resource is reviewed by multiple reviewers, and given fair and unbiased treatment.

Materials submitted by publishers may be in the form of textbooks, software, multimedia, or online resources. They must show how they fulfill the requirements of the core standards for the subject they are designed for. Evaluators on the committees consider three general areas in the review process: (1) content, (2) accessibility, and (3) pedagogy.

Content

Reviewers look carefully to see that content aligns with core standards, and is current, well researched, and reliable. It must be free of bias, and can be used by all students regardless of gender, race or ethnicity, and must be free of advertising, e-commerce or political interest, and must be in compliance with the law and community standards. It must be complex, challenging, and provide scaffolding for all students to enhance their conceptual understanding. Content should be age-appropriate and successfully engage learners from various skill levels. It should promote data gathering and manipulation and offer opportunities for students to share evidence and research. Finally, it should be clear and understandable.

Accessibility

Ideal materials are durable, easily stored, transported, and are accessible for an appropriate time period to facilitate a proper learning environment for all students. They should be easily updated and adaptable for teacher and student use in individualized or group instructional settings. They should work properly with the purchase of additional components, and should be able to be used without extensive supervision or special assistance. They must meet the requirements of federal and state laws and accepted technical standards. They should be easy to navigate through, and should have provisions for the practice of old and new skills and require independent student work.

Pedagogy

Desirable materials should be interactive and provide high quality sensory experiences for all users. Technical procedures, such as installation and setup are easy and error free. Technical specifications and limitations, including hardware requirements, bandwidth demands, and software and web access restrictions are adequately described and noted. Requirements for the instructor are clear and provide ample professional development. Assistance and many technical resources are available. There is an observable performance that is relevant to real work experience that can be used to measure student mastery of learning outcomes. Finally, formative and summative assessments are aligned with core objectives and easily assess what has been learned and provide appropriate intervention strategies.

Reviewers are expected to use evidence gathered in the review process to construct narratives that describe the resource. Teachers and subject area specialists who create the reviews are encouraged to share their opinions about the effectiveness of the materials by providing examples from them. The best reviews clearly detail the ways in which the curriculum matches core objectives as well as the other criteria listed above. Narratives should do more than describe the materials; they should indicate the likely effectiveness of them in the hands of a skilled teacher in a variety of teaching situations.

Once evaluators have completed their work, and the reviews are recorded in the RIMS (Recommended Instructional Materials System) database, they are carefully examined by subject area specialists at the USOE, and then submitted to the eleven member Instructional Materials Commission. In one of their semi-annual meetings, commissioners will monitor the work of the committees and specialists, and then make recommendation to the State Board of Education. The Board will then review the recommendations in their December and June board meetings and approve or reject the work of the committees, specialists, and commission. Approved items are then posted publicly for interested educational patrons to access from the website at <http://schools.utah.gov/curr/imc> .

Questions for Consideration

1. What is the difference between a basal and a supplemental resource?
2. Does USOE solicit publishers for submission of instructional materials?
3. Does USOE review apps?
4. What contractual obligations are there between USOE and publishers who have recommended materials?
5. Does USOE review Open Education Resources? How are they submitted, since there is often no publisher?
6. What is the purpose of the alignments created by independent reviewers?
7. What are some examples of materials that were “not recommended?”
8. What costs are involved from the publisher to participate in a review?
9. What are the qualifications for a reviewer?
10. Does USOE review the content of online courses?
11. Does a school or district have to choose materials from the recommended list?
12. What titles are currently being used in the districts?
13. How many titles are in the RIMS database?
14. How many publishers participate in the review process?
15. What is the “Favored Nation Clause?”