

Special Plans for Special Needs

With the administration—in this case represented by the principal—the head must take up questions of long-term policies and of special plans to meet special needs. What can we do to help ensure greater continuity in students' English experiences from seventh through twelfth grades? How can we improve reading ability so that each student goes out better equipped as a citizen? The director of testing is brought in on this discussion because of the unusually large number of people in next year's senior class who are too much below their grade level in reading, and also because of the fifty "special promotion" people who are part of next year's incoming sophomore group.

"Dan isn't doing well in his English, and he always has before this year. I'm sure it is the teacher's fault. Dan just cannot get along with Mr. Blank." Somehow the department head must see not only the mother, but also Dan and Mr. Blank, then try to see the whole picture, and help work out a solution fair to everyone concerned. If the question gets too complicated, it means a trip to the counselor as well.

In the evening there is a meeting of the East-West Association, the English-

Speaking Union or other such groups to see how the English work can be tied in with efforts toward world understanding. British students want to correspond with American ones. Books-Across-the-Sea is helping build up lists of such Pen Pals. Will the English head help? Yes, of course, for what lover of the humanities and of humanity can refuse such a plea? PTA study groups want to know what the school is doing for their children in speech, or in encouraging reading, or any of a dozen other things. These matters, too, fall to the lot of the English head.

No mention has been made of the routine requests for "bibliography forms" or "soldier inventory" sheets, or "What do you know about so-and-so's work before he came to us?" for these are all mere clerical work—or are they?

No mention has been made either of the quite considerable amount of work involved in helping new teachers get oriented, nor even of the occasional summer workshop in which one is "on the job."

Of all such is the work of at least one head of a department. Mere clerk? No! Guidance worker? liaison officer? supervisor? Let those who read supply the answer.

◀ *A consultant as supervisor*

TROUBLE-SHOOTER AND EYE-OPENER

G. FRANKLIN STOVER

THEY CALL ME a consultant, a resource person available at the request of the teacher, supervisor, or administrator and clearly not in a position to impose procedures, influence salary schedules, or make assignments. The role of the consultant is, therefore, one in which title or position does not enter to prevent cooperative effort as equals. For this I am thankful.

In private conference teachers report their difficulties, reveal their fears, and ask for help in matters which they might conceal from "superiors" in their own school systems. For example, teachers very frequently mention lack of time, of equipment, and finances, as factors which make certain curriculum adjustments difficult.

The following problems were raised in a school to which the writer was invited:

Sometimes a consultant coming "from the outside" can see what is unnoticed by those close to a situation. When the consultant can help teachers discover resources around them and develop inner resources, he is making supervision real and dynamic. To illustrate the supervisory nature of a consultant's job, G. Franklin Stover draws upon his experience as former professor at State Teachers College, Troy, Ala., working with the Commission on Teacher Education of the American Council on Education, and his present activities as curriculum consultant in the Pennsylvania Department of Public Instruction.

"How can we find materials which may be needed in carrying out the varied activities suggested in the new course of study?" "We do not have clerical assistance in contacting the many sources of information suggested (by the consultant)." "We do not have filing cabinets for convenient display or storage in our rooms, when we do secure materials."

The principal had lost his secretary and could offer no clerical help; yet we found thirty members of the typing class doing "busy" work, and the commercial teacher was delighted to take over the ordering of free and inexpensive materials as a joint project in English and typing. Incidentally, industrial arts classes were willing to construct filing and storage cases from orange crates and boxes collected by students.

Discovering Resources

The consultant through visitation, correspondence, and questionnaire studies found certain problems common to a number of districts. These problems became serious when state and federal pressure forced adoption of new and unfamiliar activities. Teachers felt insecure when they were assigned as instructors in pre-flight aeronautics courses.

Investigation of possible resources led the consultant to the executive director of the State Aeronautics Commission who offered a Link Trainer, two airplanes, and instructors without cost. The War Pro-

duction Training Library loaned films and projectors; state institutions loaned surplus equipment for a classroom at the airport; use of folding cots made possible the transformation of the classroom into a dormitory offering free lodging to teachers. Approximately one hundred teachers from all parts of the state, in groups of five, received instruction in classroom techniques and spent several hours in the Link Trainer and in an airplane, actually handling the controls in the air.

The experience convincingly demonstrated that resources, which few schools can provide alone, may be made available through cooperative effort.

Far more difficult, however, is the problem of stimulating the desire for personal growth and a broadened conception of the teacher's task which alone will provide adequate inner resources. Certainly no brief experience will suffice.

Unfortunately, the consultant in the summer workshop, local institute, or curriculum development program frequently is not permitted to work with a group of teachers long enough to study or to influence the processes by which the growth of individuals and the effective cooperation of groups takes place. The single visit or contact does not allow time for planning of next steps, or for getting at the roots of difficulties which prevent progress.

Better Teaching Through Problem-Solving

A view of the importance of time in maturing really significant adaptations is provided by the carefully kept records of summer workshops and local planning conferences in one school which the writer followed over a period of four years. These records show that newer points of view, when actually implemented in day-to-day planning, send reverberations throughout the whole structure and life

of the school. The changing character of the problems raised with consultants throughout the four-year period demonstrates the crucial role of properly timed consultative services when these services are based upon an intimate understanding of the origin and growth of efforts to improve instruction in a given school.

The problems which follow present merely a few glimpses into the story of school R— of the Southern Association Study in Secondary Schools and Colleges,¹ a study based upon “the assumption that to assist teachers with their urgent concerns is as valid a basis for the growth of teachers and improvement of schools as any that could be made the foundation of operations.” A study of the complete records and of the dates on which problems were raised will indicate that some of the most significant decisions were reached during crises, when consultants were called to the school, or during day-to-day planning in small functioning groups.

“Our problem is to make teaching more functional.” (First summer conference, 1938)

“How may we best prepare the staff and community for thinking through the problems of the school?” (During 1938-39 school term)

“How shall we provide a broad curriculum which is not built around subject-matter concepts?” (Second summer conference, 1939)

“How may pupils be led to develop criteria for judging the worth of activities selected?” (Pre-school conference, 1939)

“How shall we have daily staff meetings? They must be provided for in the schedule.” (August, 1939)

“How do we proceed if students find the new approach so foreign that they

will not recognize their needs?” (First week of school, 1939)

“Will a pre-planned core program cause a teacher to think in terms of the core rather than the student?” (Third summer conference, 1940)

“Since interests and needs change from year to year, what kind of advance planning will be helpful yet flexible?” (Third summer conference, 1940)

“How can we bring the parents into the process of planning the student’s work at the beginning of a school year so that parents will not unduly influence the choices made?” (Third summer conference, 1940)

“How do we develop appropriate techniques in helping students to find their needs? How do we obtain the help of consultants when it is needed and for a long enough period to serve the needs of teachers?” (January, 1941)

“We must provide an opportunity for the entire staff to think through their problems and to share in developing plans in order that they may be at the same place in their thinking when the term really begins.” (January, 1941)

“How shall we develop appreciations and attitudes on the part of the parents and the students in regard to accepting responsibility for the school program?” (Summer, 1941)

Even this brief account of the efforts of one school to meet the needs of its students should convince the self-sufficient teacher, administrator, or consultant that “the problems of teaching are so complex that no individual can solve them single-handed.” While the consultant will find many opportunities for service in intelligent use of resources, no opportunities will be more fruitful than those which “point to products of procedures, based upon and derived from collective thinking and intelligence of individuals.”

¹ Stover, G. Franklin: “Preparing Teachers for Newer School Programs,” *Quarterly Bulletin*, State Teachers College, Troy, Ala., 1942.

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