

Teachers Can Plan Workshops

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TO A CERTAIN EXTENT the philosophy of democratic leadership in school administration rests upon the premise that teachers are vitally concerned with their own improvement and that this concern will lead them to assume responsibility for their own professional growth. A corollary premise is that the concern of teachers is so vital and immediate that they will be willing to make a voluntary investment of time and energy in bringing about better schools.

Two recent workshops which were projected and executed by the Atlanta Teachers Association, a local unit of the American Federation of Teachers, served to test these premises. The workshops were the brain children of the Committee on Professional Growth of the Atlanta Teachers Association. From beginning to end the enterprises were planned, promoted, and conducted by the teachers of the city through their own organization. The city school administration was highly sympathetic and willingly cooperative, but extreme care was taken to avoid even the semblance of administrative or supervisory promotion.

"Our Time and Our Plans"

Time? The teachers used their own time. The first workshop, held in the spring of 1944, ran for four days from 3:45 to 6:30 each afternoon, and all planning was done in out-of-school time. The promoters were amazingly delighted when 325 of the 991 white teachers in Atlanta attended the workshop sessions, freely investing their own afternoons. The second

workshop, held in October 1944, required even more time. The Board of Education agreed that schools could be dismissed one hour early on the four afternoons, but the teachers continued to invest their own time also. The opening afternoon of the second workshop found 800 teachers in attendance, and they kept right on coming.

Planning? The teachers did that, too. Mostly through a small steering committee the first time, but the second time more than one hundred individuals participated in the pre-planning activities which extended over a three-month period. In addition, practically every teacher in the system participated in deciding what would be done, and who would help do it.

Staff? The teachers found that cooperation engenders cooperation. They called upon Emory University for professional assistance the first year and got it with an enthusiasm which equalled their own. Emory's coordinator for teacher education was furnished to direct the workshop, and, in addition, outstanding staff members from other universities were brought in. Judging by the reports of the participants, the staff left nothing to be desired.

The second year, cooperation really got

A workshop of, for, and by teachers? Yes, but—and there the idea too often stalls. However, in Atlanta, teachers with a will have found a way and two very workable workshops are the result. They are described here by L. D. Haskew, coordinator for teacher education at Emory University in Georgia, and Gerald Y. Smith, president of the Atlanta Teachers Association.

going. Thirty staff people from outside the school system were secured, and an additional twenty came from the ranks of the Atlanta teachers themselves. Not only higher institutions, but also governmental agencies, voluntary associations, and private corporations furnished outstanding specialists to compose a staff which proved to be unusually competent.

Details? The teachers managed them with an efficiency which left little to be desired. Publicity releases, room schedules and equipment, daily programs, refreshments, and all the other odds and ends were taken in charge by committees and the jobs were done, on time and in good humor.

Activities? The planning committee scheduled activities which seemed to meet the needs of teachers for creative opportunities, for relaxation, and for personal enrichment. Arts and crafts, playground games, choral speaking, creative rhythms, woodshop work, book reviews, folk games, and several other opportunities were provided under competent leadership. The director was unusually well pleased with the atmosphere of busy freedom which prevailed at all times, and the participants seemed equally enthusiastic in their evaluations.

We Campaign for Greater Unity and Better Health

The serious side? The theme of each workshop was agreed upon by the steering committee. The first year, attention was given to laying a foundation for greater unity between the levels of the Atlanta school system. The second workshop dealt with health education, and the way it dealt with it deserves attention.

The planning committees for the second workshop projected it as the opening gun in a long-term campaign to improve health

education throughout the school system. They hoped for outcomes which would be permanent, but the results even exceeded their hopes. For three afternoons, discussion groups examined various aspects of the Atlanta health program, and on the fourth afternoon recommendations were projected for the next steps. These recommendations established a steering committee to preserve and promote the values of the workshop and asked the committee to work in cooperation with the school administration to (1) set up twelve study committees to work throughout the year, with consultant help, and make reports which could be the basis for next year's workshop; (2) request individual schools and individual teachers to develop experimental programs, and provide them with expert consultation; (3) arrange with higher institutions certain specified resource courses in the field of health education, and (4) provide for the continuation of certain workshop activities at periodic intervals throughout the year.

Space does not permit an attempt to evaluate fully these workshop experiences. It does seem clear, however, that they have been of great value and, perhaps more important, that they exemplify the democratic philosophy at work. In summary, the following implications seem to warrant especial attention:

1. Teachers can plan, and will plan, to meet their own problems.
2. The success of planning engenders more planning by more people.
3. Cooperation begets cooperation.
4. Resources are available to teachers, particularly from higher institutions which have caught the vision of service rather than credit.
5. Most teachers *want to do* and *will do* when attention is focused upon them rather than upon the few who won't do.

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