

When Teachers Take the Lead

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"I'VE BEEN ATTENDING teachers' institutes for over forty years and this session has been the most profitable experience I have ever had," remarked Mr. Brown as he brought to a close the final section meeting of a county institute. "To me, the preparation involved, the study required, plus the value received from actually leading other teachers in their thinking about common problems, has been tremendously stimulating."

Is it not possible that statements such as this can be attributed to the fact that teachers had assumed leadership roles for approximately two-thirds of the program?

Throughout the school year, teachers in California's Santa Barbara County had requested assistance in the launching and developing of units of study, techniques and instruments of evaluating educative experiences, ways of relating subject-matter areas and skills, and effective use of audio-visual aids. So an institute was planned to meet the needs of the County teachers as defined by themselves and to utilize leadership from their ranks in terms of their own successes in the teaching-learning situations of their respective classrooms. Those who had done outstanding work in these particular phases of unit teaching were selected to participate in this program. Teachers also assumed the chairmanship of every meeting. Elementary and secondary personnel from all types of schools—the one-teacher, the multi-graded

and the large union—located in various sections of the County were represented. Over fifty teachers, or approximately 17 per cent of the teacher group of the entire County, exclusive of administrative or supervisory participation, engaged in some type of leadership role in the institute.

Planning for Leadership Begins

What salient points should be emphasized in the teacher-leader's presentation? What materials should be provided the teacher audience? What professional literature should be recommended for preparatory background study? As ways of facilitating teacher leadership were considered, these were questions often repeated.

To assist the speakers, the supervisory staff prepared a suggestive outline for each as a guide. These bulletins were issued to the teachers prior to the summer vacation and were as varied in recommendations and detail for procedure as were the number of participants. Teachers made constant use of the curriculum laboratory resources during the summer and conferred at length with supervisors regarding details of their presentations.

In order that more help might be rendered, specific units of study with which the County teachers would be working were selected on the various grade levels. Concrete illustrations and application of principles were based on these units. Section meetings for primary, intermediate, and upper grades permitted concentrated attention on problems confronting teachers at each of the three levels of the elementary school. The meetings were carried forward through such means as reading followed by discussion, problem-solving in work-type procedures, and the use of audio-visual material. Informative mimeographed bulletins and informal discussions supplemented these techniques.

General sessions also were conducted by teachers on problems of common concern to fellow workers of all grades. This was the

"The keynote of educational progress in Santa Barbara County is faith in teacher leadership. When teachers become imbued with a feeling of responsibility and privilege in assuming their rightful roles as leaders in the development of a sound program, education moves forward steadily on a broad front." It is this philosophy which motivates the program for developing teacher-leaders described here by Elsie C. Dubhorn, general supervisor in the public schools of Santa Barbara County, California. Certainly such a role for teachers is wholeheartedly embraced by the modern concept of supervision.

second time in a five-year period that teachers assumed a leadership role for the institute program. Enthusiasm was reflected in the presentations because of the deep concern regarding their individual responsibilities. Since these problems were close to the daily school living of the speakers it made the application of recommendations seem easy, practical, thrilling, and worthy of trial. Groups were small and discussion easy because individual members felt security in sections designed to meet the needs of their particular problems. Teachers were free in stating their inadequacies and requesting needed information from their co-workers. The fact that the speaker "is one of us" was important.

Teacher Groups Develop Leaders

During the five-year period of curriculum revision, supervision and curriculum development have been thought of as synonymous. This revised concept of supervision has resulted in orienting a program based on maximum teacher leadership as evidenced in activities described here. There grew an enthusiasm for opportunity to exchange thinking on problems pursued by various study groups. From this need, three Associations were developed—the Primary Teachers, the One-Room Teachers, and the Elementary Principals. Teacher initiated, the work in these local professional groups has resulted in a definite upgrading and professionalizing of the members as opportunities were broadened for social and professional contacts with other members in the field of teaching, as well as with outstanding leaders.

Officers of the organizations plan with the supervisory staff regarding immediate and pertinent problems that necessitate concerted study and action. Teachers assume responsibility for planning the meetings and carrying the year's work forward. Since it is the policy of each organization to elect new officers annually, there are many opportunities for members to take an active part in directing the thinking and action of the total group. Committee work on specific problems draws upon a large percentage of the membership to assume leadership roles. Provision for teachers to participate in leading each other toward the solution of common problems is again afforded.

One of the finest outcomes of the combined

efforts of the three County organizations was the development of a code of ethics designed for the educational personnel of the County. The suggestion for the activity stemmed from a talk to a combined group meeting of the Principals and the One-Room Teachers Associations on the establishment of better community relationships. The groups studied the problem separately in their individual organizations for approximately a year and developed tentative outlines defining their beliefs on the issue, which were later submitted to the County teachers for reaction. These were brought together for criticism and final revision at a meeting of representatives of teacher and principal groups, along with consultants from Stanford University and representatives from medicine, law, and theology. This revised statement was submitted to the elementary and secondary teachers for suggestion and recommendations. Thus the finished code represented the thinking of all teachers. The comprehensive statement is of such calibre that it reflects the depth of sincerity, interest, and dynamics of group action in driving forward a sound educational program.

One-Room Teachers Survey the Job

The following are representative of teacher-initiated activities engaged in by the One-Room Teachers Association since its organization in 1934:

1. A study of recent trends in education and the new types of curriculum development which facilitated a clear understanding of changing concepts in education with the corresponding implications for needed curriculum revision in rural situations. This problem was the focal point of interest for the one-room teachers for over three years. During one school year, the Association centered its efforts upon the problem of evolving a sequence of experiences appropriate for a one-room school. Various committees assumed the responsibility for developing statements of problems and activities appropriate for the different age levels in relation to the selected area that seemed most vital for children in a rural situation.

2. Cooperation in a countywide program of evaluation to determine whether the aim of education, as developed by the County teachers, was functioning. It was stated that it is the aim of education to furnish condi-

tions favorable to the realization of individual and group potentialities. The desirable individual was described as one who would develop behavior which may be characterized by self-respect, creativeness, cooperation, the scientific attitude, responsibility, and social effectiveness. This evaluation study resulted in a detailed analysis of pupil attitudes and behaviors.

3. The development of purposeful units of study adapted for grades one to eight in a one-teacher school. Attention was given to initiating and effectively carrying out these educative experiences in the classroom.

4. The sponsoring of observation days both within and outside the County school system thus providing teachers with opportunities to observe the principles and techniques recommended for application in their individual classrooms. Teachers requested more opportunity to observe good teaching in one-room situations. To answer this need, teachers agreed to take one Saturday each month to schedule demonstration lessons designed to highlight needs as defined by the One-Room Teachers Association. Within a two-year period practically every one-room teacher had an opportunity to be observed. The high-pitched interest of the professional group was reflected from all angles. Children were most responsive in their willingness to attend school on Saturdays and parents cooperated enthusiastically in assisting the teachers in this undertaking.

5. Participation in designing the code of ethics for the County teachers.

6. The development of comprehension test cards for checking library reading which resulted in a better understanding of reading materials particularly appropriate for children in rural schools.

With such a wide range of experiences in this Association, many opportunities were afforded each member to assume a role of leadership and followership. Teachers were asked to evaluate the organizational activity at the termination of each school year. The suggestions offered through these evaluations pointed the direction for the planning of each succeeding year's program.

Learning Through Observation

The need for closer articulation between the elementary and high school was deemed so pressing that the issue took priority for

one year's theme of study and consideration by the Elementary Principals Association. The teachers took the initiative in requesting scheduled observations to develop an insight into the problems to be faced by sixth-graders in their first year at junior high and to discern difficulties which would be encountered by eighth-grade children as freshmen in the secondary school.

What problems does the high-school teacher face in guiding the newcomers most effectively? How can the elementary teacher best prepare her pupils to facilitate the transition? In terms of an understanding of the educative experiences planned by the secondary school, what recommendations can be made to assist in orienting the child and adjusting the program to meet individual needs? Democratic interaction through planned visitation, directed observation, and subsequent consultation involving the faculties of the respective schools brought the answer to questions such as these and eliminated many articulation problems.

How have Santa Barbara County teachers developed leadership abilities through intervisitation and directed observation of regular classroom teaching? Every teacher, regardless of her methods, materials, or general procedures, has some intrinsic values worthy of note. A most profitable technique has been to refer a teacher to a co-worker who has something valuable to share. The teacher-leader is informed concerning the type of assistance needed and is enabled to prepare and have at her disposal those things that will give the most effective help. This contact or conference is scheduled at the convenience of the teachers and is generally held in the classroom of the helping teacher where necessary materials are available. A professional relationship is established which may continue indefinitely and result in a fruitful interchange of experiences for both. The theme permeating intervisitation should be group action for self-improvement. A pooling of the aggregate resources of the teacher group is of mutual value to all participants.

Teacher-Leaders Find Much to Do

It is impossible here to relate the numerous teacher-initiated activities that necessitate leadership roles in shaping the educational program in the schools of Santa Barbara County. Over a period of years, teachers

have assumed the lead in working on such projects as the following:

1. Source units developed through concentrated work in each school followed by meetings with faculties from other areas for the purpose of exchanging and pooling contributions.

2. Units of study particularly adapted to meet the needs of the foreign child through sub-committees exploring specific related problems.

3. Newer techniques of evaluation through workshops held locally as well as on the campuses of various universities.

4. Two concepts in reading: the first centered on reading as a functional skill and the second focused on reading as a pleasurable experience.

5. Reports of successful units developed in classrooms to be edited with the assistance of members of the consultant group.

6. Public relations by adhering to a policy of "open-house" at all times. Parents are encouraged to visit the classrooms and become acquainted with the educational program. The observation is followed by a

conference led by the teacher or principal which includes the parents, teachers, principal, and supervisors. The follow-up discussion is sometimes directed by the use of a bulletin of information presenting changing concepts of education as supported by outstanding educational leaders. This meeting, then, assumes the form of a study group led by the teacher in an attempt to interpret the school program to the public.

One year the teacher leadership was recognized to such an extent that an entire demonstration school on a university campus was staffed by County teachers. On the occasions when workshops were held, teachers assumed the leadership of all committee work. Administrators and supervisors participated in this experience.

The keynote of educational progress in Santa Barbara County is faith in teacher leadership. When teachers become imbued with a feeling of responsibility and privilege in assuming their rightful roles as leaders in the development of a sound program, education moves forward steadily on a broad front.

PREVIEW

WE IN AMERICAN SCHOOLS, granted honorable discharges from wartime curriculums, turn back to the task of education for democratic living in a society where the power of billions of wild horses has been turned loose. Unbelievable energy is in the hands of people who have not yet learned to live together even in the simple environment of home or office. If we really believe, as we affirm, that the world's chance for lasting peace rests upon making true democracy operative for all people everywhere and upon developing social intelligence to match man's achievements in science and technology, our task in American schools is clear. We must equip young people to respect the worth of the individual, to work together for common purposes, and to apply the method of intelligence to the difficulties we face in living together, to the controlling of our material environment, and to the use of our mounting scientific and mechanical inventions and discoveries for the welfare of mankind. In short, our major function should be to help young people understand and practice the democratic way of life in a technological age.—WILLIAM VAN TIL in *Leadership Through Supervision*, the 1946 Yearbook of the Department of Supervision and Curriculum Development, NEA.

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