

## A Region Studies Itself

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MOST STATES and local school systems have made considerable progress during recent years in developing effective procedures for planning cooperatively for needed improvements in the educational program. But on a comparative basis interstate and regional cooperation has made only limited progress. Many needs and possibilities are just beginning to be recognized. Through interstate cooperation in educational planning many improvements in education can be brought about which might not be possible when local school systems or even when states work alone.

In the Southern Region there have been many evidences that the values of interstate cooperation in educational planning are being increasingly recognized. Several organizations have carried out cooperative studies involving the participation of all or most of the states in the Region. The states themselves have recognized the value of cooperation in such projects and have come to look forward each year to realizing some of the benefits which may be attained through such interstate cooperation.

One of the organizations in the Southern Region which grew out of the recognition of the need for more interstate cooperation in the study of educational problems is the Southern States Work-Conference on Education. This organization was established in 1940 through the voluntary cooperation of the states in the Region and has carried out

cooperative studies of educational problems in the Region each year since that time. The Southern States Work-Conference is sponsored by the state departments of education and state education associations of the Southern Region. The problems to be studied each year are selected by the representatives from the participating states who cooperate individually and through their state organizations in carrying on these studies.

### Education's Relation to Resources Becomes Theme for Study

The study which was carried out by the work-conference during 1944 illustrates the procedures which are used and some of the results which may be attained through interstate cooperation on a regional basis. This study really began when the Work-Conference was organized although neither the participants nor the cooperating states were aware of the fact at that time. During the ensuing four years some sixteen studies were carried out involving many of the basic educational problems encountered by the states of the Region. As these studies progressed and as the reports were published from year to year it became increasingly evident that some basic orientation was being attempted by each of the committees but that this orientation had not been fully recognized or expressed.

The states in the Southern Region have been fortunate in that during recent years there have been a number of regional studies, emanating chiefly from the University of North Carolina, which have placed emphasis on the resources of the Region and on the problems faced by the people of the Region in their attempts to utilize these resources to greatest advantage. The organization of the Committee on Southern Regional Studies and Education in 1943, including representatives from the Southern States Work-Conference, gave renewed impetus to the study of the resources of the Region as related to the educational problems and needs. Through the cooperation of the two groups it became

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*Something new in educational planning has come out of the Southern Region during the past several years. Whereas community and statewide studies have been widely carried on with excellent results, cooperative planning on a regional scale has been undertaken only rarely. The way the southern program has grown and developed and the many values to be gained from this type of planning are described by Edgar L. Morphet, director of administration and finance in the Florida State Department of Education and executive secretary of the Southern States Work-Conference.*

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increasingly evident that a comprehensive study of the resources of the Region as related to the educational programs in the respective states and of the educational programs in relationship to the potential use and development of the resources of the Region would be most timely and of direct benefit to all participating states.

This concept then was accepted as a unifying and background theme for the Southern States Work-Conference studies and, particularly for the comprehensive study "Building a Better Southern Region through Education" which was projected for the year 1944. It was recognized that the project was an ambitious one and that many serious problems had to be faced and solved if the study was to be completed satisfactorily.

### Plans and Work Go Forward

The responsibility for planning the details of each study selected by the Work-Conference is vested in an Executive Committee which consists of representatives from the state departments of education and state education associations of the Region. Once a study has been decided upon, the Executive Committee, with the assistance of representatives from the participating states, carries out the preliminary planning and organizes the committees which then assume the responsibility for carrying out specific aspects of the study.

At a preliminary meeting, which was held early in the year and which included representatives from all participating states, a tentative outline for the study was developed to include five major parts as follows:

1. The Challenge of the Southern Region for Education
2. Building an Education to Meet the Challenge
3. Organizing Education to Meet the Challenge
4. Operating a More Functional Educational Program
5. Assuring Improvements in the Educational Program through Continuous Evaluation

Coordinators were then selected to be responsible for organizing each major part of the study. These coordinators, selected from among persons who had shown outstanding ability at previous Work-Conference meet-

ings, cooperated in selecting the chairmen of committees. The coordinators and chairmen then helped to select the committees to be responsible for carrying out the studies and planning the materials to be included in each chapter of the report.

The task of carrying out such a comprehensive study on a regional basis was tremendous. At times, particularly because of difficulties growing out of the war situation, it seemed that the study could not be completed during the year for which it was planned. Yet the committee members, in spite of added responsibilities in their states and local school systems and of changes in personnel which became necessary due to the fact that several of the original members entered the armed services during the year, carried on their work with insight and enthusiasm and had most of the materials assembled by the time of the Work-Conference meeting.

### Workers Meet Together

As had been customary during prior years the Work-Conference meeting was held at Daytona Beach, Fla., during the first two weeks in June. Approximately 155 of the 300 committee members including some planning board representatives and laymen found it possible to attend the Work-Conference and to assist in interpreting the materials and in writing the report. At the Work-Conference meeting provision was made for the 28 working committees. Each coordinator assumed the responsibility for tying together the work of the committees under his supervision and for seeing that the basic orientation agreed upon was observed in preparing the materials for his part of the report. Several consultants were available to work with the coordinators, committee chairmen and committee members.

Shortly after the Work-Conference sessions began each coordinator, assisted by the committee chairmen and members working with him, summarized for the entire Work-Conference the tentative findings and conclusions. These were discussed and modifications agreed upon. The committees then proceeded with their writing and by the time the Work-Conference sessions were concluded the entire report, consisting of some 600 pages of typewritten material, had been completed in tentative form. The final two

days of the Work-Conference were devoted to a summary and evaluation of the materials which had been prepared. At this time, each of the committees summarized its report for the Work-Conference. Thus, every member of the Work-Conference had opportunity to keep informed concerning each part of the report as well as to assist with the work of his own committee. Detailed notes were made regarding suggested changes and improvements. Thus while the reports had been completed by the time the Work-Conference adjourned, it was recognized that a number of changes and much editing still remained to be done.

#### **Book-Length Report and New Studies Included in Follow-up**

The coordinators and committee chairmen assumed the responsibility for the rewriting and editing of their respective parts of the report. These materials were then placed in the hands of the final editing committee composed of the coordinators and the Executive Committee who prepared the materials for the printer.

The book, which is published under the title *Building a Better Southern Region through Education*, comprises some 400 printed pages. This study represents the first comprehensive attempt to consider the educational programs of the Region in relationship to its resources with a view to proposing improvements which should be made during ensuing years if the resources of the Region are to be properly developed and utilized. Since every state in the Region had a number of participants in the Work-Conference who helped to prepare the materials, these persons were in position to assist in interpreting the volume and its implications to the educational leaders in their respective states. A number of state education associations planned programs for the year about the theme "Building a Better Southern Region through Education." Several states planned state work-conferences on a theme similar to the one used by West Virginia—"Building a Better West Virginia through Education." Thus the volume is not merely another report but represents a contribution of the leaders of the Region which is being used by educational groups in states and local school communities throughout the Region in planning improve-

ments in their own educational programs.

As an outgrowth of this comprehensive study the participants in the 1944 Work-Conference decided that one of the next studies which should be undertaken was a cooperative study of vocational education as a part of the total educational program in the Region. This study was projected for the ensuing year, 1945. As a basis for carrying out and implementing this study each state was asked to designate a committee on vocational education to consist of representatives from all aspects of education. These state committees carried on studies in their respective states and representatives from the state committees came to Daytona Beach for the Work-Conference in 1945 to summarize and evaluate their experiences and conclusions. The result was the development of a guidebook for cooperative studies of vocational education which is now being used by state committees throughout the Region.

Projected for 1946 is a cooperative study of elementary education as a part of the total program of education in the various states of the Region. Each state has designated a committee on elementary education which is now in process of carrying on studies within the states and is cooperating with the steering committee in planning the regional study to be culminated in 1946.

#### **Policies Grow Out of Experience**

As an outgrowth of their experiences over the past several years the Southern States Work-Conference participants have reached certain conclusions which have come to be recognized as accepted policies of the Work-Conference. These policies have undoubtedly contributed materially to the successful educational planning which is being carried on through the cooperation of the states in the Region. Among the most significant of these policies are the following:

1. The relationship of each study to the total program of education in the Region and to the development of the entire region has constantly been kept in mind. It is recognized that problems cannot be solved in isolation and that solutions can most satisfactorily be worked out when problems are considered in their relationship to the entire situation in the Region.

2. The value of obtaining as many points

of view as possible and of guarding against the dangers of conclusions reached by specialists working by themselves is recognized. An attempt is made to have each committee consist of representatives from various aspects of education. Thus leaders concerned with general education as well as vocational leaders are encouraged to work on problems involving vocational education. State and local administrators and teachers, including persons working in elementary, secondary and college fields, are encouraged to work on problems involving elementary education. A co-operative study must be cooperative in every sense of the word, and persons from all phases of education must learn to work successfully together if problems are to be solved satisfactorily.

3. Committees should be carefully organized and as much study as possible be carried out in advance of the Work-Conference. It would not be possible for a group of people who had not previously studied the problem to come together and prepare a satisfactory report during a two weeks' period unless considerable work was done either in advance of or following the work-conference. Experience has shown that careful advance planning is essential and that further study and editing are necessary following the two weeks of intensive study, writing, and summarizing.

4. The setting for the Work-Conference is important. Daytona Beach was deliberately selected as the place for the Work-Conference meeting because it provides participants an opportunity to work together with a minimum of interruptions, away from their customary working environment, as well as an unusual opportunity for excellent recreation with the Work-Conference being

adjourned at 4 o'clock every afternoon for swimming in the ocean.

5. The Work-Conference has a contribution to make in the development of leadership. Committee chairmen, steering committee members and others have an opportunity to develop regional leadership talent which may not have been previously recognized. The Work-Conference is helping to develop leadership for education in the Southern Region.

6. What happens in the states is more important than the reports which are written. While the process of collaborating in carrying out studies and preparing reports is important, the extent to which leaders in the respective states are able to utilize the conclusions of the Work-Conference in improving their own state and local school program is the final test of the value of the Work-Conference.

The Southern States Work-Conference has demonstrated that there are a great many values to interstate cooperation in educational planning. The states in the Southern Region have recognized some of these values and have been able, as a result of this interstate cooperation, to plan improvements in their own programs which would not otherwise have been possible. Educational leaders in other regions have become interested in the idea and other regional work-conferences are being discussed and projected for the post-war era. It is anticipated that those states likewise will increasingly recognize the value of interstate cooperation and interstate and regional work-conferences will soon come to be recognized as an essential procedure in planning improvements in the educational program.



THE FUTURE is filled with new frontiers. And the most challenging of these is the human frontier. We must conquer the slums; we must rid ourselves of undernourishment; we must raise the general level of health; and we must make it possible for everyone to develop his or her latent capacities for work and profitable recreation. In doing these things we shall continue to multiply our job opportunities.—Henry A. Wallace in *Sixty Million Jobs*. (See "Legislation for the 'Democratic' Age," page 229.)

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