

"What are schools doing—in the area of human relationships, in inservice education, in core programs, in regional planning, in cooperative planning. Can you tell me where this—or that—is really going on." Such are the questions we are often called upon to answer. It is from this point of view that the articles in this issue of EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP are presented. To those concerned with instructional programs at all levels of growth we suggest that in some one or all of the accounts included are sources for broadening professional horizons and moving forward in our efforts toward improved learning opportunities.

*New Water Out of Old Wells*_____

MARGARET S. PETERS AND DALE W. HOUK

One of the tools for democracy is a cooperative study group procedure, and this article by Margaret S. Peters, formerly junior high school principal in Allegheny County, Pa., and Dale W. Houk, president, State Teachers College, Slippery Rock, Pa. provides proof of the effective results of working together. Clarence Wible, supervisor in the Secondary Division of the Laboratory School; Lillian Mastrotto, supervisor in the Primary Division of the Laboratory School; Emma Heard, chairman of the General Curriculum Committee; H. Lloyd Peters, supervisor in the Secondary Division of the Laboratory School, and chairman of one of the Allegheny County Study Groups have spent considerable time with the authors in evaluating and preparing a summary of the techniques used. R. A. Heard also gave liberally of his time in criticizing and evaluating.

IN THE PAST, institute and large teacher group meetings have ordinarily been of an inspirational nature. Scripture tells us that by the foolishness of preaching some are turned to righteousness, implying that there are better approaches to producing righteousness than by talking to people. Similarly, the cooperative study group movement has advanced on the assumption that "perspirational" type meetings should supplement inspirational type meetings if the teacher is to receive any real help for her teaching from the institute. Consequently, the cooperative study group movement in western Pennsylvania has stressed *doing* by teachers rather than listening.

The term "study group" was chosen after much deliberation. It was hoped to choose a term which would not limit individual initiative of study group chairmen and committee members as to types of procedures they were desirous of following. Demonstrations with pupils and with teachers substituting for pupils, round tables, question-and-answer programs (both oral and written), exhibits, projects with teacher participation—in fact, an almost endless array of types of study groups—have developed. These groups have been active in Allegheny County for the past six years. The brief accounts which follow illustrate some of the types of procedures which have been used.

Some Study Groups Have Worked

Procedure: The leader opened the meeting with a short presentation of the oral reading problem which was to be discussed. He then suggested that the experiences of the group in respect to this problem be pooled. He emphasized the value of group procedures and asked for more than passive attention to the comments of several assistant leaders. He had provided himself with registration cards of all persons present and used these cards to assure full group participation. After each assistant had contributed his comments concerning certain aspects of oral reading, the leader asked leading questions of the group. Six members of the group responded without prodding to the comments of the first assistant, and only occasionally did the leader find it necessary to use the cards. Whenever the responses of members of the group strayed from the topic immediately at hand, the leader tactfully brought the discussion back within the bounds desired.

Evaluation: This group discussion was successful. The response of the group was more than satisfactory, not only in spontaneity but in the quality and sense of the observations. There was interest, excellent leadership, and, consequently, good response.

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Procedure: The chairman stated the problem to the group and presented the different members of the panel. Each member then presented his particular point of view. After each member of the panel spoke, the leader called for comments or questions from the audience. At the conclusion of the discussion the chairman summarized the points presented.

Evaluation: The study group was successful in that there was a great amount of group participation. We believe that those who attended the meeting were stimulated to deeper thinking upon the subject presented. The fact that a number of persons requested further meetings of this type is an indication that the study group is a desirable addition to any teacher institute. Teachers from another

county told us after the meeting they wished that their meetings were as stimulating and practical. The spontaneity of the questions and the comments further proved that the subject was vital to all who attended.

Others Missed the Mark

Procedure: The leader began the "discussion" by reading several selections from a book dealing with "remedial techniques." She talked quite rapidly and no one seemed particularly interested. During the course of the talk, she held up the book to show us the various illustrations—which we could not see. The leader mentioned several other books on remedial reading and ended her talk by showing us pages from a workbook.

Evaluation: From the "Area Theme:—Social Experiences", we had understood that actual units of work and plans of procedure would be discussed by those members of the group. Instead—we just "sat" while the "discussion" leader hurried through her topics and then sat down with a sigh of relief that no one had asked questions. We gained nothing by the talk. Before the meeting a group of us had a lively "session" on units of work. One woman said, "You just about have me convinced that I can carry out a social experience unit with my thirty-four when you put it that way." She had been very skeptical before our talk. We wondered what her reaction would be after that so-called discussion on reading!

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Procedure: The second speaker arose and presented her topic—an integration between music, art, reading, language and dramatics. She had several panels of curtains that the children had made illustrating songs taught in music class. Techniques of music were taught and then the children sketched on the panels to tell about the songs. A play was presented for parents when all curtains were completed. The children had made chair backs illustrating nursery rhymes.

Evaluation: This was more colorful than the reading topic, but there was not much

evidence of integration with reading. The leader had worked on this unit several years ago. She gave no ideas as to how the unit was developed with the children.

Approach to the Ideal

Details of organization for one study group which approaches, in the opinion of the writers, opportunities for the best sort of inservice growth of teachers, point up ways of planning. In organizing her committee, one chairman started working for the October meeting early in the spring. Here, in her own words, is a description of the procedure followed.

The chairman of the group asked four teachers to act as sub-chairmen. This committee of five met early in the spring to discuss the plans set up at the meeting of the general committee and to make plans for organizing small, local study groups. Each sub-chairman then asked teachers in nearby school districts, through the principals of those districts, to attend a meeting.

Four group meetings were held in May. Three groups had five members each; one group had only three members. At these meetings the general plans were presented to the groups and each member chose some topic of special interest to her and pertinent to the subject to investigate during the summer vacation.

In September, these groups met again. Each member presented the results of her investigation. Suggestions were made for improving or extending the work.

A number of the committee members reported that other teachers had expressed a desire to join one of the groups. These people and others were invited to attend the institute meeting, told the general plans, and asked to have some one thing to contribute to the discussion of the reports to be given in October. Thus, the membership was increased to thirty-five. At the October meeting, eighteen people expressed a desire to continue the work of the study groups.

The plans are, at present, to meet in three groups. Each group will elect a chairman for its sub-group and a chairman and a co-chairman for the group as a whole. Plans will be made for extending existing investigations and for beginning new studies. We hope that before long we will have thirty-five permanent committee members.

Putting Group Study Into Practice

At the present time, several teachers who had participated in the Allegheny County group study activities since their beginning are serving at Slippery Rock State Teachers College. As a result of their past experience, they were prepared for action when they were asked to participate in the revision of the state elementary curriculum. The problem set before the group was that of working out a life-centered school based on pupil needs. This goal was to be reached by means of a cooperative study conducted by teachers, parents, and other laymen. As a guide for the project, the new Pennsylvania State Bulletin 233A—*Local Participation in State-Wide Revision of the Elementary School Curriculum*—was used.

Plans of procedure were first outlined for the Slippery Rock project. A chairman was named for the General Curriculum Committee. As a first step, the elementary laboratory school staff held meetings to discuss their educational philosophy, using the state bulletin as a guide, and to put on paper a working philosophy for the laboratory school. As a result of these meetings, seventeen recommendations were set up for presentation to the laboratory school and college administrators. The elementary staff thought that consideration of these recommendations would help to

make the stated philosophy of education function.

Parents Have a Share

At the October meeting of the PTA, the project was explained to the parents. They were then asked for their opinions concerning cooperation in this work and voted to give whole-hearted cooperation. A resolution was also passed to have four additional "home-room" parents elected and a committee was appointed to carry out this resolution. This committee sent ballots and a letter of explanation to all parents, tallied the votes, notified parents elected, and reported the results to the PTA Executive Council. The parent group elected to work on the curriculum committee totaled thirty-five. The PTA also decided that its executive council and the members of the Slippery Rock Board of School Directors should automatically become members of the curriculum committee.

On November 12, the entire curriculum committee met and organized for work. It consisted of the thirty-five homeroom parents, the Board of School Directors, the executive council of the PTA, and elementary, secondary, and college teachers, and administrators.

Getting Down to Problems

At this point in the program a definite system of cooperative study groups was inaugurated. Groups, with laboratory school teachers acting as chairmen, discussed study group techniques. It was decided to divide into three sections to work on (1) meeting children's needs, (2) providing a favorable school environment, and (3) coordinating the community and the school. The

problem was to be attacked by analyzing the present school set-up, recommending changes, and forwarding recommendations to the state department of public instruction after approval by the local board.

Parents were named as chairmen and laboratory school teachers as secretaries in each section. A deadline was set for reporting back to the general committee. Each study group met for discussion, sometimes working in small committees and sometimes observing in the laboratory school. As a result of their research and discussion, these groups evolved certain recommendations. On February 4, these recommendations were presented at a meeting of the general curriculum committee.

These recommendations were referred to groups where responsibility belonged: laboratory school, college, parents, or board of school directors. When a matter was to be considered by parents and laboratory school, a representative committee was named to take proper action.

Some recommendations were referred to special committees for further study. Other recommendations were "long-term" and set aside for future consideration. Several projects which were suggested received immediate action: for example, police protection through traffic was provided for the children on the way to and from school; luncheon and recreational activities were improved through the cooperation of students in college health education classes; and parents provided additional play equipment.

In connection with the "long-term" recommendations, it should be stressed that this is a continuing program which

has involved the use of many hours of parents' time. Teachers and administrators have also given freely of their time to carry the work along. All attendance has been voluntary.

At present the general curriculum committee is considering the subject-matter divisions of the curriculum. They are divided into study groups working on the social living program, the physical well-being of the child, the skills program, and developing personal tastes and abilities.

Results Are Tangible

Our past five months of active participation resulted in marked improvement in community interest:

1. Parents are working along with teach-

ers instead of criticizing the school.

2. Parents are visiting school and studying the needs of children.
3. Teachers are becoming more aware that their work must function in the life of the child.
4. PTA programs of a hit-or-miss lecture type are being replaced by study-type meetings on local school problems.
5. School administrators in our service area are observing this project. They have become interested in it and indicate that they are desirous of having teachers trained in study group techniques.

We are still in the experimental stage. Nevertheless, we believe that the cooperative group study method holds great promise for strengthening our democratic school system.

NEWS OF CONSEQUENCE: Individuals interested in a summary of the Chicago meeting can obtain one by writing directly to the ASCD office, 1201 Sixteenth St., N.W., Washington 6, D. C. Summaries will be available in mid-May and will sell for thirty cents. Stamps, cash, or check should accompany orders.

Information on summer conferences in which ASCD is cooperating may be obtained by writing to the Washington office. Details concerning these conferences are included in the April issue of *EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP*, p. 455, and in the April issue of the *NEWS EXCHANGE*.

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