

substitutes may require interpretation to the public.

### We're Convinced It Works

After an experience of several years, the values we are getting from increased participation of teachers seems amply to justify the plan in spite of problems involved. There is need for

experimentation with various means for giving teachers the needed time for educational planning. Springfield's experience with the use of substitutes has been promising. The problem of releasing teacher time is doubtless not insurmountable if administration comes to recognize the importance of adequate provision for it.

## Taking Curriculum Soundings\_\_\_\_\_

LESLIE W. JOHNSON

Administrators are more frequently making use of the opinion poll for giving an accurate picture of educational needs. How one school system used this method as an actual means for curriculum improvement is described by Leslie W. Johnson, director of curriculum in the Superior, Wisconsin public schools.

A GOOD PLANK in any educational platform is a statement of sharing in policymaking by all participants affected by the policies. It has become such an important principle in the recent philosophy of administration that various means are used to put the principle into practice. However, the mechanics of organization often prevent wide-spread use of the practice—it is difficult to get groups together; there isn't enough time for meetings.

Values must be weighed in making arrangements for group planning. Specially constructed techniques and devices need to be considered to gain means by which staff members may participate. In curriculum planning, the curriculum coordinator needs to "keep

his ear to the ground" in order to be effective in guiding phases of curriculum development.

### THE CASE FOR FREQUENCY

Surveys of teacher opinion have often provided the springboard for an attack on real and current problems. In 1945, for example, the Curriculum Guiding Committee of the Wisconsin Cooperative Educational Planning Program launched a questionnaire entitled, *Inquiry on Curriculum Problems*. The volume of material (twelve essay-type questions) on a state-wide survey made the problem of tabulation difficult. Nevertheless, the questions raised were extremely useful for self-analysis and discussion in local communities. They

indicated where teachers felt there were weaknesses and problems that needed attention.

One such survey, help though it may be in determining a program of planning, soon loses its effectiveness with time, change of personnel, and program development. It is necessary to sample regularly in order to catch the full significance of shifts in emphases, new problems, awkward and ill-advised current practices; and to determine whether or not and to what extent certain problems have been solved.

An observation of special interest is the change of opinions over a period of time. Problems that are considered important at one time seem rather foolish two years later. Those that seem not to exist come into being later as somewhat of a surprise.

#### A SAMPLE OF OPINION TAKING

Superior, Wisconsin is a city of 40,000 population. There are eleven elementary schools, five junior high schools, and two senior high schools. The educational staff consists of 207 members. Two surveys have been made within a three-year period to assist in determining the future course of curriculum planning and school organization. This report may be considered a sampling of what one might learn from a study of the questionnaires.

The questionnaire was introduced with the query: "Do you have any problems in the curriculum or professional areas listed below on which you desire help? If so, state your problem briefly under the appropriate heading." Ten headings followed: classroom organization and administration, organization of curriculum, materials of instruc-

tion, effective techniques of instruction, guidance of children, professional leadership, use of community resources, extra-curricular activities, home and school relationships, others. Questionnaires were unsigned to encourage freedom of expression. The response by staff members was ninety-one percent for the questionnaire as a whole.

#### Too Many Youngsters

The first survey indicated that a number of teachers were concerned about the size of their classes. Two years later the problem didn't seem to exist. We may conclude that satisfactory adjustments, which corrected conditions where teacher-load seemed unreasonable, were made.

#### How About Grouping, Failure, and Promotion?

Other problems of classroom organization and management revealed by the first "sounding" included the following problematic situations:

*What shall be the basis of promotion?*

*How can we reduce the number of periods in the daily schedule?*

*How should children be grouped?*

*How can we arrange for more time for our work?*

*What constitutes a failure?*

These problems are placed in order of importance as determined by the number of responses. A second survey indicated progress had been made toward the solution of these five problems and two seemed nonexistent. Promotion remained an unsolved problem, as well as that of failures. Grouping had been studied rather intensively with one school used as an experimental

school to try out conclusions of the special study. A plan of grouping was worked out by teachers of the experimental school and was recommended to the others for consideration. Today the conclusions are generally accepted.

### What Shall We Teach?

Reactions to the plan of curriculum organization took no general pattern. Responses were directed toward specific parts or phases of courses. The vagueness of responses on the first survey indicated that the teachers were not secure in their thinking on curriculum organization and revealed a need for a more extensive program of in-service training in this area. The second survey showed that much had been accomplished in the development of a better understanding of "what to teach."

### How Can We Use What We Have?

The problem of materials of instruction was quite a different matter. Teachers seemed more sure of their footing in this area. The five first ranking problems are listed:

*How can we get more visual aids?*

*How can we get more textbooks?*

*How can we get more supplementary books?*

*How can we arrange for auditory aids?*

*When will we be able to get a new hectograph?*

That the search for the solution of these problems was effective was indicated by responses to the second survey. The problem changed from "how can we get" to "how can we make better use of. . . ?" The problems, as such, were *not solved*. But certain develop-

ments had taken place in the meantime, and they *had changed*.

### Help with the Slow Learner

Under the classification of effective techniques of teaching, the problem of remedial measures ranked first on the first survey. That it still ranks high seems indicative of failure to solve it adequately. Several interesting statements represent a good analysis of this phase of education.

*We need a clarification in philosophy of formal vs. informal procedures in classroom teaching.*

*We need to know how to teach reading in high school.*

*Should home economics be the dumping ground for poor students?*

### We Don't Understand Guidance

The problem of guidance on the first questionnaire suggested a need for a better understanding of that area. A large majority of questions were confined to testing. The whole problem seemed that of diagnosis of children's difficulties. There was little indication of a real understanding of the purpose of guidance functions among the members of the staff. The results of the second questionnaire continued to point to need for further in-service training in guidance functions.

### We'd Like Supervisory Help

Most of the teachers responding to the question on professional leadership wanted supervisors to demonstrate more often in the classroom. There seemed to be a sincere desire on the part of the teachers to have individual conferences with supervisors. Several teachers asked

for visiting days. No mention was made of extension work or summer courses in professional education. The chief value derived from the response to this section was the provision of indicators as to the effectiveness of the supervisory program when these "soundings" were taken.

#### **Taking Trips Involves Risk**

A large number of teachers were anxious to arrange for field trips in order to use the community for instructional purposes. On the other hand, this number represented less than one-sixth of the total teaching staff. At the time of the first survey, the teacher, by law, was responsible for the safety of the children when off the school property. This situation prompted the administration to make some provision for the safety of the children while on such trips and relieve the teacher of her responsibility. Consequently, increase in the use of field trips has resulted.

#### **Radio Isn't Our Concern**

Little interest was shown in the use of the radio at the time of the first survey. (A rather heavy broadcasting schedule is maintained over four local stations.) Radio stations were notified of this fact. As a result, an educational radio commission made up of staff members representing both elementary and secondary education was appointed.

Both surveys revealed little interest in listening to educational programs. This may be due to reception difficulties from stations broadcasting educational programs during school time. Wire recorders have been introduced which may offer a partial solution to the problem of program listening.

#### **The Extras Have Little Value**

The problem of extra-curricular programs and activities presented questions which gave the administration some concern. The teachers' questions referred principally to entertainments. It appeared that the program had little value except to keep children and pupils contented in school. The only exception suggested that extra-curricular activities should be made curricular.

The survey lead to an analysis and interpretation of the program then in existence with the intention of making necessary changes in order to better justify what was being done. The response to the same program in the second survey indicated that much progress had been made.

#### **Community Relationships Aren't Succeeding**

Few teachers expressed any great concern about home and school relationships in the first survey. Those that did referred specifically to parent conferences. These were difficult to arrange, and several mentioned the PTA as an organization which had failed in the development of parent-teacher conferences.

#### **We're Not Solving the Problems**

The second section of the first survey referred to the role of the teacher in the attempt to solve the problems mentioned. "Indicate briefly what you or your school are now doing on the problems which you have listed above." This request brought weak response. Some of the best statements were:

*Every spring we go to the court house,*

post office, fire hall. Other places are too far.

I have been passing low I.Q. children. We are experimenting with different types of activities.

I try to arouse interest the best I can, but still fail in many cases.

I am trying to stress workshop methods, especially in senior English.

The first "sounding" brought into focus a large number of problems which were being faced by the school system

and the curriculum department. It was evident that the attitude of the teachers could have been expressed as, "Here are the problems—and there are many. We can't do much about it."

This wasn't true in the second "sounding." Teacher participation in course-of-study construction, policymaking, purchase of materials, and experimental programs has afforded opportunities for developing staff initiative.

## Raising the Level of Consultant Service

---

MARCELLA R. LAWLER

The changing concepts of consultant service are reviewed by Marcella Lawler, research assistant, Horace Mann-Lincoln Institute of School Experimentation of Teachers College, Columbia University. In her previous position with the State Department of Education in Washington, Miss Lawler served in a consultant capacity to many schools in that state. She brings first-hand experience to her discussion on planning for consultant service.

**AUTOMOBILES SERVICED!** Train reservations made! Plane tickets purchased! Thousands of miles are being traveled each month in the United States by consultants working in the public schools. Reports written! National and regional conferences held! Workshops planned! Colleges, universities, state departments of education, and foundations are developing programs of consultant service.

Twenty-five years ago the educational consultant was almost unknown. At that time we had the visitor, the *expert* who was brought into the school for a speech or a very short period of time. During his brief stay he was expected to give *the* answer. He frequently left the school feeling completely frustrated, knowing his help had been inadequate.

The school personnel in attempting

Copyright © 1948 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.