

# *A Consultative-Cooperative Method*

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During the past five years a major research project known as the Citizenship Education Study has been sponsored jointly by the Detroit public schools and Wayne University. In this article, Elmer F. Pflieger, evaluation director of the Study, describes the consultative-cooperative method employed in developing "effective learning classes" in one of Detroit's high schools.

THE CITIZENSHIP Education Study used a consultative-cooperative method in an attempt to produce curriculum change in the participating schools of the Study. Essentially, the method consists of improving a school situation through the cooperative efforts of administrators, teachers, pupils, and consultants. Several unique features of the method are described in this article. Problems which sometimes arise in using the method are also discussed in telling the story of the establishment of tenth grade "effective learning classes" in one of the participating high schools.

## Using the Method

At a meeting of a small group of teachers discussing a functional program of secondary education, the principal of a large metropolitan high school encouraged the group to develop a really effective high school program for entering tenth grade students. As a result, a group of teachers was invited to develop a course to meet the needs of the students of this school. The committee consisted of representatives of all subject matter departments of the school in addition to administrators and staff members of the Citizenship Education Study.

At its initial meeting the committee tackled the question, "What educational experiences will improve citizenship and best fit the needs of tenth grade pupils at this school?" Inspiration came from several sources. A letter from the principal was read, two Study staff members discussed the need for improvement in secondary education and presented ideas from the work of other groups of teachers similarly engaged, and a school counselor discussed some conclusions from a study of drop-outs. The resulting discussion showed that the group was ready to improve citizenship through a curriculum better fitted to the needs of students.

This meeting was held on school time away from school, because one factor in the use of the consultative-cooperative method is the attempt to develop a relaxed situation in which there can evolve a spirit of cooperation, a feeling that success is possible, and a sense of security. The meeting began with a luncheon, and lasted through the afternoon. This gave all members a chance to react to the ideas presented and to make suggestions.

## Studying Students and Community

An important feature of the method is that participants discover the length

and breadth of the problem and chart a course of action themselves. To illustrate, the committee soon recognized that if a program fitted to the needs of students was to be developed, more would have to be known about these students. A considerable amount of time was then spent in studying the students and the community served by the school. Two phases of this work are important to note.

To know more about the community a survey was made through an anonymous questionnaire to students. Information about families, homes, education and occupations of both students and parents, hobbies, club activities, and similar factors was obtained. The use of information from this survey illustrates a feature of the consultative-cooperative method in that data are used objectively to help solve problems. The "expert" is used as a consultant, but data supplant "authority" in finding answers to questions.

Similarly, data which had previously been collected were re-studied to give further insight into students' needs. These data included information about academic achievement, opinions and attitudes, problems of personality adjustment, age, race, sex, vocational choice, work experience, health factors, previous school records, intelligence, and socio-economic factors. The data substantiated the committee's belief that the school's program was not satisfactory for the student body it was trying to serve.

About fifty percent of the students were dropping out before graduation. A large percent were enrolled in the college preparatory curriculum, but less than ten percent of the graduates

went to college. Many of the drop-outs had expressed vocational choices in the professional, semi-professional, and clerical areas. Such were the facts that confronted the committee. This school was not unique in these respects; similar facts can be unearthed in secondary schools across the country. But what should this committee do about them? For nearly a year the members met regularly, gathering evidence and trying to work out a solution.

### **Evolving a Program**

The committee began thinking in terms of a program designed to develop the five qualities of the good citizen. These qualities of the good citizen are contained in the Framework of the Citizenship Education Study. Briefly stated they are: cherishing democratic values; helping solve social problems; meeting basic human needs; practicing democratic human relationships; and using knowledge, skill, and ability.

The committee visited schools which had programs differing from the conventional. They brought in as consultants people who had worked on the development of similar programs elsewhere. They read, they studied, they discussed. By the end of a year of study and research the program had crystallized fairly well and was ready to be put into operation.

Built on a philosophy that recognized good citizenship as the goal of education, the program was concerned with practices and techniques which would improve citizenship. The program was developed around the idea that this goal would be achieved if students lived and worked together democratically, if they were given techniques for solving

personal and social problems, and if they were given help in developing the skills and abilities necessary for democratic life. To this end, procedures such as the following were developed for the course:

- participation by students in determining course content
- extensive use of the problem-solving method
- more attention to the special difficulties of particular classes and students
- more emphasis on cooperation and less on competition between students
- more group and class projects and fewer individual assignments.

#### Some Salient Features of the Program

One feature of the program was that pupils were to spend longer periods of time with one teacher, thus enabling both teachers and pupils to know each other better. In a large school there is often no teacher who assumes responsibility for individual pupils, with the result that some pupils are neglected. By having one teacher responsible for a class, it was hoped that this disadvantage of a large school would be eliminated and that all pupils would develop a greater feeling of belonging.

The "effective learning class" was required of all incoming tenth grade students. The class met for a double period which took the place of English and social studies. Every student was also enrolled in a single period occupational planning class taught by a counselor. These two classes, together with health education, and electives comprised the student's program. All "effective learning classes" met during the same periods so that common experiences, such as excursions, auditorium

programs, combined class discussions, and student planning meetings, could be conducted without interfering with other classes.

Adequate communication is an important part of the method. The committee which planned the course and the teachers who put it into operation attempted to keep the rest of the faculty informed of their program and its progress. Reports were made at faculty meetings, and newsletters and special bulletins about the "effective learning classes" were issued to the teachers.

#### The Program Underway

The fourteen teachers needed for the program were recruited from many departments, but most of them were English and social studies teachers. The fifth period each day was reserved for the effective learning teachers to meet together as a total group or in smaller committees. The discussion at these sessions was devoted to a number of areas. Sometimes the mechanical details of an auditorium program or the keeping of records occupied the entire time. Other sessions were devoted to learning about new techniques, such as leading a discussion or making a sociogram. Still others gave teachers an opportunity to exchange ideas, to discuss problems, to plan activities, or to gain greater insight into the philosophy of the program.

Pupil experiences varied widely from class to class. A series of pre-planned common experiences included the administration of a number of tests, both for information about the students and for evaluation of the program; and the development of two units, one dealing

with orienting the pupils to the school and one on the newspaper. Beyond that, the experiences in each class were determined by the teacher and, in varying degrees, by teacher-pupil planning. On the one hand, there were classes in which the teacher followed closely the content of the tenth grade English and social studies courses of study. On the other hand, there were classes in which the teacher and pupils planned and worked together on problems and activities of concern and interest to the pupils. Examples of the latter are a project to develop understanding of different cultures, the problem of tardiness to class, the procedures for obtaining working permits, and activities related to improving the mechanics of writing and speaking. Actually, such pupil-teacher planning is the consultative-cooperative method on the pupil level.

#### Student and Faculty Opinion Polled

Continuous evaluation of both process and product is another part of the method. The teachers and Study staff members were concerned about evaluating the "effective learning classes." The evaluation program included the collecting of initial and final data on an achievement test in the language arts and on a personality inventory. These data were compared with similar data from a previous tenth grade class which had followed the conventional program and also with data from a comparable high school which served as a control. In addition, student and faculty opinion about the value of the effective learning classes was collected by means of questionnaires and interviews. On the basis of an analysis of these several

kinds of data, the following conclusions seem valid:

♦ Achievement on subject matter tests is not solely determined by course content. The students in the "effective learning classes" made gains equal to, or greater than, those made by the students in the traditionally organized subject matter courses.

♦ Classes concerned with students' problems and having an emphasis on pupil adjustment seem to help raise the adjustment level of students. The students in the "effective learning classes" increased in adjustment as measured by the personality inventory while the others did not.

♦ The students in the effective learning classes indicated through their opinions on a questionnaire that the aims of the course were being achieved. On a list of twenty-two specific items, an average of seventy-six percent of the students stated that the aims were being met. Seventy-seven percent said that the effective learning class should be continued for future tenth graders.

♦ The teachers of the effective learning classes agreed with their students that the experiences in these classes were valuable and should be continued for other pupils. Opinion of the rest of the faculty was not so favorable. Only slightly less than half of the teachers who made a judgment about the classes said that they should be continued. It is believed that this unfavorable judgment on the part of some teachers was due partly to inadequate communication.

#### The Evidence Is Here

This article has dealt with two concepts. First, it has illustrated the use of a consultative-cooperative method in establishing effective learning classes in a high school. Second, it has outlined briefly important elements in the use of the method.

Two conclusions from the "effective learning classes" are important:

► The classes were meeting the needs of students and were helpful in furthering the development of good citizenship.

► Even though the emphasis in the effective learning classes was on new experiences, academic learning was comparable to that of pupils in traditional classes.

Briefly summarized, the elements in the use of the method are:

1. A group of teachers and administrators truly concerned about the improvement of a situation
2. A problem which presents a real challenge to the group
3. A relaxed situation in which there can develop a spirit of cooperation, a feeling of success, and a sense of security among the members of the group
4. Sufficient time for planning
5. The use of research methods in getting answers to questions
6. The use of consultant help

7. Cooperative planning and decision making

8. An action program resulting from the decisions

9. Adequate communication with all persons involved

10. Continuous evaluation.

Our experience with the method leads to the conclusion that it is effective in curriculum development. It is not necessary that an outside group be available to stimulate and initiate such a curriculum program. A prerequisite, however, is that teachers be truly concerned about curriculum improvement and that leadership exist within the group. The essential feature of this method of curriculum development is that those whose responsibility it is to put the changes into effect must share in developing them. Such a method can lead to continuous improvement in the school program.

## *Developing an Improved Primary Curriculum*

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ALLISON DAVIS

On the basis of extended observation of classroom activities and intensive research in mental problem-solving while developing new intelligence tests, Allison Davis, professor of education at The University of Chicago, outlines basic criteria for the development of a motivating and realistic curriculum in the primary grades.

TO LEARN the true nature of schools, or of any other institution, one must live in them. With this conviction, the writer has observed and analyzed activities during the last five years in more than 100 schools and 500 classrooms in

several regions of this country. Both pupils and teachers not only were observed in the classroom, but also were informally interviewed concerning the activities in their classrooms. During the same five years, while developing

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