

- † The leadership that served to release creative abilities of participants
- † The outcomes in terms of better understanding of people, points of view, and directions for leadership in ASCD organizations
- † The realization that effective educational improvement must be accomplished through the cooperative efforts of all concerned.

At the last general session it was unanimously agreed that another conference be held next August at Indian Lake and that other regions be en-

couraged to promote the same type of workshop. It was hoped that these would be inter-regional in scope.

But the real test of the effectiveness of the conference will be the degree to which the participants modify actions as a result of growth. This cannot now be measured, but it is certain that it can be perceived in several local situations. The free give and take, the sharing of ideas, was expressed hundreds of years ago: "And gladly would he learn, and gladly teach," for all were both learners and teachers at Indian Lake.

A Cooperative Approach to Curriculum Surveys

ROBERT W. EDGAR

Too frequently school surveys are conducted by a staff of visiting experts who carry on their investigation quite independently of the local staff and who have no responsibility for follow-up of survey recommendations. Robert W. Edgar, assistant professor of education at Queens College, New York, reports a curriculum survey in which the visiting staff of "experts," together with the local school staff, the students, and the citizens of Great Neck, Long Island, participated in the organization of the study and in the preparation of reports and recommendations.

FEAR AND RESENTMENT often mark the course of a school survey, especially in the curriculum area. Local staff members sometimes consider the surveyors, generally members of the faculty of a university engaged in teacher preparation or the advanced study of education, idealists who are unaware of the difficulties of working

with thirty or forty children in the classroom or of the pressures under which supervisors perform their duties. These practitioners feel that it is easy enough to criticize, but quite another thing to perform. They view the members of a survey team as people who will seize the opportunity of a school survey to expose the obvious short-

comings of the school program in order to inflate their egos from a position of invulnerable superiority. As a matter of fact, their own experiences as critics reinforce their opinions.

The circumstances of a school survey often support this attitude. It is generally authorized in an atmosphere of discontent and crisis. Occasionally heads are expected to roll and recalcitrant teachers brought into line. Final reports will be examined to see who has been held up to public scorn and, if the report fulfills expectations, there will be snickers of triumph in some quarters and explosive reactions in others.

Educators responsible for examining the school curriculum in a school survey have indicated their consciousness of these fears and resentments. For the most part, references to specific individuals have been eliminated from reports and introductions have usually included some sort of verbal reassurances. The St. Louis survey of 1939 states, "Teachers, by and large, are forward looking in their general concept of education and of the function of the school in democratic society."¹ The report of the survey of 1945 of the Tenafly, N. J., schools is still more reassuring, "The citizens of Tenafly will be interested to know at the outset that it is the consensus of the members of the survey staff who studied the elementary schools that the present program is considerably better than the typical school system in the coun-

try as a whole."² It is probable that such reassurances have very little effect. They sound somewhat like, "Some of my best friends are—, *but*. . . ." The clause before the "but" is brief and vague; the succeeding statements are often lengthy and specific.

Strictly speaking, an agency conducting a school survey is hired for the purpose of providing information and judgments and is not responsible for the subsequent history of the school. This concept has often proved adequate in such areas as finance, building programs, and business procedures. In the area of curriculum, however, there appears to be a growing demand that the surveying organization share the responsibility of implementing recommendations. When this responsibility is accepted, it becomes imperative to deal with the fears and resentments which might possibly develop.

Changing Concepts of Survey Procedures

In facing their broadened task, surveying agencies have begun to employ methods and techniques used for the improvement of curriculum in other settings. Indeed, many of the leaders in the movement for the use of the cooperative group approach to curriculum change have at various times participated in school surveys. Though not surveys, such studies as the Eight-Year Study of the Progressive Education Association, the Southern Association Study, the Teacher Education Commission Study, and the innumer-

¹ Division of Field Studies, Institute of Educational Research, Teachers College, Columbia University, *A Report of a Survey of the Public Schools of St. Louis, Missouri*. New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1939, pp. 10-11.

² Division of Field Studies, Institute of Educational Research, Teachers College, Columbia University, *Report of the Public Schools of Tenafly, New Jersey*. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1945, Vol. III, p. 11.

able state and local curriculum improvement programs, have had an impact on the survey movement. Similarly, the insights of social scientists developed from experimentation in the process of changing attitudes, values, and understandings through democratic group action have been examined for their implications for survey procedures.

In recent years variations from the traditional intensive examination followed by an evaluative report have been employed. In the study of the Weston, Massachusetts, schools, the members of the Center of Research and Service in Educational Administration of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, served as advisors rather than as surveyors. The authors of the report described the study as "participatory" and defined their procedures as follows:

The 'participatory' type is the informal but intensive study by the local people of their own schools. It is democratically conducted, and is characterized by the real participation of the school personnel and lay citizens. They evaluate the strengths and shortcomings of their schools in light of their study and conference, and advice from specialists; and they focus upon the development of improved policy and practice. The professional educator serves as guide and advisor, rather than as the final critic and shaper of things hoped for.³

Hill and Brownell of the Yale University School of Education also used various means of bringing local professional personnel, students, and laymen into their evaluation of the schools of Lincoln, Nebraska.⁴

³ *Weston Studies Its Schools*. Weston, Massachusetts, 1946, Vol. I, p. 2.

The most active of the agencies conducting school surveys, the Institute of Field Studies of Teachers College, Columbia University, has also been experimenting with new techniques. In the fall of 1946 it contracted with the Board of Education of the Schools of Great Neck, N. Y., (Union Free School District No. 7) to conduct a two-year "co-operative study" of the district schools. Though the Study included the administration and guidance as well as the curriculum functions of the schools, this article is concerned only with the curriculum aspects.

Organizing the Great Neck Cooperative Study

From January, 1947, until June, 1948, members of the Institute staff, members of the school staff of Great Neck, citizens of the community, and, to a limited extent, students worked together on the organization of the Study, the isolation and investigation of local problems, and the preparation of reports and recommendations. The over-all direction of the cooperative phases of the study of curriculum and teaching was placed in the hands of an executive committee known as the "Joint Steering Committee." It consisted of representatives of the Teachers College participants, of the administrative and teaching staffs of the Great Neck schools, and of representatives of five parent-teacher organizations active in the community. At its peak it reached a total membership of twenty-six.

This Committee served principally as a coordinating and general policy-for-

⁴ Clyde M. Hill and S. M. Brownell, *Report of the Cooperative Study of the Lincoln Schools*. Board of Education of the School District of Lincoln, Nebraska, 1947.

mulating group. With the approval of the teachers it set up a district-wide grade-level organization for the purpose of selecting and studying problems considered important by the participants. In addition, it determined policy on such matters as voluntary or compulsory participation by teachers, membership in the investigating groups, lay participation, and means of developing local leadership. In the final stages of the study it authorized an opinion questionnaire to determine participant reactions to the Study and provided supervision for the publication of the reports drawn up by the local working groups.

Study-Action Groups

The great bulk of the cooperative study of the school program was carried on by five "study-action groups." The district-wide grade-level organization which was adopted brought together in a single group teachers from the kindergarten and the first and second grades, administrators, lay people, and consultants especially interested in the program of these grade levels. Other study-action groups were similarly organized around grades three through five, six and seven, eight and nine, and ten through twelve. As is evident, the organization was designed to gather together professional and lay people from both sides of traditional separation points in the school system. The number of teachers in each group varied from twenty-six to sixty-six; the number of consultants from one to nine; the number of parents from zero to ten, and in only one group were students officially reported as participating.

All of the study-action groups adopted the problem-solving approach

as their basic method of attack. The general practice was for the total membership of each group to spend several initial meetings isolating problems important to the participants. Difficulties arose, but they were resolved by the groups themselves. When the problems had been selected, sub-committees, enlisted on a voluntary basis, were deputized to investigate the problems and to formulate proposals for their solution. The study-action group of grades ten-twelve, for example, formed nine committees to study the following areas: critical social issues, discovering new needs of pupils, earning a living, family relations, integration of the curriculum, leisure-time activities, physical, emotional, and mental health, the outstanding student, and tools of learning.

After isolating the problems and securing volunteer membership for the investigation by sub-committees, the study-action groups left the determination of research methods to the working groups themselves. The usual approach was through discussion. In some of the subgroups this was the only method. Most of the groups, however, did not confine themselves to a single approach. An examination of the materials produced revealed six additional techniques:

- Interviewing teachers, parents, and pupils
- Circulating questionnaires among professional and/or lay people
- Examining published materials
- Collecting data from school records
- Observing practices in other school systems
- Conferring individually or in small groups with consultants.

Recommendations had to be submitted to the plenary study-action

group for approval before being adopted as the official expression of the opinion of the group. On the whole, the recommendations showed breadth of outlook and the ability to examine an on-going curriculum from a fresh perspective. The focus on the needs of pupils eventuated in proposals which avoided the customary reshuffling of the old courses of study. Some tendency to recommend a course for this and a course for that still existed, but most of the recommendations could be grouped under such headings as: making the program more flexible, unifying the school program, educating for citizenship in a democracy, educating for family living, grouping children for learning, evaluating growth and reporting progress to parents, and providing facilities, materials, and other resources of instruction.

The Reactions of Participants

In the final stages of the Study the Joint Steering Committee authorized the circulation of an evaluation questionnaire to obtain some idea of the effectiveness of the Study, the degree of satisfaction of the participants with it, and to provide a basis for adjustment of future plans to the demands of the groups. The picture was complicated by the fact that the Teachers College staff had conducted a survey of the school program along traditional lines simultaneously with the cooperative phases of the Study. Thus the results of the questionnaire were really the opinions of the participants concerning a combination of a cooperative and a traditional study, rather than a purely cooperative endeavor.

The complete results of the question-

naire are reported elsewhere,⁵ but one of the items might be of interest here. The participants were asked to indicate their attitudes at three discrete stages of the Study: (1) at the time when the Cooperative Study was announced; (2) at the time of the circulation of the questionnaire; and (3) at the prospect of the continuation of a locally organized program of curriculum improvement. Reactions were indicated on a scale extending from "felt it an unwarranted interference with more important activities of teachers," through "thought it would be a waste of time," "did not care one way or the other," and "felt it might have some good results," to "was enthusiastic about the possible results."

Seventy-one percent stated that they began the Study with favorable attitudes, though only eighteen percent classed themselves as enthusiasts. At the time of answering the questionnaire eighty-three percent reported favorable attitudes, an increase of twelve percent. However, the number of enthusiasts had declined somewhat, to fifteen percent. In contemplating the idea of continuing an organized, though completely local, curriculum development program, the number of respondents on the favorable side declined to seventy-eight percent, but the enthusiastic group increased to twenty-seven percent.

Though the results do not reveal a startling movement toward more fa-

⁵ Robert W. Edgar, *A Study of the Techniques and Procedures for Curriculum Improvement in the Great Neck Cooperative Study*, (unpublished project for the Degree of Doctor of Education in the Advanced School of Education, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1949).

avorable attitudes, a small but definite trend in that direction is apparent. When the complicating factors of the concurrent traditional survey and the exploratory nature of the cooperative procedures are considered, the results are encouraging. Reports indicate that both professional and lay people have been studying the implementation of the recommendations intensively since the conclusion of the Study. If one considers the size of the tasks and the pressure of the time under which the work was done, one concludes that the Study contributed to the possibility of even greater future accomplishment.

Cooperative or Traditional Surveys?

Should the traditional survey procedures be replaced by cooperative techniques in the study of the curriculum? The experience in this Study

gives no easy answer. The Study itself was complicated by being a mixture of procedures. It does suggest that the problem is essentially one of purpose. The traditional survey is primarily designed to provide information and judgments to people who are ready to act and who have the skills to move in the indicated directions. If modification in attitudes, concepts, values, and skills is a necessary part of the preparation for change, then cooperative techniques have a contribution to make. Ideas, information, and experience in the use of the cooperative group approach to curriculum change offers hope that the gap between theory and practice will be narrowed and that the experience of students will be more closely adapted to their needs both as individuals and as members of a democratic society.

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