

Workshops Contribute to Curriculum Development

Workshops have come to play a significant role in programs of instructional improvement. In this series of three short articles there are described a city-wide workshop, a community workshop, and a workshop dealing with problems of international understanding. The authors are Lester J. Grant, assistant superintendent of schools and workshop coordinator, Decatur, Illinois; C. O. Arndt, who was coordinator of the United Nations and International Understanding Workshop, now teaching courses in the School of Education, New York University, on International Educational Relations, and co-author Samuel Everett, a staff member of that workshop, is at City College, New York; and Paul E. Johnson, elementary coordinator, Plymouth, Michigan, public schools.

CURRICULUM CHANGE IS CHANGING PEOPLE

Lester J. Grant

CURRICULUM COMMITTEES have functioned for years in Decatur, Illinois, but no curriculum change has been so marked as that resulting from our recent six-weeks' summer workshop, which is an integral part of our year-round program. For our language arts and social studies teachers the workshop was the culminating activity of two-years' study of trends in curriculum development, with the very able help of William Van Til, John J. DeBoer, and others.

Planning Begins

The workshop was one of five summer activities for teachers, conceived by our Professional Service Committee—a committee of fifty representatives of all buildings, all grade levels, administration, Board of Education, and laymen. A sub-committee known as the Workshop and Materials Committee

was responsible for the pre-planning. It helped to acquaint the entire staff with recognized good workshop techniques, determined the areas for emphasis, suggested a daily schedule, and set up techniques for evaluation of the entire workshop.

Since relatively few of the 120 teachers (twenty-eight percent of the entire staff) had previously participated in a true workshop, the completely democratic atmosphere frightened some—those, for example, who preferred to be told that the workshop day ended at a designated time. A daily morning schedule including three work periods and closing at noon was agreed upon. Unscheduled afternoons left complete freedom to work as one chose. To watch interests, attitudes, and enthusiasm of participants change was most gratifying. The so-called free afternoons voluntarily came to be a multi-

tude of functioning sub-committees.

Requests by teachers for college credit for the workshop stopped when the Board of Education readily agreed to accept the local workshop as fulfilling its requirement that each teacher must earn five semester hours college credit each five years.

The Areas for Study

The areas finally decided upon for study were language arts, social studies, mathematics, science, health, and industrial education. Five consultants were selected who knew in theory and in practice the philosophy accepted by our teachers, namely, the common learnings or core curriculum approach. Since our approach to curriculum revision has been what is called a broken front approach, we have given much encouragement and help to the teacher who has shown a willingness and a desire to experiment. This meant our consultants had to be prepared to deal with subject matter areas as designated and also to give guidance.

Group Integration

Not all the 120 teachers in the workshop were teachers in the areas for which we had assigned consultants. For example, there were a few in business education, three in homemaking, three in physical education, and others who could see little relationship of their fields to the major areas covered by the workshop. This seemed to them to be a major obstacle. Who was going to help them? What did they care about social studies and English?

This problem solved itself almost at once when some group raised questions about how well we were meeting the

needs of youth in health and preparation for home and family living. Out of these questions grew two volunteer committees that circumscribed all areas and set into motion two of the most worthwhile outcomes of our workshop, although they were not directly planned. One group was known as the Home and Family Living Committee, and the other as the Health Committee. These have now combined and have representation from each grade level, each subject area, and from lay and professional groups. It seems certain now that out of this self-created group will come results that were recognized as needed but for which the proper motivation or interest was lacking.

Other such problems were soon resolved as the participants came to react as a true group. At the outset they were 120 individuals who had many interests and problems. Individual satisfaction soon became quite evident as common problems were discovered and group action and progress recognized.

The usual workshop committees were named such as planning, social, trips, lunch, publicity, recreation, materials, and evaluation. The evaluation committee got frequent written unsigned as well as many verbal reactions which were summarized four times before the entire group for their further reaction. These were invaluable to the workshop planning committee. The recording committee compiled a detailed history of the workshop, and at the last session presented to every member a mimeographed summary report of the activities of each committee.

Results of Our Workshop

As indicated earlier, the purpose of

our curriculum study and workshop was to produce a change in people. It was to interest teachers in children and their needs rather than chiefly in subject content. No attempt was made to produce written courses of study or units of work unless they were natural outgrowths of the study underway. The recorders of each group kept an account of the decisions reached. Some have developed into complete outlines representing new content and approach to objectives desired.

The complete history of our workshop, then, was a composite of the efforts of all participants insofar as it could be recorded. Much of this is being reproduced for all our teachers and will serve as suggestive source material. More important is the change that has come about in the attitude, interest, and enthusiasm of teachers and students as reflected in the work both are doing and the reaction of parents who have children in the experimental classes.

Recognizing from the outset the imperative need for parent understanding, representative lay persons have been brought into committees determining policies and content. When

teachers become interested first in children and then in content, parents are necessarily drawn more intimately into the picture. This, too, is already reflected in the greater use of our school guidance services by classroom teachers.

Although we do not yet have any objective test data to prove that we are doing a better job now than before, and we have not produced volumes of teaching units, it is obvious that the staff study, interest, and sincerity of purpose will result in more understanding teachers and more effective teaching. Two teachers in one of our junior high schools have already shown the effectiveness of these improved techniques by practically eliminating all school discipline problems in a group of slow-learning children. For the first time these children are important, their successes are recognized, and they have a place in the sun.

We have seen a marked change in people, which we believe is the only true curriculum revision. It was brought about through the cooperation of our state teachers colleges and university with our local staff and community in an effective in-service program.

WORKSHOP ON INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDING

C. O. Arndt and Samuel Everett

WHY DOES ONE FIND among the teachers of England, France, the United States, and other countries so little interest, not to speak of confidence, in the United Nations? At least two generalizations appear warranted. First, teachers are not yet intellectually

prepared to cope with international questions. Real attention given to such problems is all too recent to have built a background of facts and principles with which to think. Second, teachers are not yet psychologically prepared to face emotionalized prejudices in

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