

## Action-Research for Public Schools

DURING RECENT YEARS "action-research" has caught the interest of school people throughout the land. Teachers and supervisors faced with the knotty problems of everyday work ordinarily have too little time or training to succeed in solving them through individual research. Moreover, the independent studies conducted by research specialists seldom have direct bearing on their problems. In contrast, by working together cooperatively using the assistance of a research consultant they find effective research feasible. These school people who have suggested and participated in the study have a personal concern. They see to it that the results are accepted and carried into practice. Though a member of the team, the research specialist is primarily a consultant on technical problems.

Only a few examples may be cited here. Action-research studies characterize many projects being conducted currently by the Horace Mann-Lincoln Institute of School Experimentation at Teachers College, Columbia University, and the Bureau of Educational Research in the New York City schools. Experience has proved that this method is profitable both for the school personnel and the research agency.

The major characteristics of action-research programs may be summarized briefly: (1) a group need to study a problem is recognized; (2) the members of the group share in planning the design and procedures of the study; (3) they select or construct research instruments and techniques; (4) they participate in collecting data; (5) they collaborate in analyzing and interpreting the data; and (6) they cooperate in the applying of findings in practical situations. Each of these steps will be discussed in turn.

*The first step* in an action-research program is that a group recognizes a need to study a problem. This need may arise from a problem that the group faces, a wish to improve present practices, or a wish to experiment with a new curriculum or instructional method. This step may be illustrated by three recent action-research studies. In one, a committee of supervisors recognized a need to improve their supervision. They proposed a study of their present practices from which they might obtain fruitful "leads" for changes in their procedures. In another, a high school decided to introduce an experimental core curriculum and to evaluate its effectiveness in contrast with the conventional high school curriculum. In a third, cooperative action-research was employed in formulating and evaluating a curriculum for slow-learning pupils.

*A second step* in action-research is the planning of procedures to be used in the study. At this stage the role of the research technician is to offer suggestions and to elicit suggestions from members, helping them to organize the suggestions into an efficient experimental design. In the above studies the supervisors and teachers for each study met with the research technician and laid out the plans and procedures. In this step the objectives of each problem were clearly defined and the designs of the studies—diagnostic, survey, case study, or experimental-control group methods—were determined by group decision.

*As a third phase*, instruments and techniques for gathering evidence were constructed or selected. At this stage, the research technician was consultant on the

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will be living in kindergarten. It seeks to invite a cooperative approach to child growth and development by the home and school working together.

#### CURRICULUM BULLETINS

*Applied Chemistry for High School Students*, Board of Education of the City of New York, 1948-49 Series, No. 2, New York, N. Y.

*The Slow Learner in the Secondary School*, Office of the County Superintendent of Schools, Division of Secondary Education, Los Angeles County, California, September, 1949.

*Home and Family Living*, Pasadena City Schools, Secondary Curriculum

Publication No. 19, 1949-1950, Pasadena, California.

*How to Make a Play School Work, A Manual for Teachers and Group Leaders*, Play Schools Association, Inc., 119 West 57 Street, New York 19, N. Y.

#### PAMPHLETS

*Shall Children, Too, Be Free?* by Howard A. Lane; Freedom Pamphlet; Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith.

*Being a Good Parent*, by James L. Hymes, Jr., Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University.

*Discipline*, by James L. Hymes, Jr., Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University.

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technical details or matters. In all instances, however, the group of teachers and supervisors participated in the selection or construction of tests, questionnaires, or interview schedules for collecting data. In the analysis of supervisory practice the committee of supervisors participating in the study did the major part of the work in constructing the questionnaires and interview schedules used. In the study of the core curriculum, the committee participated in selecting published tests as well as in developing sociometric techniques and questionnaires. In the study of the curriculum for slow-learning pupils, the teachers, supervisors, and research technician are now constructing a problem check list and group interview method to discover the major problems and concerns of pupils as a basis for a vital curriculum.

*The fourth step* involves group participation in the collection of data. In all of these action-research studies the group members administered the tests, questionnaires, problem check lists, sociometric techniques, and interview schedules. They cooperated in selecting samples of pupils and in equating experimental with control groups.

*The fifth step* involves the analysis and interpretation of the data gathered. At this point the group helped to determine and to execute the methods by which the data could be most efficiently analyzed, summarized, and reported. Once the data were summarized, the entire group helped to make the interpretation of the findings and to formulate the conclusions.

*The sixth step* involves group cooperation in applying the findings in particular situations. Since each member of each group had been involved in all stages of the development of the research project, and since each had a clear understanding of what the data indicated as desirable next steps, each was willing to apply the findings personally and to spread the facts and findings to associates. The effect of action-research is to mitigate the attitude of hostility frequently observed toward the findings and recommendations of the independent type of research. Action-research studies increase identification with, and friendly acceptance of findings and recommendations. They help to close the gap between research and practice.—J. Wayne Wrightstone, Director of Educational Research, Board of Education of the City of New York.

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