

A Cooperative Study at Indian Knoll

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What happens when a community organizes a cooperative project to improve its school is told in this article by Elizabeth Moss Bailey, instructional supervisor, Cherokee County schools, Georgia, and Nell Winn McGlothlin, chairman of the Georgia Committee on Elementary Education, Department of Public Health, Atlanta. On the basis of evidence as to the effectiveness of their study, the participants in this study have developed certain principles of educational planning.

NO DOUBT ABOUT IT. The little group of parents and teachers gathered at the school house that crisp October evening were challenged by the question. After all, thought Mr. Dean, he'd never really stopped to think about exactly what he wanted the school to do for his children. Of course, he had some ideas like—well, he surely wanted them to be able to read and figure—and he was in favor of the school putting on programs so the kids could learn to "talk on their feet." He wanted his children to learn to behave, too. But here they all sat—nobody saying a word—everybody looking at that long list of things they wanted the school to do and trying to think of some way of saying what all of them were beginning to feel.

We Set Our Sights

"What we really mean," volunteered Mr. Stone after some time, "is that more than anything else we'd like for our children to be better than we are in the business of making this a better community. We'd like for the school to help them see what this community is like, what it *could be* like, and what

gets in the way of its being a better place to live in."

"Yes," added Mr. Yancey, solemnly, "but that's not enough. We want the school to teach them how to *do something* about those things that keep us from having a good community."

"That's quite an order," smiled Mrs. Reece, the principal. "Just *how* do you think the school can do this job?"

"I suppose," said Mrs. Wingo, the primary teacher, that you learn to do something about your community problems just as you learn to swim." When everyone looked blank, she added, "I mean by getting in the water, having a more experienced person help you, and swimming short distances first."

"Do you mean," asked Mrs. Reece, "that if we want our children to become adults who know how to deal with the problems of this community effectively we ought to begin right now giving them experiences in seeing jobs that need to be done and doing them?"

"It means, too," chimed in Mr. Hoke, "that we who have the advantage of years and experience will need to work with them—helping them to see what

is good about the Indian Knoll community, what is bad, what needs to be done, where we can get help."

It was ten o'clock! Mrs. Reece had to call a halt, but before she did she asked the people to be ready at the next meeting to talk about what problems the adults and children in the Indian Knoll community might tackle together.

And that was the beginning three years ago. The story of what has happened at Indian Knoll since that time is a story of teachers, children, and parents studying their school and community, a story of a school program based upon the needs of the people being served.

A Community-Wide Survey

There was the big problem of nutrition for example. Everyone was sure that there were people in Indian Knoll who were not eating the right food. But, who were these people? What was the "right" food? Why weren't they eating well? What was lacking in their diets? These were questions that both children and adults set out to answer.

First of all, a specialist from the University of Georgia was invited to come and work with the children in school and the adults in a community meeting. A diet survey, the purpose of which was to determine exactly what the children were eating each day, was planned. Parents and children kept careful records of what the children ate at home. Teachers and children kept records of what they ate in the lunchroom. Then came the day when each child checked his record against the requirements of an adequate diet. Then they knew. Diets were heavy in carbohydrates and protein. Most children were eating too

little fruit, too few vegetables, and drinking too little milk. Graphs showing the results of the survey were made and discussed in classes and in community meetings.

Everyone now knew what was wrong. What could be done about it?

The upper grade group began checking the school lunches by the diet standards set up. Groups of children worked together on suggested menus both for the lunchroom and to take home. They began to plan how they might make the lunchroom more attractive and how they could help with the serving of the food. How to carry on pleasant conversation at mealtime became a topic for discussion. All children began to keep records of their height and weight so that they could check on their growth.

In one community meeting several women began to talk about how they could learn to plan more balanced meals for their families. Plans were developed for an adult class in meal planning, and the homemaking teacher from Canton High School came out once a week during the summer to teach the class.

Then, someone made a very startling discovery. During the sharing time one of the sixth grade boys told about an article he had read in the newspaper that said it is possible to eat all the "right" food and still not get all the minerals that the body needs. Another problem discovered and another study under way!

Study of Food and Soil

This study was concerned with the kinds of soil found in Cherokee County, why the rivers and streams are so muddy, what has been done by the



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TVA to control the loss of top soil and to build up what is left. As the study of soil and its effect on human welfare proceeded, everyone began to feel a little uncomfortable about the school grounds. That bank near the road was washing so badly that someone wondered out loud if the children would come to school one day and find the building itself washed away!

An SOS went out to Mr. Robinson, the Soil Conservation Technician. Would he come out to advise with the school and community about that bank. He would, and did. He drew up a plan and everyone got busy. The men brought tractors and graded the hill down to a less steep angle. The chil-

dren and the nearby patrons brought poultry fertilizer and disked it into the land. Then they planted lespedeza, sericea, love grass, and fescue. While they sat back to watch it grow, the older children began to ask questions about fertilizer, soil building crops, and methods of controlling erosion. One group made a map of Cherokee County showing the location of different classes of soil, rivers and creeks, farm areas, and industrial sites. They began to find out about the kinds of work in which the people were engaged and what new industries were developing.

The growing interest in food and soil prompted the community group to discuss the possibilities of a school garden. Funds were raised and a tract of land adjoining the school property was purchased. Children and adults will have many opportunities to experiment with fertilizer, different methods of gardening, and various ways of preparing food.

A Problem for Everyone

In the meantime, parents who were visiting school for the first time in years began to talk with each other about the condition of the building. At one community meeting, parents and teachers discussed the problem of making the school building safe and attractive. A consultant from the State Department of Education made suggestions. After an hour's discussion the list of needed improvements was as follows:

- Paint the interior
- Get the building wired and properly lighted
- Make bookcases and storage closets
- Get more maps, globes, and library materials
- Screen windows
- Improve floors
- Provide each room with washing and drinking facilities

The teachers suggested that children be given opportunities to plan for some of the improvements. For example, the older children could call in a well-known lighting expert and work out a plan for measuring the light in different parts of the building in order to determine what color of paint to use and what kind of lighting fixtures would be most practical. The younger children could paint bookcases, help clean floors, and root plants for their window boxes and flower pots.

Money and labor were needed for big projects like getting a well dug, painting the building, and building an extra room. Here was a problem for the adults.

A Pattern of Cooperative Living

And so the story goes. It could go on—telling how the older children became interested in the distribution of minerals throughout the world and how this distribution affects human welfare;

how both parents and children became interested in providing recreational facilities for the school and community; and how teachers began to realize the importance of cooperative effort in the development of good human relations. More important, however, than the story itself, are the principles of educational planning which have emerged as teachers, parents, and children have worked together. The principles bid fair to weave themselves into a pattern by which the program of the Indian Knoll School will be cut.

C That *all the people*, parents, teachers, and children, who are affected by the school program have a right to say *what* the school shall teach.

C That in a society which values the individual and puts faith in his ability to solve his own problems and to participate in the solution of his community's problems, the school program must be concerned with providing problem-solving experiences for the young.

C That youth and experience derive mutual benefits from working cooperatively at problems which concern them both.

C That the community is the logical source of problems which make up an important part of the school curriculum.

C That educational planning is a never ending process and that the content of the curriculum is determined as parents, teachers, and children discover new problems and new resources for solving old problems.



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