

# Curriculum Research

C. W. Hunnicutt  
Column Editor

C. W. Hunnicutt, professor of education at Syracuse University, continues as editor of this department. William M. Alexander, University of Miami, and J. Galen Saylor, University of Nebraska, contribute this first column on curriculum research.

## Needed: Organized Research in General Education

A RECENT experience of the authors' illustrates Hollis Caswell's recent statement<sup>1</sup> of the need for organized research, and points to one area in which such research is acutely needed. Our efforts to locate any recent studies of experimental approaches to general education, such as the core curriculum at the secondary level, were almost fruitless. We inquired of various university people who are involved in the direction of research and learned of none underway in this area. Such materials as appeared were either theoretical, descriptive, or concerned with exceedingly limited phases of the problem. We hope that more extensive surveys will uncover additional studies, and that early publications of findings of such investigations as those by the Horace Mann-Lincoln Institute of School Experimentation and the Illinois Secondary School Curriculum Program will help to meet these needs. In the absence of comprehensive analysis, we are suggesting a few basic guides for research workers in general education.

### The Groups Concerned

Those planning research in general education may well work on problems that have already become important to

laymen as well as professional groups. For years there has been a general dissatisfaction with the high school curriculum and an almost frantic groping for panaceas. A few groups, as in Denver,<sup>2</sup> have vigorously criticized any attempts to improve the high school program but most are anxious for change.

Such publications as the Educational Policies Commission's *Education for All American Youth*, the John Dewey Society's *The American High School*, and the North Central Association's *General Education in the American High School* have helped greatly in stirring up interest in experimental programs. If people who have become interested are to do more than scoff or dawdle, however, they must now be given more information and be themselves involved in programs of experimentation and research. More schools must be enrolled in experimental programs of improvement. Research leaders can provide guidance for the staffs who want improvement. Tangible evidence is needed to satisfy both the critics and the supporters of traditional programs that newer curriculum plans produce desirable results. Through research will be found the techniques of proven merit and wide applicability desired by teachers and acceptable to the public.

<sup>1</sup> See Hollis L. Caswell, "Research in the Curriculum," *Educational Leadership*. VII:438-445, April, 1950.

<sup>2</sup> See "Pattern of Necessity," *Time*. LV:66-72, February 20, 1950.

## Studies in Varying Situations

Because of wide variations in communities, and in school facilities and administrative arrangements, no single plan of core curriculum or other approach to general education is universally appropriate. The chief criticism now leveled at many such plans is that they are developed in atypical situations. To meet this problem, wide investigations and case studies are needed to discover the evolution of varied programs of general education in small and large, wealthy and poor, urban and rural districts. Although some factors might prove to be universal among all programs, the greatest contribution might be an analysis of the differences that appear when general education programs are made specific to their school and community settings. A case book on core programs, for example, might be developed to indicate similarities in their development as well as to show how individual programs have been initiated and guided. Perhaps a series of case books on core programs in a variety of situations would be possible.

At present the authors find no adequate survey of the mere existence of core curriculums, common learnings programs, and similar approaches to general education. Perhaps a first step should be a survey on a nation-wide basis to identify possible centers for more intensive study.

## Evidence Regarding Specific Problems

Case studies are not enough. School staffs interested in reorganizing their programs want as specific evidence as possible on definite problems. For example, some of the questions about which there seems common concern are these: How can the adequacy of the present curriculum be determined? How can the major needs or problems

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to which general education should contribute, be identified? How can a flexible schedule be developed? How can the general education program help youth solve immediate personal problems and still prepare them for future needs? What types of learning experiences are effective? How can skills be developed in cooperative learning situations? How can materials appropriate to varying reading levels be used to develop common learnings in a group? How can a core curriculum be evaluated? What kinds of classroom arrangements and facilities are essential? How can individual progress be determined and reported?

Such questions, we believe, need study in many situations. Evidence from 100 secondary schools concerning any one question should test the hypotheses now available only in theory or in scattered studies. For example, a current assumption in the area of general education is that the organizing centers for the core curriculum should be important needs or problems of youth and society rather than the logical divisions of subjects. Research could make a contribution by identifying in as large a number of situations as possible: (1) the processes followed in determining the organizing centers of the core curriculum, (2) the organizing centers themselves, and (3) such evidence as can be found of the effectiveness of different organizations. Even the generalization that there is little uniformity in processes and in organizing centers should prove enlightening to curriculum plan-

ners and might help in developing new hypotheses concerning patterns of core organization.

### Cooperative Research

The area of general education seems almost uniquely adapted to cooperative research procedures. The problem of developing a more functional program of general education at the secondary level is recognized throughout the country, so that those who stand to benefit from results of such research constitute a very large national group. But there seems at present to be no plan for research designed to answer the questions of educators in terms related to varying school situations. Leading institutions representing all areas of the United States could render an important service to public education by organizing a nationwide program of investigation. In each region, institutional research directors in consultation with representatives of the secondary schools interested in developing experimental approaches to general education, might coordinate investigations of specific questions. Various programs might employ different techniques and facilities, but would be unified in purpose and coordinated through planning groups and exchange of information. The end result should be significant publications which would be rich sources of descriptions and of evidence needed by local curriculum planners in all interested secondary schools.—*William M. Alexander*, University of Miami, and *J. Galen Saylor*, University of Nebraska

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