

Teachers Discover Their Community

NORRIS A. KING

Junior high school teachers find they cannot guide youngsters in core programs until they themselves learn more about their community. Norris A. King is junior high school supervisor in Baltimore County, Maryland.

A NINTH GRADE core curriculum was organized in Baltimore County in 1947 by a summer workshop committee of teachers, supervisors and administrative officers. This committee formulated what they believed to be a forward-looking, functional framework which encouraged the teacher to provide opportunities for vital learning experiences for junior high school youth.

The title given to the year's work in the ninth grade core classes was "Living in an Ever Widening Community." This program, stressing learning and living in an ever widening community, was basically a course in citizenship. Its effectiveness stemmed from the conviction of the educational staff that worthy action on the part of citizens in a democracy depends upon the enlightenment and civic consciousness of the individual; that the place to begin this kind of education is in the home and local community where the individual first finds himself a participant in group living.

In this approach to better citizenship through an understanding by children of their relation to successively larger social groups, units entitled "Myself and Others," "Our Community," "Maryland, Our State," "Our Government, A Cooperative Enterprise," "Living in a World of Work," and ending

with "Toward One World" were set up.

Materials Found Inadequate

Materials needed as the basis for the type of civics instruction outlined in the course could not be found within the covers of a textbook. A variety of books, pamphlets on local problems, magazines, and the daily and weekly county newspapers had to be used. Also, it became imperative for teachers and pupils to keep abreast of political, social and economic problems in the local community, in the state, in the nation, and in international affairs as well.

In addition, firsthand experience gained from field trips and excursions, from interviews and from participation in the solution of problems vital to the welfare of home, school, and community was an indispensable part of the course. The course also required the teacher to be alert to the possibilities within every situation for the development and practice of those civic virtues without which we cannot hope to make a better world.

Production of a curriculum bulletin in the workshop proved to be a worthwhile experience in itself for the nine teachers who participated. Suggested problem areas and pupil activities included in this booklet seemed to indicate rich teaching possibilities. The

teachers were most enthusiastic about the proposed two-period core which integrated citizenship training, English, literature and guidance. But a well-written curriculum bulletin does not necessarily lead to a successful program in the classroom. We soon discovered that something was missing in our program and we met together to find what that something might be.

Need for Knowledge of County and State

The teachers were quite frank. They admitted difficulty in getting information; they conceded that they had not had enough firsthand experience in community life. They acknowledged they did not know enough about places for field trips and excursions. They realized they did not know many persons qualified to give interviews concerning community problems and possible solutions. Actually, the teachers identified one of their problems without too much difficulty—they needed a more intimate knowledge of our county and state. The next step was to do something about the situation.

Community Study Program Inaugurated

Outcome of the meeting was the decision to set up a community study course for the ninth grade core teachers. A representative teacher from each school was asked to meet with the supervisor and together the group set up a tentative list of exploratory experiences. In each case the criterion used in deciding upon an activity was, what do we teach in our classes that we need to know more about?

Purposes of this program were:

- To help the core teachers acquire a more intimate knowledge of our community and state.
- To help the teachers become acquainted with people who are community resources because of their varied interests and work in specialized fields.
- To provide experiences for teachers in the use of community resources that they might wish to utilize with their classes.
- To give teachers experiences in planning field trips.

In order to schedule this course in the long-range calendar of meetings and events for the school year 1949-50, the days and the hours had to be set definitely in advance.

One provision of the course was for partial credit toward the renewal of teaching certificates. Also there was the possibility that an entire summer school requirement might be completed through three years of this type of work. Suitable persons were supplied by the principals to relieve teachers from any classes which might be scheduled during the time of the meetings. The only expenses in connection with the course were for bus transportation for the Baltimore County tour, the Annapolis tour and the Conservation tour.

Principals, too, had a stake in this venture. We needed their cooperation and assistance. Therefore a letter was sent to each principal explaining the purposes of the course, suggesting ways of relieving teachers without employment of substitutes, and stating that the final decision concerning requests from teachers to enroll rested with him.

Year's Program Set Up

Questionnaires were sent to teachers and it was found that all but two were eager to participate. The course was started with an orientation meeting and as a result of our discussions the program for the year was set up. Participating teachers listed the kinds of experiences they wished. It was the task of the writer to plan with individual teachers who had special knowledge about these events. The following events scheduled throughout the year from October to April grew out of this planning:

- Tour of Baltimore County. Purpose: To show what historical, educational and industrial centers influence life in our county; to show rural and urban differences in our county; and to show the varying topography of Baltimore County.
- Tour of Annapolis. Purpose: to visit some historical homes of the Maryland colonial period; to visit educational centers that influence Maryland life; and to learn of the structure of our state government.
- Tour of Baltimore County Court House. Purpose: To show how our community is governed.
- Tour of City Hall. Purpose: To show how Baltimore City is governed.
- Visit to Baltimore City Traffic Court. Purpose: To acquire firsthand knowledge about one of our serious community problems.
- Visit to the Maryland Historical Society. Purpose: To learn of our historical background.
- Panel Discussion—"Services Performed by the Baltimore County Government." Purpose: To learn of the

service performed by the Health, Probation, Welfare, and Educational Departments. Participants: Baltimore County Health Officer; Director of Baltimore County Probation Department; Director of Baltimore County Welfare Board; and Superintendent of Baltimore County Schools.

• Panel Discussion—"Services Performed by the Baltimore County Government." Purpose: To learn of the services performed by the Baltimore County Planning Commission, Recreational Department, Bureau of Public Works, and Zoning Department. Participants: Director of the Planning Commission; Director of the Recreational Department; Director of the Bureau of Public Works; and Zoning Commissioner.

• Visit to the Maryland Legislature at Annapolis. Purpose: To observe the state legislature in action.

• Tour of Baltimore City Slum Area. Purpose: To learn of the housing problems in our community and to learn of the steps being taken to improve housing in our community.

• Tour of Baltimore Harbor. Purpose: To find what industries provide work for people in our community, to learn of the movement of materials into and out of our community and to learn of other sections of the country and the world with which we trade.

• Panel Discussion—"Industrial Baltimore County." Purpose: To find out what industries provide work for people in our community and to learn of the job possibilities for high school graduates in the industries of our community. Participants: Representatives from Bethlehem Steel Company, Glenn L. Martin Company, Black and Decker

Manufacturing Company, and Bendix Radio Company.

• Conservation tour of Baltimore County. Purpose: To learn of the different kinds of agriculture carried on in our county and to learn of steps being taken in our county to combat soil erosion. Guide and consultant: District Conservationist for Baltimore, Cecil and Howard counties.

EVALUATING THE PROGRAM

Several evidences seem to indicate the value of this program. The group has a unity that was not in evidence at the beginning of the year, and the teachers are anxious to meet together to continue this type of work for another year. We have accumulated a great deal of vital information. After each event a summary was written by two teachers. These summaries and lecture notes were duplicated and distributed. Governmental agencies and industrial concerns have been most liberal in supplying additional information once they have learned of our problem.

Our teachers have met personally many people who have specialized information about the life and problems of our county and state. They now know many of the people who can assist their classes when expert knowledge is needed.

This group has also had experience in planning field trips. Many of the tours made by the group have been repeated by individual teachers and their classes. These teachers have acquired a feeling of adequacy in dealing with current problems, since they now have a more complete picture of our community life and of additional re-

sources to draw upon in their classroom instruction.

Planning for Next Year

The group felt that this type of work should be continued. As an outgrowth of this concern, each school was asked to send a representative teacher to a meeting to plan the activities for the following year. Again we asked ourselves the question—what kind of things are coming up in our ninth-grade core classes that we need to know more about?

The group members suggested that we should emphasize three areas. They felt that they lacked knowledge about the western part of our state. They suggested, instead of a trip planned for a day, a week-end tour of this section of our state and they had many suggestions for our itinerary. Also, they wanted to know more about the services performed by our state government and again they had suggestions for activities in this area.

Further, the group members wanted to know more about the work done by private organizations and the state and county governmental agencies for handicapped groups, delinquents, and the like. Suggestions concerning things for the group to do in this area were numerous.

Values Derived from the Program

As a result of this experience we have found that teachers are willing to use their own time for in-service programs if they are brought into the planning of activities that will help them in their classroom work. Principals are willing to make special arrangements in their schools so their teachers may partici-

pate in these programs if they are consulted before final plans are made and if they can see values being derived from them.

We have found also that a program such as the one described in this article can be operated without great expense to the participating teachers or to the Board of Education. Governmental agencies, industry, and community resource persons are more than willing to render assistance without charge to the group. When teachers become ac-

tively interested in the community they help public relations. Many of the persons who were called in to participate in our programs commented very favorably on the teachers' questions, on their enthusiasm, and on their varied interests.

The above conclusions are based on experiences in one county. You may find that they hold for other situations as well, if you are considering a community study program for your teachers.



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