

work mates, which children are the favored playmates, which children are most admired, respected, disliked or feared. *Fostering Mental Health in Our Schools* (Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1950) gives timely suggestions for putting this information to use.

Role playing has come to the fore as an effective device for discovering how the other fellow thinks, feels and acts. Persons taking opposing points of view in a discussion are asked to change places temporarily in order to build sympathy for the other person's point of view. Persons act out hypothetical situations so that groups may identify desirable and undesirable practices in such group situations as interviewing parents, working with community organizations, supporting school levies.

The group process "movement" has, through gradual maturing, become a way in which persons sensitive to individual and group reactions are working in group situations. In this sense it pervades the whole of curriculum study by staff and lay groups as a method of effective action. In this way also it pervades classroom activities, the entire curriculum, as a method of effective learning.

The concepts and techniques that have been described are in many cases not new. Attention was given to them before group process gave them concerted emphasis. The real contribution of the group process "movement" is the impetus it has given to the understanding and application of certain appropriate concepts and techniques in group situations.

Organization for Curriculum Improvement

JAMES A. HALL

Any organization for curriculum improvement should include several characteristics, according to James A. Hall, director of instruction, Denver Public Schools, Colorado.

IS THERE one form of organization which is productive of improvement in curriculum? Personal experience leads me to believe that no one form of organization will produce curriculum improvement. Curriculum improvement seems to be possible under any plan of organization that takes into account the nature of improvement and the nature of the people concerned.

A few thoughts on this subject based upon both study and personal experience may be of assistance to those who face the task of developing an improved curriculum. To make progress, any organization for curriculum improvement should include among other things the following characteristics: importance, involvement, opportunity and flexibility.

IMPORTANCE

The organization of a school system must indicate that curriculum improvement is an important phase of the school program. If this is not done, other activities which are placed importantly in such an organization will receive the major part of the attention of school personnel. Definite provision should be made in the plan of organization for curriculum improvement, and where the line and staff concept prevails curriculum improvement should be a line function. If the curriculum department is simply an adjunct which is placed in some obscure part of the organization, it is extremely unlikely that the members of the faculty of the various schools will sense that curriculum improvement is an important function of the schools.

We also tend to think important those things which we are willing to pay for. Consequently, unless there is adequate budget allowance for curriculum work there is a strong possibility that the items for which budget allowances are made will receive the greater part of the attention of school personnel. In a similar manner time must be scheduled for study and improvement of curriculum. If the schedule is so full that any systematic efforts for such study must be conducted outside of school time, after other enervating duties have been performed, the results in curriculum procedures will reflect the absence of proper attention within the school schedule. None of us is gifted with infallibility; many of our ideas which seem so splendid when started do not pan out as we had anticipated. Consequently, definite pro-

vision should be made for follow-up and evaluation of all curriculum innovations. Wishful thinking is not a sound basis on which to build an adequate program of curriculum improvement.

As has been said above, importance depends upon administrative provision for curriculum improvement. As things are administratively made important, they also tend to become important to the people who work in our schools.

INVOLVEMENT

For people really to recognize the importance of curriculum work, however, it is necessary that they become involved. It should be apparent that curriculum is changed in classrooms and not in committee meetings or by courses of study, resource units, guides or teaching aids. Modern psychology indicates that change in the classroom is much more likely to occur if the classroom teacher is involved in the developments which promote changed procedures. Any organization for curriculum improvement needs to provide for such involvement. There must be adequate opportunities for channeling of ideas both ways, from the teachers to the committees and supervisory officials as well as in the other direction. It seems important that all school personnel move together in this process of curriculum change. To be sure, isolated experimentation, work in protected or favored small groups, and other such devices have an important part to play in curriculum improvement. But unless they are seen by the total staff as a part of an acceptable, on-going improvement, little of value is likely to result. Little of value will be

achieved by having faculties pulling in opposite directions. The time and effort necessary to achieve a commonness of purpose on the part of the staff seem to be an underlying prerequisite for substantial curriculum improvement. Experimentation is essential in curriculum improvement, but it must be viewed as a part of a whole process and must be watched by all concerned.

For any individual or group to be actually involved in activity there must be a certain amount of responsibility which this individual or group has and accepts. Such responsibility should not be of the busy-work type. For complete involvement, of course, all members of the staff should have their share of responsibility for the decisions made, the materials produced, and changed procedures. The entire staff too, should be involved in evaluating the activities proposed and those carried on. This will tend to insure a complete and comprehensive evaluation which utilizes many points of view and looks at the problem from all sides.

OPPORTUNITY

Any organization for curriculum improvement should provide many opportunities for the entire staff. One of these is the opportunity to be heard and to have one's ideas considered. If certain ideas are taboo, if certain points of view are considered out of date and not acceptable, if the patrons of the schools are not included, the program is doomed to difficulties from the very outset. The opportunity to be heard does not, of course, grant license to indulge in personalities or bouts of name calling. But it does mean that every sincere objection, point of view, idea

and proposal should be heard and carefully considered. Another opportunity that the plan of organization should provide is the chance for every individual to be treated as a person of significance. In a democracy, every person is important and that school organization which does not reflect and encourage a feeling of importance and significance on the part of its personnel is not democratic and certainly will be much less effective as a school organization than it might be.

A third opportunity is the opportunity to assume responsibility. It seems very difficult many times for administrators, curriculum directors and other leaders to delegate the responsibility which they feel is theirs to teachers and other professional workers. Unless each member of the school staff has an opportunity to assume some responsibility for the curriculum program he will not feel identified with it. Concurrent with the opportunity to assume responsibility is the opportunity to make mistakes and to profit therefrom. None of us is successful in everything tried. The most we can hope for is that we may profit and learn from the mistakes which we have made.

FLEXIBILITY

Any plan of organization for curriculum improvement needs to be extremely flexible. Times change, problems change, opportunities change, leadership changes, and even philosophies of education and philosophies of learning change. To meet these changes, a high degree of flexibility is not only desirable but extremely necessary. An examination of current curriculum organizations throughout the United

States gives indication that the patterns which were adequate in the past have, through freezing, become less acceptable in the present than they once were. For example, an organization designed to produce courses of study is not completely adequate for the production of instructional guides. A system of supervision designed to provide inspection is not exactly comparable with a type of in-service education concerned primarily with the purpose of helping teachers. A testing program set up to check certain accomplishments of students against some arbitrary standards is quite different from a program of real evaluation of instructional progress in terms of constantly evolving goals.

Leaders in curriculum improvement need to be aware of the tendency for

organizations to become rigid, of the tendency for methods of procedure to be determined by the organization, not by the needs of the system. Such awareness and a willingness to make needed adjustments as they become apparent will go a long way toward developing the necessary flexibility in the program.

* * * *

Improvement to meet changing needs and changing conditions seems to be a matter of desire rather than of organization. While organizations may be made to meet the needs of the people involved it is possible to get substantial improvement under almost any form of organization if the spirit is willing and if the four items listed above have been properly taken into account.

What Does Academic Freedom Mean for Elementary and Secondary Teachers?

MARTIN ESSEX

Academic freedom is not solely a concern of teachers in higher education. It is today an issue which faces every elementary- and secondary-school teacher. Martin Essex is superintendent of schools, Lakewood, Ohio. He is also chairman, N.E.A. Tenure and Academic Freedom Committee.

THE NEW YEAR begins at a time when freedom to learn, to teach and to think is at low tide for our century. Perhaps never before in our history has there been more confusion about what should be taught, how it should be taught, and the purpose of the American public school.

From the vantage point of the N.E.A. Tenure and Academic Freedom

Committee, one is continuously confronted with the magnitude of the varied movements that attempt to limit freedom to learn. A torrent of restrictive forces is pouring at us. "Freedom to teach without fear or favor" is seriously threatened. To deal with this situation we must be aware of the whirlpools in the stream of economic, political and social change.

Copyright © 1952 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.