

ASCD's Role in Cooperative Curriculum Research

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This article reports the problems considered, conclusions reached, and actions taken at the 1951 Research Conference, Chicago, and at the research study groups and Research Board meetings of the 1952 convention, Boston. It also delineates the unparalleled opportunity now open in the area of cooperative curriculum research. William M. Alexander is professor of education, University of Miami, Florida.

TWO SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENTS in ASCD's program this past year have given real impetus to cooperative curriculum research. These two developments indicate wide interest by teacher-education institutions, school systems, and other groups concerned, in working together to seek solutions of curriculum problems through such research techniques as are appropriate. First, an ASCD Cooperative Curriculum Research Conference brought together some 80 persons interested in curriculum research at a conference held on the Chicago campus of Northwestern University, Nov. 29, 30, and December 1, 1951. Second, one section (Section III) of the study groups at the 1952 ASCD Convention, Boston, was devoted to curriculum research and the work of this section was carefully organized in relation to ASCD's Research Board. As chairman of that board, I am attempting in this article to present some of the thinking and conclusions of the Chicago conference and the Boston section which seem of importance to the total membership of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Increasing Interest of ASCD in Research

ASCD's interest in research is not new. Our publications and committees have frequently given attention to research projects and findings. The Research Board and other groups from time to time have proposed additional activities relating to research. However, the Plans and Appraisal Committee in 1950 reviewed these past activities, found them insufficient in view of the growing need for curriculum research, and recommended that several steps be taken to provide for greater emphasis in ASCD on cooperative curriculum research.

Following an inquiry to determine interest in such an undertaking, the national ASCD Conference on Cooperative Curriculum Research was authorized as a Research Board project for 1951. Indicative of the interest in such research was the fact that the invitations to the conference were accepted by approximately four of each five persons initially invited. In addition to comprehensive action recommendations by the conference study

groups, a follow-up evaluation brought forth from the participants over 200 recommendations of next steps in an ASCD-sponsored research program. There seemed to be unanimity regarding the need for further state, regional, and national conferences and other activities related to cooperative curriculum research.

Section III (Curriculum Research) of the Boston convention included four study groups whose membership totaled more than 100. In addition to these study groups, several other sessions at Boston—the open meeting of the Research Board, meetings of certain regional groups, the general sessions on resolutions and actions, and some voluntary groups organized from the Chicago conference—gave major attention to the problems of cooperative curriculum research. The Research Board members were particularly pleased at the very large attendance and the hearty participation at the open meeting of the board. Also revealing the interest in research is the fact that 10 of the 47 resolutions presented at the final business session dealt with research. In addition, 11 action recommendations were made to the Research Board by the study groups in Section III, and various recommendations from other groups are probably yet to be received and considered by this board.

Why Curriculum Research Merits Increased Attention

Participation in these groups and later study of their reports indicate that certain major ideas of many educational workers have contributed to the increased interest. These ideas seem to be:

- That difficulties currently experienced in making curriculum improvement might be overcome by the guidance and support which could be given by a definite body of curriculum research findings.
- That persons actively engaged in ongoing programs of teaching and curriculum planning do not have time or resources to ferret out existing research and need the help of better-organized, more easily interpreted reports of curriculum research.
- That curriculum research must be carried on in action (school) situations, must deal with day-by-day problems of teachers and other educational practitioners, and must give direct help to those seeking solutions to these problems of curriculum and teaching.
- That such programs of cooperative curriculum research as that organized by the Horace Mann-Lincoln Institute of School Experimentation, Teachers College, Columbia University, have real promise and need to be developed through many centers to include much wider participation of teacher-education institutions and school systems.
- That teachers and other persons engaged in curriculum experimentation and research throughout the country can receive help and encouragement by mutual association in programs and projects sponsored by ASCD and other prominent organizations.
- That researches carried forward by individuals in connection with graduate study or for other purposes might take on more significance if planned in relation to national or regional programs of cooperative curriculum research.
- That larger budgets for support of curriculum research and experimen-

tion might be secured through the encouragement and support of educational organizations, conferences, and cooperative agreements.

- That a greater degree of cooperation is needed on the part of the several national organizations already promoting educational research.

Subsequent sections of this article will explore some of these ideas further by reference to reports of the Chicago conference and the Boston convention.

ASCD'ers Want "Practical" Research

Throughout the Chicago and Boston discussions, one heard the complaint that existing research is too theoretical, too fragmentary, too inconclusive—"not practical." Although these criticisms are not necessarily accepted, the Research Board definitely believes that a stimulus must be given to research dealing with actual curriculum problems in actual school situations. This in no way denies the need for continued and increased emphasis on research that may not have immediate practical applications.

Previous articles in *Educational Leadership*,¹ as well as contributions to the

¹ See Hollis L. Caswell, "Research in the Curriculum," *Educational Leadership*, VII: 438-445, April, 1950, and the following articles in the December, 1949 (VIII) issue of *Educational Leadership*: Stephen M. Corey, "Curriculum Development Through Action Research," p. 147-153; Laura Zirbes, "Gaps in Curriculum Research," p. 187-192; George V. Guy, "Recent Developments in Curriculum Research—A Selected Bibliography," p. 193-197. Also see related articles in the "Research Column" of *Educational Leadership* by the following authors in the issues listed: C. W. Hunnicutt, April 1949, p. 472-473, 476; J. Wayne Wrightstone, Jan. 1950, p. 250, 284; William D. Sheldon, Feb. 1950, p. 347-348; Hilda Taba, Mar. 1950, p. 423-425; Vincent J. Glennon, May 1950, p. 584-585, 586; William

present issue, have defined in some detail the nature of action research. Underlying the study group discussions in both Chicago and Boston seemed to be an acceptance of the general thesis of the authors cited that the practical research demanded is *cooperative action research*. This research, the discussions suggested, should have such characteristics as these:

- The purpose should be to improve (curriculum) practice.
- The problem to which a research is devoted should be one of importance that exists in an actual school (or school-community) situation.
- The persons who regularly work in the situation should actively conduct the research, sometimes with advice from technical experts and other persons.
- The purpose of a research should be to determine whether a particular practice results in the consequences anticipated (the hypothesis).
- Evidence should be systematically secured and interpreted in order for generalizations to be reached regarding the success of a practice.
- The organization, development, interpretation, and use of findings, of the research should be a joint undertaking of the group of persons who are actively interested in the problem and who associate themselves together for its solution.

The general concern of the study groups at Chicago and Boston for "practical" research on "practical" problems is illustrated by a partial list of areas for research reported by one of the

M. Alexander and J. Galen Saylor, Oct. 1950, p. 53-55; John B. Bouchard, Oct. 1951, p. 53-54; William H. Bristow, Jan. 1952, p. 251-253.

Chicago groups. In answering the question, "What kinds of cooperative research are desirable to facilitate the process of identifying and meeting the needs of elementary and adolescent pupils at the local levels?" the group proposed the following questions as suggesting hypotheses worthy of cooperative investigation:

(a) How can we assemble evidence as to the worth and validity of an approach to curriculum design which recognizes *needs of children* as one integral factor in curriculum construction?

(b) How can a teacher determine pupil needs?

What are effective procedures for teachers and pupils to use in the cooperative study of needs?

How can we make available to teachers, in a meaningful form, materials, techniques and findings from areas such as sociology, psychology, anthropology, and economics?

What aids are needed for studying children and how may these be developed?

How can we help teachers develop skill in using these aids?

(c) How can teachers use information concerning pupil needs as a basis for developing classroom experiences?

How can teachers provide effective experiences to help each individual with his needs and *also* provide for appropriate group needs?

What techniques can help teachers know when they are making appropriate progress in meeting unfulfilled needs?

What procedures can be used to help teachers discriminate in selecting

experiences for particular needs for particular children?

What procedures are effective in helping teachers, parents, and children use evaluation as a continuous, cooperative process which is an integral part of teaching?

(d) How can a school staff (and/or system) work cooperatively on the study of pupil needs?

What techniques can be developed to enable all teachers working with a child (or group) to have the benefit of all existing information concerning his status, problems and progress?

What procedures can be developed to provide for effective continuity of experiences as the individual progresses from year to year?

What types of mutual assistance in understanding children can be provided by teachers within a school or system?

(e) What are the most effective techniques for integrating home, school and community efforts in identifying and meeting pupil needs?

(f) What experiences should be provided by teacher-education institutions to help teachers at the pre-service level develop an understanding of, and skill in, identifying and meeting needs of pupils?

Discussion in these conferences of the foregoing and similar areas was consistently aimed at problems of classroom teaching. Hence many of the final recommendations of both conferences dealt with ways and means of assisting the participation of classroom teachers in cooperative action research and of enlisting the aid of teacher-researchers

in a wide variety of research projects designed to solve problems of classroom teaching and curriculum planning. This participation at the classroom level, it seemed to be agreed, is the essential and perhaps now lacking element of "practical" research.

ASCD Can Facilitate Cooperation in Research

A considerable number of the recommendations of the Chicago conference and the Boston convention groups would give ASCD the role of stimulating and coordinating cooperative curriculum research. Thus such recommendations as the following are under consideration or have already received action by the Research Board, the Executive Committee, or such other group as concerned:

- Help organize state and regional conferences dealing with cooperative curriculum research (a few such conferences are already planned).
- Repeat a conference like the Chicago conference next year and plan it so as to give maximum opportunity for sharing and planning of cooperative research projects (the Research Board is now initiating plans for another conference to be held in the fall of 1952).
- Provide central ASCD staff services to assist state, regional, and other ASCD groups in organizing cooperative research programs (the Executive Committee expects to provide some such services beginning in the summer, 1952).
- Cooperate with other national organizations interested in curriculum research (representatives of several such organizations attended the Chicago conference, additional representatives will

be invited to the 1952 Research Conference, and recommendations regarding specific types of cooperative action with individual organizations are now under consideration).

- Provide for the participation of more classroom teachers, other educational workers, and laymen in cooperative research undertakings (although the organization of cooperative research projects is primarily a local problem, participation in ASCD's program is open to all persons interested in educational improvement).

- Prepare for graduate schools lists of needed areas for investigation which might be consulted by individual research students or groups of students interested in undertaking studies relating to curriculum problems of widespread concern (preliminary lists are already available).

In general, the point of view of the study groups and of the Research Board is that national ASCD can only help in bringing about cooperative research. The primary responsibility for organizing cooperative projects is that of teacher-education institutions, school systems, state education agencies, local professional organizations, and state and regional ASCD groups. The national office and the Research Board can provide help only through organizing conferences and committees and servicing local groups as staff and funds permit.

ASCD Can Aid Communication of Research Techniques and Findings

Many recommendations from both Chicago and Boston proposed types of publications and other means of communication to aid in promoting research activities locally. For example,

such publications as the following were recommended:

- A handbook on action research.
- Reports of research studies in popular style.
- More articles in *Educational Leadership* reporting stimulating types of current classroom research.
- Series of pamphlets on "what research says" about various curriculum and teaching problems.
- Pamphlets dealing with frontier curriculum planning, particularly cooperative curriculum research.
- Lists, issued periodically, of curriculum research projects under way.

One of the major services ASCD can render in the field of research is that of publications. Hence these suggestions will undoubtedly receive careful consideration by the groups to which directed. At the same time, there is a feeling not to be overlooked that publications have not sufficed to communicate research findings in the past and will not suffice in the future. Local study groups, cooperative organizations of teacher-education institutions and school systems, state and regional research conferences, and other devices for face-to-face communication may be prerequisite to effective use of publications. Therefore, planning of ways and means of better communication regarding research should be a function, it is believed, of all groups concerned with the research problem and not just an assignment to ASCD's Research Board and Publications Committee.

ASCD Can Encourage and Aid Teacher-Researchers

One of the heartening points of emphasis in the Chicago and Boston dis-

cussions was that concerning the need for recognition and help to the large number of teachers and other educational workers carrying on classroom research and experimentation. As stated over and over again, these are the persons on whom we must count and to whom we must extend a helping hand if curriculum research activities are significantly expanded. According to reports made at these conferences, there are many teachers and others carrying on research as described in this article who do not think of their evidence-gathering activities as being research. Yet their studies, shared with others and perhaps refined by cooperative planning, might be of real significance in curriculum improvement.

To give such teachers and others recognition and help and to make their research and experimentation of wider utility, such suggestions as these have been made:

- Invite wider participation of teacher-researchers in ASCD membership, in conference programs, and in publications and other projects.
- Maintain inventories of significant classroom research under way.
- Encourage total school experimentation and the affiliation of schools engaged in experimentation for purposes of mutual exchange of ideas.
- Emphasize classroom research projects in all publications dealing with research.
- Encourage studies of provisions for teacher participation in research.

Role of ASCD in Cooperative Curriculum Research

It has been difficult to report faithfully in a single brief article the prob-

lems considered, conclusions reached, and actions taken at the 1951 Research Conference, Chicago, and at the research study groups and Research Board meetings of the 1952 convention, Boston. Rather than violate these conference deliberations by further summarizing, I would like to make certain concluding observations based on participation in all these discussions:

- The need for ASCD leadership in promoting more adequate curriculum research and better communication of research techniques and findings, is widely recognized.
- ASCD as a national organization cannot carry on research, but can help the research effort greatly by promoting and servicing conferences on research, by developing publications and other means of communication dealing with research techniques and findings, and by providing recognition and help to teachers and others carrying on research.
- Real progress in the expansion of curriculum research activities will have to come through the initiative of ASCD

members in school systems, teacher-education institutions, and other situations, in developing cooperative arrangements for carrying on curriculum problem-solving activities.

- To make possible these arrangements, ASCD members will need to be adamant in demanding budgetary provisions for research in their local situations and exceedingly resourceful in exhibiting a research attitude and procedure in their curriculum planning activities.
- The national ASCD staff, the Research Board, and any other group at the national level can be of help in the research effort only as locally developed plans and interests produce specific requests and recommendations regarding conferences, publications, committee projects, and national program plans.
- The highly encouraging development of interest in research among ASCD'ers in the past two years strongly indicates that the membership and organization as a whole will push forward these research interests rapidly and effectively—such an effort promises to be one of the most significant developments in American education of this period.

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