

the group and began to see student council experience as potent for their individual development as well as an advantage to the school. For these kinds of learnings to take place, planning for the student council must be shared among faculty, administrators and students and the person who carries major responsibility for advising the council should have active support from all sources.

Evaluation of the Group Research

In our preliminary planning the research team had attempted to anticipate tension spots. We predicted our crises would occur in two areas, namely the distribution of tasks among the members and the completion of assignments according to time schedule. Here, we believed, would be the crucial test of our hypothesis that a group could share equally on all levels of group life. The hypothesis would be sup-

ported if, at these times, there were no call for authoritative direction. As the team worked at its tasks, formulating hypotheses, determining methods for data collection, designing and testing instruments, anticipating the analysis of data and executing plans, our concern disappeared. The special competencies and preferences of the individuals were discovered by the total group, making the assignment of tasks almost automatic. The fact that specific assignments and the final reports were completed according to schedule and without pressure other than that applied by the group standard further supports our hypothesis.

The success of this collaborative effort suggests that public school administrators and universities may look for and receive help in the solution of certain of their research problems if they are willing to experiment together.

A Community Plans for Better Schools

PAUL E. JOHNSON

“Whether examples of action-research, cooperative research, cooperative problem-solving, or community planning, the activities mentioned in this article represent the efforts of one school-community to foster the evaluation and improvement of the educational program of its schools.” This, according to the author, “is the aim of all educational research.” Paul E. Johnson is curriculum coordinator, Ferndale Public Schools, Ferndale, Michigan.

THE CONCEPT that curriculum improvement depends upon desirable changes occurring in people seems to be fairly well accepted today, in principle if not always in practice. However, all

too often this has implied change in the attitudes, understandings, beliefs and behaviors only of those persons in immediate and regular contact with children in the schools. Such change is

ultimately necessary if improvements in the school curriculum are to take place. However, it is proposed here that this is too narrow a conception. *This principle must be related to whole communities or at least to school service areas.* People of the community are and should be the stabilizing elements determining the nature and functioning of schools over a long period of time. Effective educational leadership will recognize its responsible relationship to the school-community as a whole rather than to the school staff as though it were a group isolated from the community.

In keeping with this point of view, this report is not limited to one or two examples of cooperative problem-solving in progress in the School District of the City of Ferndale; it deals with a total school-community study whose basic problem may be stated as: *How does a community go about planning for better schools?*

PRINCIPLES UNDERLYING SCHOOL-COMMUNITY PLANNING

Many possibilities suggest themselves immediately. These include the functioning of citizens' advisory committees, citizen-staff curriculum planning committees, room-parent study groups, parent-teacher-student associations, faculty planning with citizen resource assistance, college-sponsored workshops, problem-centered groups concerned with special problems, and professional problems committees of professional organizations. But these possibilities take on significance only when something is known as to how they originate, their reasons for being, the way in which the members function, and the

relationship of the school staff members to citizen members. Among the common elements binding together the various study committees are a set of beliefs and principles and, consistent with these, cooperative ways through which leadership responsibilities may be discharged. These have been stated in a mimeographed brochure¹ describing various examples inclusive of some of the types already listed above. They may be restated here as facets of the basic principles which give direction to this school-community study.

Some Basic Beliefs

Certain principles, concerned with human relationships, may be expressed as follows:

- Schools, which are designed to develop desirable, effective citizens for the American way of life, must reflect in their climates and in the interpersonal relations of all people concerned, those values basic to this way of life.
- Inherent in such inter-personal relations is the satisfying of the emotional needs for belonging, for successful participation, for recognition, and for security—some of the requisites to sound mental health. Such needs must be met for all people—parents, teachers and children alike.
- The skills of active, effective, "do-democracy" are developed in people as they attack, through cooperative group action, problems which they have in common.
- Desirable, healthy progress in im-

¹ *Cooperative Group Work—A Process Useful in Improving Our Schools.* Ferndale, Michigan: School District of the City of Ferndale, May 15, 1951.

proving our schools is only a part of a deeper and broader "social change" evidenced by modified understandings, beliefs and attitudes of people, and reflected in behavior more nearly in harmony with the social values held by our democratic society.

Some Fundamental Conditions

The origin of groups which work on school-related problems, and the conditions necessary for their continuing progress, share these characteristics:

- A feeling by a group of people that a significant problem exists.
- Respect by designated authority for the right of these people to raise questions and to receive information. (Board policy enabling schools to develop individually is important.)
- Patience by all concerned in starting with the problem as the group sees it.
- An effort on the part of group leadership to secure maximum participation by every member.
- A sincere desire on the part of each member to cooperate in arriving at the best possible solution to the problem.
- Willingness to devote the necessary hours to the collection and presentation of data, followed by explanation, discussion and arrival at consensus agreement if possible.
- A tempering of expectations by recognition that some of the most important changes hoped for are changes in attitudes, beliefs and behaviors of people, and that such changes come about slowly, with progression and regression alternating in a confusing and often disturbing way.
- Confidence that sincere people, using the best information available, will

come out with the best answers for them at this time.

Some Responsibilities of Leadership

The responsibilities of designated leadership must be consistent with these beliefs and conditions. Among these responsibilities are the following:

- To provide open channels of communication and give continuous opportunities for identification of problems by staff, community and children.
- To assist parents, teachers and others in recognizing and identifying otherwise latent problems.
- To provide or help to create the machinery through which opportunities may be given for attacking the problems, and to assist the participants in discovering and obtaining all available resources—human and material.

SCHOOL-COMMUNITY PLANNING IN ACTION

The following examples are selected to represent the various ways in which this community is cooperating with its schools in joint action. Examples given are limited to those in which the participation of school personnel is obvious. Other community activities, not described here, consistent with the design presented above, are the spontaneous result of the community's growing realization of its inherent potential—much of it now latent—which may be freed through cooperative planning and action.

Citizens Advisory Committee on School Plant Planning

Arising out of a need recognized by local citizens as well as the Board of

Education, eight neighborhood school building committees were organized in 1949 through action of the various parent-teacher associations. Over a period of ten months these committees worked with advisory help from the administration and the Board of Education. They studied the need for expansion of building facilities in the total community in general, and the need for facilities in their own school service areas in particular. As a result, a community building program totaling \$1,680,000 was completed by the fall of 1950. No intra-community friction resulted, even in spite of rapidly rising building costs which necessitated many compromise cuts in the original plans.

Insights developed in the board as to the value of such citizen assistance resulted in its authorizing a continuing Citizens Advisory Committee on School Plant Planning. For the past two years this committee has given continuous study to such matters as pupil-population trends; needs for school sites, playgrounds and plant; attendance area boundaries as they affect plant loads; and other similar problems. In struggling with the problem of this committee's structure, the board recognized the importance of attaining as complete as possible a representation of all community groups. Such representation varies with the structure of communities. In this community the pattern of representation includes a member and alternate from each of the ten local PTA's, the Civic Committee (a federation of improvement associations), the Board of Commerce, and the school employees. Technical consultant assistance on school plant is provided

by two members of the administrative staff.

Among the committee's most important accomplishments since the 1950 Building Program have been its recommending the further expansion of one grade school, and the spear-heading of an interpretation program which contributed to the successful outcome of a vote for the extra millage needed for this purpose. In addition, the committee realized that expanded high school facilities would be needed by 1956. Believing that buildings should be planned on the basis of the curriculum which they are designed to facilitate, the committee created a sub-committee to study the high school curriculum. In the fall of 1951 the board gave this sub-committee full advisory committee status, thus enabling its parent committee to continue to give full attention to perennial school plant problems.

High School Curriculum Committee

Initiated in November 1950, to work on the problem mentioned above, this committee is structured as its parent committee, the one described above. The high school principal and curriculum coordinator have been designated as regular consultants. Meeting weekly, after four months of deliberation the committee produced an "Interim Report."² This report presented facts which had a critical bearing on the problem of the high school curriculum. It also listed fourteen points which the committee felt the community should consider carefully in ar-

² "Interim Report." High School Curriculum Committee, School District of the City of Ferndale, Michigan, April 5, 1951.

iving at a basis for curriculum planning. To launch community discussion of this report, a meeting of the PTA presidents, program chairmen and school principals was called in April 1951 to discuss ways and means for obtaining "a broader participation in a discussion of what the high school of the future should be." In subsequent meetings during the spring and fall of 1951, members of the committee formed panels to present to the various parent organizations the problems which they were encountering and to solicit questions and suggestions from people of each school service area.

In December 1951, a sub-group was asked to formulate a general course of action for the committee. This sub-committee proposed (a) to re-examine the points previously proposed for discussion and to express those acceptable to the committee as statements of belief; (b) to set up a hypothetical curriculum framework within which they believed these objectives could be achieved; and (c) to compare the present curriculum with that proposed, in order to determine what changes seemed advisable. During the last two aspects of the study, staff members and students would be asked to participate as they could best be involved.

In February the committee came to grips with another difficult part of its assignment—that of determining the kind of program which the committee felt would achieve the aims to which it had subscribed. Various reports of other school systems, and recommendations of a number of professional associations and study commissions, were used by individual committee members. Three members of the high school staff

were invited to present a description of an evolving program at the ninth grade level. The staff group represented was composed of those social studies and English teachers responsible for instruction at this level. Their clear description of purposes, methods and progress being made was most effective in clarifying questions of committee members regarding a "basic studies," extended-time block on which they had spent several meetings.

Eventually this committee hopes to determine the kind of secondary school program this community wants to provide for its youth in the years ahead, outline its effect on school plant construction, and report to the School Plant Planning Committee for its guidance.

High School Social Studies-English Committee

In the fall of 1950, teachers of ninth grade social studies began working to improve their instructional program. After several meetings the group invited the curriculum coordinator to serve in addition to the principal on a consultant basis. By the end of the first semester, the group had identified four general areas which formed a flexible framework. The decision was made to join an off-campus workshop organized for study teams of Secondary School-College Agreement³ high schools and sponsored by Wayne University and the University of Michigan. Here the local high school team was joined by representatives from four Ferndale junior high "feeder schools." In the

³ See *Educational Leadership*, March 1949, p. 381-84.

workshop this group worked through many of the questions and problems related to cooperative planning. Using S.R.A. Youth Inventory findings as a basis, the group developed a "Resource Guide: Personal Problems of Adolescents."

For the current year, social studies teachers were joined by English teachers who have the same group of ninth-graders. Block schedules keep these students together for two consecutive periods. In some instances one teacher, competent in both areas, has the same group during this time block; in others, two-teacher teams work together. Coordination periods make possible continuous planning by these teams. In addition, in bi-weekly meetings the total group has continued to work on an over-all, flexible framework within which cooperative planning of problem-centered units may go on. This framework consists of a tentative selection of resource unit topics within the four broad areas of Home, Community, School, and Personal Problems. As resource units are developing, staff members from other subject fields are being asked to participate. As the group moves along in its planning, new experiences in cooperative planning with students continue to direct its efforts.

Parent-Problem-Initiated Study

The example which follows represents a type of study which has been and is being repeated with some frequency. It is quite different from those just described. In this instance perhaps even more than in the others, words seem to express quite inadequately the really important things that have hap-

pened to the participants. Growth in acquaintance and understanding, increase in confidence and respect, relief of feelings of concern, recognition that education is a partnership undertaking of parents and teachers—these, and other intangibles, either unidentified or difficult to describe, are outcomes whose contribution to school improvement is present but difficult to weigh.

About a year ago, concern was expressed by a group of parents in Roosevelt School over the instruction of their children in the sixth grade. This focused on recent results of standardized achievement tests and a recurrent fear that some children may have missed important work in a half-year, extra-promotion process two years earlier when mid-year promotions were eliminated.

An invitation was extended to all parents to attend a meeting with the principal and three members of the central office staff. Purpose was to explore the problem. This was identified by the group as including the following:

- How are our children doing in terms of their capacities to achieve?
- How are they doing when compared with other children of the same age?
- What is the school doing to adapt instruction to the range of individual differences normally found in children?
- Taking these children where they are, how can we, as parents and teachers, best promote their maximum growth and learning from here on?

At the second meeting examination of mental ability and achievement scores was followed by intensive discussion of longitudinal studies of child

growth and development. As one outcome parents suggested that growth measurements be taken by the educational psychologist to help determine the growth patterns of their children and the relative achievement of growth in academic skills. The curriculum coordinator was asked to present at a later meeting some of the newer concepts of teaching and some of the newer instructional materials.

In later meetings methods of teaching were discussed, growth measurements for each child were presented, and time was taken to analyze these. The teacher joined the group to discuss some of the specific problems of pacing instruction to differences in children's rates of growth and learning. Later, she analyzed the reading ability levels represented in the class. With the assistance of the curriculum coordinator she assessed the need for instructional materials to carry on more satisfactorily a program to provide for differing abilities in the group. The analysis and the modified plan of instruction were presented to the study group and approved by its members.

The last meeting, three months later, was a stock-taking session for the appraisal of progress made. Now, nearly one year later, much satisfaction has been expressed regarding this study. This effort, initiated as a result of a problem felt by parents, was based upon the best information obtainable, collected as scientifically as possible.

A plan for improvement, arrived at through the cooperation of all concerned, was put in action and evaluated in the context of the total school and home environment of the children around whose needs the study revolved.

* * * *

These are but a few of the individual problem-centered studies which are in progress in Ferndale. Many other somewhat similar activities are under way, some of seemingly greater complexity than others, but all centered on topics or problems significant to local people.

It is of little consequence what name is applied to the activities mentioned in this article. Whether examples of action-research, cooperative research, cooperative problem-solving, or community planning, they represent the efforts of one school-community to foster the evaluation and improvement of the educational program of its schools. This, in our opinion, is the aim of all educational research. The process presented here is based on the belief that only through their own thinking, planning and work can people and communities improve. Leadership, guidance and resource assistance are the major contributions of school staff. Special resource help from college personnel, state departments of education and other outside agencies may be of great help as their resources are needed in such on-going processes of problem-solving.

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