

Curriculum Research

Column Editor: Robert S. Fleming

Robert S. Fleming, newly appointed ASCD research coordinator, with this issue assumes responsibility as editor of the Curriculum Research column. As a full-time member of the ASCD headquarters staff, Dr. Fleming, in cooperation with the Research Board, will guide the research activities of the Association. He is on a year's leave of absence from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

The Research Potential in Curriculum Development

CURRICULUM development activities under way in the public schools of the nation have a significant research potential. As school groups undertake program planning, the research characteristic of this planning may often be emphasized. It is felt that many efforts of teachers and groups are not used as fully as possible since no attempt is made to design carefully the project or to collect and organize needed material.

The assumption is made that much of the curriculum work in progress can make a greater contribution if the potential research component is more fully recognized and appreciated.

Past efforts on the part of various educational groups have placed emphasis on cooperative enterprises. Throughout the country there have been emerging many impressive cooperative curriculum activities. Teachers are increasingly planning together and school faculties are making strides in their efforts to develop a "total" school approach. Many groups are now utilizing patrons, children and resource groups in curriculum planning. Cooperative efforts are being used in all phases of our educational program.

It is interesting to note that as groups have felt the impact of cooperative activities they have tended to recognize the strengths inherent in such enter-

prises. As teachers and lay citizens get the satisfaction of participation, they seem to want more extensive participation. That is to say, the cooperative spirit is a contagious one. Active, enthusiastic teachers want a role of participation—of cooperative participation. Cooperative curriculum research is a process of active participation.

Thousands of school leaders, teachers, parents and others are actively engaged in curriculum planning as a new school year gets started. As the 1953-54 school year progresses, there will be numerous successes, some failures and many challenging and perplexing problems. Countless new ideas will emerge—new and improved procedures will be developed, useful material will appear. Some teachers will engage in significant explorations designed for providing improved educational experiences for boys and girls. Their findings have widespread interest. These efforts have a unique research potential.

State departments of education will also assess the problems which confront school groups. Efforts will be made to assist in the solution of these concerns. These activities hold curriculum research potentials. Some attention needs to be given to the research potential in the work of state department groups.

Universities and colleges will undertake service programs, as well as try to

encourage graduate students to undertake curriculum studies. Resources of these institutions, which in the past have not been thought of as providing a research function, can be directed toward curriculum research. Service activities may become effective if field service is more skillfully planned.

What do these varied curriculum activities of schools, state departments of education and colleges and universities suggest for curriculum research? Past years have been exceedingly busy—1953-54 promises to be no different. It seems important that our curriculum efforts be used to the greatest advantage. Each year we often scheme and angle around the same problems. Some of us seek to avoid them. Each year brings more perplexing and confusing problems. Our efforts at times are not coordinated. Our successes and failures are not studied. This suggests a research need.

Concern about Program Development

The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development is deeply concerned about program development in the nation's schools. In fact, the organization is anxious to encourage each school to undertake an active program of curriculum planning. It is the responsibility of each school faculty, with pupils and parents, to plan carefully its educational program. In many respects this is a research undertaking. The past several years have led us to recognize the need for more and more help in all aspects of program planning. Many teachers need direction, security and practical help in curriculum development. A summary of our efforts, findings and accomplishments may give real help and security.

Cooperative work in curriculum

planning in recent years has made a distinct contribution. And yet, if some arrangements could be made for a more extensive compilation of our work, plans, procedures and accomplishments, important strides could likely be made. If the results of activities could be studied, important leads could be identified for future investigation. This suggests a powerful research potential in curriculum work.

No doubt there are dozens of school faculties actively engaged in work on similar problems. These school groups are widely dispersed over the country. These groups, once identified, may offer significant advice and encouragement. For example, many groups may be concerned about discovering specific ways whereby vital problems of a given community can be discovered, studied and attacked. The work of each group would be helpful to the others. A summary of the work of the group of schools would likely make a unique research contribution.

Perhaps an important element in school improvement has to do with an "action" research approach. As we identify major problems, formulate a specific plan for solving each problem, and become active in its solution, the school program is likely improved. Improvement tends to come about through active effort. An exploratory emphasis on school improvement is, in many respects, a research emphasis.

The cooperative formulation of problems in a city or county unit, or in a state, or among teachers of a particular grade or subject may lead to the establishment of a research design. As hypotheses are formulated, groups may find a variety of research techniques appropriate. Among these are case studies, carefully collected records, summaries of activities, pupil evaluations, community studies, analyses of creative

efforts and a variety of others. The collection, analysis and use of these projects give further emphasis to a research potential.

If the various college and university groups of the country interested in instructional improvement could view their field service activities as a research undertaking, significant progress could be made. In many cases, our understandings of vital curriculum problems would likely be extended. This would make necessary the designing of specific hypotheses to be tested, specific plans for working, and specific evaluation techniques. Projects could be designed to help get at a realistic problem in terms of group problem-solving procedures, group dynamics, evaluation, and organizational techniques for curriculum development.

The state departments of education likewise have real opportunities to give their efforts a "research turn." The wealth of energy being expended in their work could doubtless be focused toward extending our understandings of many vital issues.

School people are busy people. Perhaps our efforts could be better spent if we viewed the impact of our composite attempts as teachers, faculties, institutional groups, and state departments of education. *There is a wealth of potential curriculum research in America.* With little extra effort we could face up with the real problem of extending our understanding about curriculum development, the nature of the learning situation and the special competencies needed in providing for maximum learning in our schools.

—ROBERT S. FLEMING, research coordinator, ASCD, Washington, D. C.

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Prentice-Hall INC

70 FIFTH AVENUE
NEW YORK 11, N. Y.

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