

The Importance of People

Column Editor: Peggy Brogan

Continuous Relationships

*"Tonight I am alone
Beneath a whispering tree
The friendship of the woods
Is calling out to me . . ."*

WHY IS IT that human beings so need their time beneath a friendly tree? Why do Barbara and Cheryl take off their shoes to feel the first green grass of spring? Why can't Danny and Jerry accept their teacher's explanation that the wet clay makes the hill too slippery to climb, instead of trying over and over again to find some way to get to the top? Why did the grown-ups mercilessly cut down trees, and then, finding that their land was ruined, try to find some better way to get nature's cooperation? Why do we hold in abeyance our evaluation of foods grown in artificial soils, until we have measured their vitamins and other health-giving potential against foods grown in soil and fertilizer from living matter?

The answers to these questions are not found in words about poetic retreats from reality—vacations far from the abode of man. They are found deep in human nature itself.

For all human beings need continuous relationships. We need to be attached in positive ways to people and ideas and things in our environment.

We might say it is the human scheme of things that Danny and Jerry stay at the job of investigating their earth. As human beings they have to find out about their environment — have to

know what they can expect by way of interaction—have to make positive relationships which give them the feeling of being attached. They try each other out in this same way, pushing and wrestling and teasing to see what working things out together involves. For work things out together they must. Born with a need for what environment has to offer, their security comes only when they can count on *knowing how* to get what they need.

With summer just around the corner we can join our children who seem never to tire of the job of finding out about their earth. There is a restfulness and wisdom about the attachments children make. A restfulness that comes from lying flat and touching and rolling and climbing and claiming the earth as theirs. A wisdom that comes from jumping off a lot of little things before jumping off big things; from finding that a kick won't move a rock; from damming up a rain-made stream in just the right way so it will change its course without losing its character as a stream and without flooding the environs.

A Matter of Interaction

To discover that living is a matter of interaction, that continuous relationships are two-way affairs, is to discover the secret of mature democratic living. Many opportunities for discovering this secret lie in relationships with our earth, where respect for individuality depends not on verbal per-

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suation, but on reality where mutually beneficial transactions are the only ones that can be counted on over a period of time.

Our adult failures and successes, our eroded lands and our nature-like substitutes, are teaching us that it is wiser to live *with* our earth than *on* it. We are beginning to extend the wisdom of *living with* to include people. In our age of moving from country to city, of window-sill gardens and disappearing vacant lots, let us not forget the history of our acquiring what beginning wisdom we now possess. A history of first attaching ourselves to the good old earth through depending on it, then trying to achieve independence from it, gradually learning

the meaning of continuity through interdependent relationships with it. A history of being close enough to the earth to learn through relationships with it.

Summer can be the time to walk in the rain, to lie in the sun, to hike and garden and swim. As we bask in the warmth of pleasant relationships, let us bask in the warmth of the knowledge we are gaining—a knowledge that says that *knowing how* to get what we need means *living with* — that living with is living freely — another way for realizing the importance of people.

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Looking Ahead in Curriculum Research

THE assessment of the curriculum field following World War II focused attention upon a need for renewed emphasis on research. The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development has pioneered in this endeavor. The development of such concepts as "action" research and "cooperative" curriculum research represents a logical development of the association's interest in school improvement.

During the 1953-54 school year curriculum research has played a prominent role in the association's program. This role has been greatly facilitated by the variety of ASCD research enterprises of the past. The research program has been an effort to portray for members of our association the need for curriculum research. It has also attempted to stimulate and assist many groups through a "research approach" to develop a solution to their current curriculum problems. The development of this "research sensitivity" seems most appropriate in an era of confusion and concern for public education.

The activities of the Research Coordinator have been varied. In general, an attempt has been made to work through existing ASCD groups. In most cases, visits have been made in direct response to a request from the field. An analysis of field activities suggests several types of activities. Among these are work with state ASCD curriculum research committees, work with general ASCD groups through

meetings or planning sessions, work with individual school units or systems on a specific research activity, work with a regional research activity (Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools' Committee on Research and School Service), and work with national, regional, state and local conferences.

The above features of existing cooperative curriculum research observed this year have, for some, a negative note. On the other hand, such features are important in diagnosing our status and in planning next steps. This "status analysis" also suggests several key problems which educational leaders might well recognize. The assumption is made that future operations in cooperative curriculum research depend upon our creativity and diligence in working with problems such as the following:

A. How can groups be helped in the process of problem identification?

B. How can groups be aided in creating and developing uniqueness in design for those studies which foster a creative approach to teaching?

C. How can groups be helped to survey existing research findings and view them prudently?

D. How can teachers find time for participation in curriculum research?

E. How can principals become involved in coordinating and assisting teachers with curriculum research activities?

F. How can teachers and groups be

encouraged to share, to write, to describe, to demonstrate their findings, thus giving them greater incentive to summarize and make available the results of their research efforts?

Leadership Training

The above problems actually are problems of *leadership training*. These problems are not being ignored. Significant strides are under way in several places. Kentucky ASCD is planning a summer workshop which will be focused on leadership training for cooperative curriculum research. The Horace Mann-Lincoln Institute is actively working on this phase of the problem. Groups in Iowa are exploring the respective roles of various leadership groups in curriculum research. Florida is investigating ways by which state councils on elementary and secondary education might stimulate research. Texas ASCD is planning a state conference on curriculum research. Many states have active state ASCD curriculum research committees. Michigan is preparing a handbook on curriculum research. New York City has already prepared a similar publication. Saint Louis has organized a Metropolitan Curriculum Research Council now actively working on important problems. Many states are surveying curriculum research activities under way. A number of states are now considering the problem of getting an active plan under way and appropriate ways of getting started. Such developments seem to be sound ones. They suggest significant progress in a relatively short period of time.

Observations in the field suggest the existence of a wide variety of levels of curriculum research. As the year has progressed there has emerged a growing realization that the association *has* had a marked influence upon activities

in the curriculum field. One finds a growing acceptance of a research approach; one finds an increased number of people desiring involvement in research activities. There is *not* the marked apathy toward curriculum research which many may formerly have exhibited. This increasing atmosphere of acceptance toward an exploratory, investigative, research approach to curriculum improvement seems to represent a most favorable trend.

Specifically, how would one characterize curriculum research now under way? The following features seem typical of gross findings over the country:

A. The greatest amount of curriculum research tends to fall in the area of elementary education. There seems to be relatively little under way at the secondary level.

B. The studies now under way (1953-54) are largely studies in the fundamental subject areas, reading, arithmetic, spelling.

C. There are many studies of a general nature under way. Those occurring most frequently have to do with reporting pupil progress.

D. In many cases studies do not involve total school staffs; rather, they affect small teams or groups within a school or school system.

E. The research studies do tend to originate from expressed concerns of teachers.

F. The studies are frequently not sharply designed—placing emphasis on clarification of kinds of data needed and on the development of procedures for collecting data.

G. Resource people are not always identified and involved.

A survey of cooperative curriculum research now under way over the country is now in progress. The national office hopes to make this available in

the late spring. This survey will facilitate cooperative activity in that individuals, places and projects will be identified.

The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development has made provision in its total program for stimulating and assisting with curriculum research. Efforts have been made to secure foundation support to extend this work. These efforts have *not* been successful.

The research challenge continues to be a persistent one. As public education faces the problems of the next few years, the research challenge becomes increasingly important. Perhaps our future role as an association is still one of pioneering, assisting, projecting, pushing ahead. This dream is a realistic one when we recognize the potential leadership teams now present in each geographical area of the country. Such teams can be formed and can function with minimum expense. These teams might take the form of a state research committee, a city curriculum committee, representatives from several institutions in an area or clusters of research board members in a given region or area.

In its concern for fostering cooperative curriculum research, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development must not retreat. The spirit of cooperative inquiry can be accelerated in each region and in each state as our members are assisted in applying a research approach to edu-

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cational improvement. Groups are active in their efforts to improve school buildings, transportation, administration, public relations, in-service programs, educational materials and numerous other related areas. Vigorous leadership will be needed, however, if our approaches to curriculum development are to be in keeping with research findings and consistent with established elements of educational philosophy.

The challenge of the future for educational leaders has important implications for curriculum research. Techniques, instruments, leadership, procedures which are sound and creative must emerge. These developments must look to the future rather than merely seek support for the status quo. Curriculum workers are now making, and must continue to make progress in use of such a research approach.

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