

it quite easy to urge others to do this research and I can make what I think are sage suggestions for improving the quality of their inquiries. But when it comes to using more scientific methods to improve my own behavior, I have great difficulty.

The use of the methods of science to improve human behavior, especially one's own behavior, has had a short history. Curriculum research has had a very short history. Relatively few de-

isions about instructional materials or methods are based upon scientific evidence. A number of the articles in this issue of *Educational Leadership*, however, suggest that interest in using research as a guide to action is increasing among school people.

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The Classroom Teacher and Action Research

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Intensive and widespread planning in a metropolitan area has resulted in initiation of action research projects in numerous local schools and school systems. This article describes the development and the accomplishments of this area-wide movement.

THIS is a telescopic account of how a cooperative action research project came to be, the difficulties encountered in getting it under way, the efforts required to keep it going, and the cautious advancement of some tentative generalizations about what has been learned thus far.

The decision to undertake a cooperative research study developed slowly out of several years of committee deliberation and conference activity involving, at times, up to one hundred fifty teachers and administrators.

Framework for cooperative endeavor in the Detroit area is an organization of school systems known as the Metropolitan Detroit Bureau of Cooperative

School Studies.¹ The research project grew out of the activities of the Elementary School Improvement Committee² formed in 1949 under the auspices of the Bureau.

It is interesting to trace the evolution of the research project through the official minutes of committee activity. For instance, from the record of a meeting of the ESIC on June 12, 1951, it appears that much time and

¹The Bureau was formally organized in 1946 with twenty-eight charter members. Currently it includes forty-seven public school systems located in a five county area. Also affiliated through membership are the School of Education, University of Michigan, the College of Education, Wayne University and Michigan State Normal College.

²Referred to, hereafter in this report, as the ESIC.

thought were given to the problem as to whether or not the committee should sponsor a program of cooperative research which could be carried on principally by participating schools. There was general agreement as to the desirability of sponsoring a study but many problems remained to be solved, including the selection of a general problem area and the securing of funds to conduct a study.

The committee reached agreement as to the general criteria for a cooperative endeavor:

1. The problem should involve many school systems, teachers and pupils.

2. It must answer needs common to many school systems, teachers and pupils.

3. The problem must be of sufficient social and intellectual significance that it can be justified regardless of the sacrifices involved.

4. It must be a common problem that schools can attack collectively and one which they could not profitably attack singly.

5. It must provide for a direct improvement in educational experience for children.

6. While it must of necessity be limited in scope, it must have implications for the widespread improvement of educational practice.

Finally, the committee authorized contact with a foundation to ascertain its interest in assisting with a project meeting these criteria.

Realizing that a great deal of intensive planning and organizing would be required to formulate a study design, secure foundation support and

clarify ways in which school groups could affiliate with the project, the ESIC delegated a subcommittee³ to proceed with these activities.

Eventually, the Cooperative Action Research Project Committee and the Midwest Administration Center⁴ agreed that there were elements of common interest in the study and that collaboration would be mutually beneficial. A general topic for study was finally developed: "How Can an Elementary School Be Organized to Promote More Continuous and Better Sequential Learning Experiences for Children?"

The Midwest Administration Center and the CARP Committee agreed on the importance of local and area groups engaging in cooperative action research. This was a forward step in research since few school systems voluntarily band together to work toward the identification and solution of significant instructional problems. The CARP Committee was definitely committed and enthusiastically interested in stimulating action research in local situations. The committee believed that participation in research activities in a local area would, through the process of working together, develop leadership qualities and reveal fruitful approaches for curriculum development or modification.

Getting Under Way

The idea of a research project had been a much debated topic at several of the previous ESIC-sponsored con-

³ Which became the Cooperative Action Research Project (CARP) Committee

⁴ Of the Cooperative Project in Educational Administration, University of Chicago.

ferences. The committee noted among the conferees a growing impatience with the repetitious discussion required to brief new conference members and the resulting lack of progress in getting started. This impatience was interpreted as the end of the exploratory period and a sign of readiness to proceed with specific planning. Accordingly, a "how to get started" meeting was held in January 1953 at Haven Hill Lodge.⁵ Those who had promising projects or a sincere interest in cooperative endeavor were invited. Representatives of eight school systems responded to the invitation.

The minutes of the Haven Hill workshop meeting reveal many important interests and problems raised by individuals and school groups embarking for the first time on cooperative action research. Some of the questions were:

1. What is action research?
2. Can we work on anything we want regardless of whether it fits the big project or not?
3. How does a school group choose a problem that is clearly related to the theme?
4. What can I do as a teacher to improve my teaching situation?
5. How can participation in this project improve a teacher's work in the classroom?
6. Will teachers have an opportunity to express themselves regarding participation in the project?
7. What control will the Midwest Center exercise by virtue of its contribution to the project?

⁵Haven Hill Lodge is a conference site operated by the Conservation Department, State of Michigan.

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8. How does a principal get a resource person to come to his school to help?

9. When do we start gathering data and what do we do with it?

10. How can in-service teacher-principal education programs related to action research be introduced and sustained?

The problems of choosing a project, sustaining interest in it and defining the source of control appear in these questions.

Some members of the workshop expressed uncertainty about participation in a cooperative action research project, but they apparently wished to continue a relationship with the group. Frequently, this segment raised questions which showed doubt as to the feasibility of the project. One of these questions related to the size of the problem selected for study. This and similar questions took their rightful place at workshop meetings and possible solutions were suggested:

1. A complex problem might be broken into manageable parts with one or more persons taking responsibility for single aspects.
2. Several persons in one school unit might work on a problem or persons in the same school system but not in the same building might work on a common problem.
3. Several school systems within an

area might work cooperatively on a common problem.

The problems encountered were not considered as being strange or peculiar to this particular type of project. Differences in goals, conflicting opinions as to the plan of operation and the interpretation of the leadership roles of individuals and groups are inherent in group process.

Another important aspect of the project revealed further at this time was its two-sided nature. In connection with getting help, schools engaged in the project have the responsibility of supplying process data in addition to data pertinent to the specific questions related to the local aspect of the problem.

The workshop at Haven Hill was exceedingly valuable in clarifying certain issues which had been paramount in previous deliberations. Feeling for the project was extended and many of the participants gained a clearer perception of the nature of action research and the proposed study. This meeting revealed a climate of commitment which, heretofore, had been missing. Voluntary screening for participation in the project resulted. Groups were challenged to produce or not to produce in the area of action research. The "nibbling" process gave way to a firmer approach.

Meetings of the type just described are essential in promoting group understanding and appreciation of the values gained when schools and teachers work together on problems of mutual interest and benefit. Naturally, the committee has provided many opportunities for working together co-

operatively as participants considered their role in the project, as they reported progress and as they studied possible next steps.

Defining Problems

The Haven Hill Workshop paved the way for definite commitment of participation in the project. Schools then became interested in specific problem selection and data collection. In some school groups, problems have been clearly perceived, but in many instances methods for attacking these have been less evident.

Some active efforts center around these problems:

1. Will continuity and sequence of learning be increased for children by using some form of the primary plan?
 2. How can the gap between kindergarten and the first grade be bridged?
 3. How may schools help children to develop self-direction?
 4. Can an elementary school improve learning experiences of children through flexible classroom organization by giving children opportunities to work in large groups, small groups and as individuals?
 5. What ways can be developed for gathering data which indicate the opportunities within a classroom for an individual to assume the role of leader, follower or equal (two people assuming cooperative efforts basic to the goal of cooperation)?
 6. How can a school help children to grow toward social maturity?
- Other areas under study are citizenship, reading, science and child growth and development.

Local problems under study differ in

character and are at various stages of development. They range:

In the degree of organization—from formal to informal;

In the point of origin—developing from their inception with teacher participation, others developing at the administrative or supervisory level with the hope of involving teachers at a later time;

In both type and scope of the problems selected;

In the degree of nearness to children; and

In numbers of persons involved and the positions represented.

Some of these endeavors have been helpful in furthering the research project; others have proved less effective.

Recognizing Difficulties

The CARP Committee has been active in its endeavor to help advance this research project through written reports, suggested bibliographies, meetings and consultant services.

So far this project in its development has revealed obstacles that must be overcome in conducting action research. Those most evident are:

1. Few teachers feel adequately prepared to do research.
2. Many teachers are fearful of engaging in an enterprise which requires an unfamiliar skill.
3. Some teachers feel that an action research project means adding work to a currently heavy program.
4. Teachers who feel self-sufficient may not care to assume a new role.
5. Few schools have a workable program for releasing teachers to work on projects within a school day.

Positive Values Emerge

Even though obstacles have been present, the CARP Committee has continued to believe that the involvement of school personnel in cooperative action research projects will reveal many positive values. Progress reports which are being written are beginning to verify these expectations.

One report given by a teacher before a group of school superintendents and board of education members emphasized the complicated process inherent in defining and delimiting a problem. However, the most striking part of the process reported by this teacher was the involvement of a total school staff. In concluding her report she said: "I think one important development has been more flexibility in the classroom and more interest. I think teachers are becoming more aware of opportunities in fostering social growth along with academic work. I think at the beginning many of us felt this was an added part of the day. Now we realize that in certain situations the children may be learning academic skills but they are also growing socially. Many of the problems I have watched in my classroom where children were learning to work together have been duplicated in teacher activities."

Other teachers⁶ have also expressed some of the positive values of the project. Some of these are:

"Working together on a common problem tends to break down petty rivalries and to create a more professional attitude on the part of teachers."

"Some of the teachers who are pro-

⁶The word *teacher* as used here refers to all members of the professional school staff.

moting self-directed activities in the classroom for the first time, have themselves become freer and more creative in their teaching."

"The acceptance and cooperation of a former exact science teacher with our action research project has been interesting to teachers here. This teacher, now teaching fourth grade has given wholehearted cooperation in spite of questions in his own mind regarding the validity of the results of our attempt at action research."

"We have found that every project has to be 'sold.' Teachers naturally are reluctant to change and cannot be hurried into new methods and procedures. They must see and feel the value of the study. This takes time and patience on the part of the entire group."

"We feel that the best outcome so far is the recapturing of a professional attitude by our members. They have

had an opportunity to get out of the 'daily rut' and to work at a professional level. In some instances college theories have actually been put into action for the first time."

"Greater sensitivity on the part of some teachers to children's reactions to the leadership role."

In stimulating interest in action research, the CARP Committee has emphasized and re-emphasized that in this type of research a close relationship should exist between practitioners and people skilled and conversant with scientific research. The committee has both types of membership.

As schools continue to work in the area of cooperative action research, the resulting data may convince teachers that this type of research can lessen or enhance their work through modifying or changing present practices. Then, the ultimate goal, a better education for children, will take form in action.

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