

too brief to indicate the full potentialities of this approach to curriculum research. Obviously, the procedures used are inadequate from a research standpoint. Yet in some cases these efforts to collect evidence about innovative practices mark the first attempts to compare new practices systematically with former ones. Believing as we do that the collection of evidence is an essential step in any curriculum experimentation, we feel that help and

motivation to this end are appropriate. With the help of such courses, individuals may learn to study their problems more systematically than before, to use more adequately related existing research, and to work more effectively with others in cooperatively defining and attacking curriculum problems. From these beginnings, it is hoped that students will find increasingly accurate means of identifying and testing possible problem solutions.

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## **Leaders Learn Through Experience**

**This article is a progress report on New Jersey's experience in preparing leaders for cooperative curriculum research.**

**N**EW JERSEY BECAME INVOLVED in leadership training for cooperative curriculum research by a process of evolution. For several years the State Department of Education has been sponsoring a workshop for the state staff of helping teachers and a number of supervisors and curriculum workers employed by local districts. The workshop, held for a week each January, is a voluntary project, developed by the participants for purposes of their own growth. Its membership numbers about one hundred, divided into study groups of ten each. The group chairmen constitute the workshop council or planning body.

Early in 1953 the workshop completed the study projects which it then had current and in April of that year the council began a series of meetings to explore new areas for study.

As the council studied participants' suggestions, two problems of common concern emerged. One was immediate and pressing—the problem presented by the large number of inadequately trained teachers who, because of the teacher shortage, had been brought into the schools under emergency certification. How was it possible to help them learn the bare fundamentals of teaching quickly enough to "keep their heads above water"? As the council

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discussed this concern, its members became aware of a deeper, subtler problem, "How can we find better ways to close the gap between what we know and what we do?" The leaders knew that telling teachers what to do is ineffective; they realized that their role is to help teachers find their own solutions to problems. They recognized that this is always difficult; the difficulty in this instance was only intensified by the current situation. They felt a genuine need for greater skill in the ways of working with people which will lead to desirable change.

Two members of the council were involved in the national ASCD program of cooperative curriculum research. They proposed that cooperative curriculum research as a method of school improvement might be explored at the 1954 workshop. This proposal interested the council but, of course, this group could not make the decision. The council therefore proposed a one day meeting to enable the total workshop personnel to learn the nature and purpose of cooperative curriculum research. Then each person would be able to help make the decision. When consulted, the workshop participants favored this meeting.

#### **Nature and Processes of Research**

At a one day session held in May, Stephen M. Corey of the Horace

Mann-Lincoln Institute of School Experimentation, presented an overview of the nature and processes of cooperative curriculum research. The participants then divided into small groups, discussed the presentation and raised questions. Then they reconvened to ask further questions and to help clarify uncertainties. Groups about the luncheon tables explored the presentation further.

The afternoon was used for a more concrete examination of the fundamental character of cooperative curriculum research. One group of participants had formulated the outlines of a situation involving a school and its community and, in the afternoon session, presented this in a spontaneous dramatization. A new principal had decreed that the lunchroom manager could no longer collect the school lunch money. Every teacher would have to collect for her own class. The manager complained that her honesty was being doubted, the teachers complained of one more interruption to teaching. Everyone got excited. The dramatization represented a meeting which included the principal, certain teachers, the lunchroom manager, the school bus driver, the PTA president, a school board member, and an invited consultant. Some of the facts were brought out, the problem clarified, and the group prepared to explore tentative solutions. This skit helped the onlookers to see the difference between trying to solve a problem by heated argument and seeking the facts on which a solution can be based.

The "reactionnaire" which was completed after this meeting revealed that the majority of the workshop members

really wished to learn to use the methods of cooperative curriculum research as a way of working with people, and wished to make this the next workshop project.

From the outset, the council had seen the importance of proceeding by careful steps. Now it proposed that another full-day meeting be held in October as further preparation for the ensuing January workshop. The participants agreed and asked that the October meeting give them firsthand experience in problem defining.

In preparation for the meeting, the workshop council members, in order to improve their skill as group leaders, held a session of their own in which they put themselves through the same experiences which the total workshop group would have in October. Each described some area of concern and the others helped him to shape a statement of a problem that would lend itself to study and eventual action.

This preparation made heavy demands on the chairmen but proved to be well worth it. When a letter was sent to all the workshop participants, suggesting that they bring their burning problems to the October meeting, it was possible to include samples of the raw questions and the resulting problem statements worked out by the chairmen at their preliminary meetings. In October, the leaders of the workshop groups felt fairly secure for they had already had some firsthand experience with the techniques of problem definition.

### Defining Problems

The October meeting opened with a demonstration by several members of

the Institute staff acting out a situation in which a school principal and his friends, who were also principals, wrestle with a problem. Together they learned how to state a problem so that it can be "worked upon, not just worried about." The total group discussed the demonstration with reference to the process employed. The remainder of the day was spent in small groups, each group referring to the processes used in the morning demonstration as a guide in stating its own problems in workable form. To support the group chairman, a consultant experienced in cooperative curriculum research sat with each group.

One major result of the day's work was a realization that it is necessary to gather adequate data before the actual nature of the problem is apparent. Thus, as the participants worked together, they began to discover for themselves some of the fundamental principles of cooperative action research.

At the end of the October meeting each participant formulated a statement of the problem on which he wished to work, and the council reformed the groups so that persons with somewhat related projects could work together at the January workshop.

Evaluation of the October meeting by the workshop participants showed that understanding of the process of cooperative curriculum research is not reached overnight. The participants felt that they had found something worth exploring and were certain they wanted to continue but some doubts and confusions were expressed. For example, some said, "If we took all this time to work out problems, nothing

would ever get done." Others said, "There is nothing new in this approach; thoughtful people have always worked this way." But despite repeated cautions that they should come to the workshop only if strongly moved to do so, more than one hundred leaders registered.

Following the policy of careful planning, the workshop council again met to clarify the purposes of the coming January workshop and to establish a common understanding regarding procedures, schedules and plans for evaluating. The council corresponded with the participants so that considerable readiness was established.

The January workshop met for three days. The major part of the time was spent in working seminar fashion in small groups. Each group member was allotted an hour to discuss his own project and receive help. In the large group meetings, experiences were provided to increase the effectiveness of the work of the small groups. Role playing, panel discussions and films were used.

The major purpose of the January meeting was to enable each person to get maximum experience in working with a real problem of his own so that he could continue on his own in his local situation working with local people. It was agreed that the participants would meet again in May when each would bring data on his local activity for further study and evaluation.

The meeting in May centered on evaluation of the ways of working which participants had used as they worked with the problem at home. It was found that sometimes the problem had been too vaguely stated in the be-

ginning, or that there had been insufficient evidence regarding the nature of the problem. It became apparent that it was necessary to think early in the process of the means by which results are to be evaluated. As someone said, "You can't evaluate what you have done until you have clearly in mind what you want to achieve." It was agreed that much practice was still needed in determining what the problem really is, in stating it in workable form, and in isolating the factors involved in it.

### **What Are the Reactions?**

It is impossible at this point to evaluate the effectiveness of the workshop but reactions which workshop participants have volunteered during the past year may be significant.

A local supervisor describes how the staff worked cooperatively on problems involved in helping Puerto Rican children adjust to their new life. She writes, "As I have watched the deep furrows leave their brows and the dazed, sad look disappear from their eyes, I realize the warmth of understanding they are receiving from principals, teachers and children. The program which has developed surpassed the preliminary plans made at the workshop."

A helping teacher describes how she worked with a teacher and a group of children on means of improving reading through developing oral vocabulary. Her written report shows that she and the teacher gave a great deal of attention to process and she speaks of the personal growth which she and the teacher felt they had made. She says, "We ended our experiment with more

questions than we had at the start. It set us to thinking seriously of problems we had read about and in which we had only a remote, academic interest but which we had not sensed in our own situation."

Another workshop participant described a critical situation, in which a teacher was in danger of being dismissed. This matter was cleared up and the school was improved, when all concerned discovered and changed the conditions causing the difficulty.

Others reporting made such statements as these:

"I feel the workshop on action research helped me realize that I can't accomplish much by myself."

"I am more aware that there are no canned answers to school problems. It takes time, facts and experimentation by the people involved to change a situation."

"It has influenced my whole approach. I am trying to avoid ready-made answers to questions. I find myself saying more and more, 'Let's look at the facts together.'

"Our approach to teachers meetings has changed. There has been much more involvement of teachers in planning, leadership and participation. We are more conscious of the necessity for involving more people from the beginning if we expect acceptance and lasting outcomes."

### **Role of Leadership**

Because of changes in personnel in the State Department of Education, the workshop did not meet in January 1955. But planning for it is again under way. Study of cooperative curriculum research in New Jersey will con-

tinue. Over the state, many of the workshop participants are gaining skill in using the methods by applying them in the solution of their problems. They are aware that they need further help from one another and from experts. They will seek this help because they have caught a glimpse of what a powerful tool these methods are in effecting change.

They are clearer in their minds regarding the role of leadership in education. They recognize more clearly that if educational practices are to change in harmony with what scientific research has taught us about human development, we cannot leave the determination of change to a few persons in positions of authority. One reason why desirable changes come so slowly is that those who have to implement change do not understand what needs to be done. Persons whose job it is to institute new practices must be involved in all the study, planning and experimentation leading to them. This includes not only teachers, but all those persons who work closely with children and, to a degree, the children themselves.

For this reason, *many* leaders with skills in helping people tackle their problems scientifically and cooperatively are needed. That is why the State Department of Education in New Jersey has used its resources to help train leaders. That is why the leaders themselves are not satisfied to "take a course" but are going through the actual processes, learning with the people whom they are expected to lead. They know they cannot really acquire the understanding and skill involved in any other way.

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