

CURRICULUM COORDINATORS

Study Their Jobs

A graduate seminar helps New Jersey curriculum coordinators analyze their jobs and focus their leadership efforts more effectively.

A STUDY ENTITLED *The Work of the Curriculum Coordinator in Selected New Jersey Schools* has just been published¹ which may prove to be both useful and interesting to curriculum workers in other states as well as in New Jersey. Behind the subtitle, "A Report to the New Jersey Curriculum Coordinators," lies a story of significance in the field of curriculum improvement.

In January 1950, the curriculum coordinators of New Jersey met with the assistant commissioners of both the Elementary and Secondary Divisions, Thomas Durell and Heber Ryan, at the State Department of Education in Trenton. The meeting was called for the purpose of giving help to those who had K-12 responsibilities and therefore needed to meet with both assistant commissioners. Six people attended the meeting, four of whom actually worked on both levels.

The group met again thereafter once each fall and each spring. Each time the group increased in size until in November 1952 there were twenty people on the membership list. The group became so stirred by the increase in

numbers, that it passed a motion that Thomas Durell should "be requested to make a survey of the title, duties, status and responsibilities of people appointed to curriculum positions."

Mr. Durell's report, made the following May, gave us what one member called "an armful of spinach." It seemed to us that there was no discernible pattern in inaugurating the position. It seemed each of us bore a different title. Some were "line," some were "staff" and some were both. Some had had training, others had not. Some had written definitions of their assignment, others did not.

A committee to follow up the survey was "volunteered" without too much resistance on their part. They were Edgar Lawrence, Irvington; Charles King, Millburn; John Lo Presti, Hillside; and George Sharp, Tenafly, chairman.

The committee was charged with the responsibility of developing written material which would (a) guide school districts in initiating the position and (b) give school districts which had already instituted the position, principles which could be used to evaluate their programs. This material was to be turned over to our State Department.

¹Available from the Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, \$1.00.

A Seminar Helps

In September of 1953, the committee made arrangements with the Seminar in Supervision and Curriculum Improvement at Teachers College, Columbia University, led by Professor Gordon N. Mackenzie to assist with the study. After a number of conferences, the study was launched. Two questionnaires, one rather elaborate, were constructed with all hands involved. These were filled out and returned. In addition, seminar teams visited nine school systems to make a more intensive, firsthand study of the curriculum improvement program in each. The results, which have been reviewed and revised by the curriculum coordinators are, as stated before, now available.

The seminar group found three general approaches to curriculum improvement in the nine systems although there were variations within each approach. They were: (a) group work in buildings, (b) supervision of individuals, and (c) required group work on system-wide problems.

In studying the organizational structure of the school systems the group found that in the larger systems the person in charge of curriculum improvement was in a "line" relationship to the central office curriculum workers and, in curriculum matters, to the building principals. Responsibilities were generally quite clearly defined. In the smaller systems, however, the superintendent retained major respon-

sibility and the curriculum person was in a staff or advisory relationship to the superintendent and to the building principals. Responsibility was generally *not* clearly defined. In neither the large nor the small systems was there any desire to use authoritarian methods of working. Both stressed cooperative ways of working.

In eight of the nine systems, there were central curriculum councils and a structure of system-wide committees. Lay participation in the work of the committees was found, however, to be very limited.

One of the questionnaire studies was devoted to an analysis of the activities of the curriculum person. These activities seemed to fall in five major areas and are given in descending order in terms of time spent on each. They were:

1. Curriculum improvement activities.
2. Activities to *facilitate* the curriculum improvement program.
3. Personal-professional growth.
4. Preparation and provision of resources.
5. Community relations.

It was revealed that many curriculum workers participated in many activities even though they may not have had responsibility for them.

The material secured through this questionnaire should be helpful to other curriculum workers in analyzing their own activities.

The final effort of the seminar group was to give us material which would be helpful to school districts that wish to inaugurate this position and to school districts that wish to evaluate

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their present program of curriculum improvement. Accordingly a chapter is included in the report which gives guidelines either for establishing a sound program of curriculum improvement or for assessing one that is already in operation. The phrase "guidelines" is used to indicate that there is no one right way—no blue print—to follow in setting up a program but that each school district should follow certain *basic principles* in tailoring a program to fit its own unique needs. Guidelines are offered for assessing curriculum improvement procedures, organizational plans and the activities of the curriculum person.

Since the study has been completed, two interesting developments have taken place. The New Jersey State Department of Education has been reorganized so that there is now a Director of Curriculum and Instruction (K-12), Mr. Ablett Flury; a Director of Secondary Education, Mr. William Warner and a Director of Elementary Education, Mr. Eric Groezinger.

The New Jersey Curriculum Coordinators have decided to push beyond

the study to try to clarify further the position of the curriculum leader. We want to work cooperatively with *all* staff members but we also would like to have some limited authorities in order to do our job more effectively. It seems to us that we can get off the horns of that old line-versus-staff dilemma, if we can spell out and win acceptance of certain specific *defined* authorities within the area of curriculum improvement that would make us neither line nor staff. We are not at all clear as to what these defined authorities should be. Right now we only have "feelings" but we are going ahead to seek out these authorities.

We realize that it is not going to be easy to pin them down. "Shared responsibility" is a phrase that we all respond to emotionally, but when it comes to setting down on paper the precise limits of each person's "share," we go beyond experience into the unknown. Perhaps other curriculum workers throughout the country will set this task for themselves so that in a few years we may have some concrete results.



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