

# Curriculum Research

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## An Institute for Training in Cooperative Curriculum Research

FOR SEVERAL YEARS ASCD and its Research Board have been active in seeking ways of increasing interest and skill of its members in curriculum research. This emphasis has been used as an important basis for school improvement. Last April 24-29, the first Institute for Cooperative Curriculum Research was held in East Lansing, Michigan. This Institute was planned carefully by representatives from each of its four sponsoring agencies: the Horace Mann-Lincoln Institute of School Experimentation, the Center for Improving Group Procedures (Teachers College, Columbia University), the National Training Laboratories, and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. Planning sessions were held for staff in December, January and April. The major share of financing the Institute was assumed by HMLI, which viewed the project as an investigation to be carefully studied and evaluated.

This project was thought of as one for leadership training for curriculum workers. It was hoped that the Institute would serve as a guide or prototype for additional training institutes. Such expectations led to careful and specific planning by a staff of eight.

The purposes developed by the planning staff for the Institute were:

1. To further the insights of curriculum leaders into the cooperative curriculum research process;
2. To further the ability to *diagnose* human relations problems in cooperative curriculum research;
3. To practice and evaluate some *skills* in cooperative research, leadership and planning;
4. To relate the learnings of the Institute to specific curriculum development problems faced in the "back home" situation.

An announcement of the proposed Institute and the above statement of purposes were sent to the entire ASCD membership with the *News Exchange* in January 1955.

As a result of this announcement, applications were received from 150 people. Actually 43 individuals attended the six-day Institute. These people came from all parts of the United States. Individuals paid twenty-five dollars registration fee and fifty dollars for room and board.

Careful study was made of those planning to attend the Institute to determine the nature of their background, experience in curriculum research, needs and expectancies. This was regarded as an important aspect of preliminary planning.

The work at East Lansing was planned to proceed along two major lines: emphasis on *human relations*

and emphasis on *curriculum research*. The week's activities consisted of general sessions of the entire Institute, work groups of 16 delegates and two trainers meeting for a three-hour block of time daily, special interest groups and general consultation on "back home" problems.

The general sessions provided a variety of experiences for all participants. Some sessions had to do with human relations or group considerations while others dealt with curriculum research. In several cases the general session became a work session for developing skills. For example, one session dealt with analyzing and interpreting data.

The work groups provided a "home base" for relatively small groups to work daily with two staff trainers. The purpose of these groups was to provide specific training in both human relations and research skills. Groups worked quite differently and employed a laboratory approach.

The special interest groups were specific training sessions, planned in advance by staff members. An examination of the list of 20 groups shows specificity in this aspect of the conference:

- Sociometrics
- Getting and Analyzing Data about Children
- Quantifying and Analyzing Unstructured Data
- Introducing Innovations, Getting Experimentation Under Way, Risk-Taking Design for Action Research
- Questionnaire and Inventory Construction
- Role of the Consultant
- The Interview as a Source of Evidence
- Getting Involvement and Shared Leadership
- Controlled Behavior Observation

Efficient Treatment of Numerical Data  
Diagnosing a Troublesome School Situation  
Problems of Working Within a School Organization Structure  
Role Playing for Diagnosis, Training, as a Source of Data  
School Records  
Projective Tests  
Case Study Methodology  
Use of Published Tests in Curriculum Research.

Two afternoons were provided for consultation with individual staff members on "back home" problems. Participants seemed anxious to discuss local problems and to make plans for their work at home. This was entirely voluntary. Many also sought other opportunities for talking about their plans for activities back home.

During the Institute the HMLI staff collected a variety of types of data. Some information was collected which could be studied quickly as a basis for improving the course of the Institute. Extensive data was also collected for future study, review and analysis. In addition, plans are under way for follow up of the participants in a variety of ways. Some instruments were repeated during the fall of 1955 to determine whether there are carry-over or lasting values which emerge.

This project appears to be a very significant development in ASCD's research activity. It was a project cooperatively sponsored. Each of the sponsoring groups made important contributions. The diversity of emphases contributed to the uniqueness of the project.

A description of the Institute has been developed and would likely be of value to other groups in the future. This report was prepared by HMLI

and gives a complete account of the plans, schedule and manner of work.

Another outcome had to do with changes in people. The evaluation at the close of the Institute revealed a general "warm and good" feeling about the week's activity and its worth. Individuals seemed to develop an appreciation for the merging of the human relations and the curriculum research emphases.

Before leaving East Lansing, the staff had a post-Institute evaluation meeting. Staff members seemed to consider the Institute a valuable experience and one which should be repeated using the East Lansing meeting as a practical point of departure. This project suggests a variety of implications for ASCD and the Research Commission. Doubtless state and regional groups will in the future want to conduct research conferences. It seems appropriate for ASCD to assist in providing an opportunity for leadership training in this area.

Continued study of materials secured in the Institute experience in East Lansing, and of data secured from participants after they returned to their homes provides an opportunity for appraisal of the effectiveness of the Institute in fulfilling the four purposes stated above. Evidence to date suggests that substantial progress was made in helping participants to gain *insight* into the cooperative curriculum research process, and to develop ability to diagnose problems.

—ROBERT S. FLEMING, professor of education, New York University, Washington Square, New York, New York, and chairman, ASCD Research Commission.

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