

## There's Need To Improve the Process

**I**T HAS seemed to make such good sense—this involvement of teachers and other members of the staff in the process of curriculum improvement. It evolves so logically from our democratic convictions and from our understanding of how changes in practice are brought about.

Yet some of our patrons, and, indeed, many of our professional colleagues are challenging this procedure. They point to basic problems which must be faced. In this day of heightened public interest in the program of the school, searching questions are being raised about the manner in which curriculum decisions are reached, and about the means for carrying them into effect.

Before you read the thought-provoking articles in this month's *EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP* you may want to take a moment to consider some of the issues and problems confronting your school with regard to staff involvement in curriculum improvement.

Do you have trouble explaining to the public, and defending the results of the "broken front" approach? Mary McMillan in her article "Wings Over Our Shoulders" refers to it as the "rhythm of group work." It is obvious that if a staff or individuals within a staff are to carry some responsibility for the identification of problems for study, and for carrying forward a program of action, the problems won't always be the ones the principal, or the chairman of the local Better Schools organization, would have chosen.

Should the variation in the experience and competence of teachers make any

difference in their participation? Much as we might wish that all teachers were highly capable and professionally motivated, we know this is not the case. Can we justify placing in the hands of such teachers a major responsibility for making curriculum decisions?

In a nation noted for its successful application of mass production techniques to industrial processes questions are raised about a school system which can not or does not promulgate a curriculum developed by experts. How is a carefully integrated and sequential series of experiences in science to be provided the pupil who moves from teacher to teacher year by year if each teacher is permitted to modify or participate in the "improvement" of that curriculum?

Perhaps the questions being raised are extreme. Good practice certainly makes use of the expert. But how effectively? What skills do teachers need to make good use of consultants? And what skills do the consultants need to develop? Are there not some problems that can be dealt with better by individuals or groups other than the school faculty? June McLeod in her article "Teacher Participation in Meeting Some of the Problems of Double Sessions" points out that teacher participation will not solve the basic problems of providing more classrooms, more teachers, or more books.

You may grant that teacher participation is good, but can a teacher afford to give enough time to curriculum improvement activities to make his involvement more than superficial? Faculty meetings seldom get down to basic issues. Members of curriculum committees exchange

their "gripes" or list their problems, but seldom get into action. One of the most promising of the approaches to curriculum improvement, the "action research" project, bogs down because of the time and energy required of the researcher. Catherine Broderick and Barbara Mason report their research on staff activities considered helpful and those considered non-helpful. They list, among those characteristics most frequently present in the least helpful activities: "We participated in discussions," and "We examined our classroom practices." It is very likely that the teachers concerned were not unwilling or uninterested in carrying their projects forward to more productive ends, but that they found the pressures of their other responsibilities interfering.

It may be that your questions center not around the desirability of staff participation but have to do with the need to improve the means by which we do it. A most searching examination of what happens to the individual teacher as he engages in a process designed to change his own behavior is reported by Miss McMillan. If we believe that curriculum improvement is more a matter of changing the actions of the teacher than it is changing subject matter content, then we must study more carefully the impact of the program on the individual. The changing of people is a complex process. What kinds of help and resources are needed? May not the psychologist or the psychiatrist be as essential as the curriculum specialist?

Our lack of skill with and understanding of the group process may account for many of our difficulties. How does the individual teacher engaged in an action research project share his interest, his plans and his findings, with others on the staff so as to gain their support and understanding? Who should take the initia-

tive in organizing a group for action? What percent of involvement of the total staff is needed if a curriculum improvement project is to be effective? What if some staff members do not participate at all? How can the members of a staff engaged in a curriculum project gain the satisfactions and rewards essential to the maintenance of morale and continued work?

Then, could it be possible that we have expected teachers to play a large part in this most important aspect of our educational program but have failed to give them the necessary tools and equipment? Are they involved in the selection of the materials of instruction? If curriculum problems are to be approached creatively it may be quite important that there be freedom to examine and procure appropriate texts, library materials, films and records, art supplies, and the like. What about the facilities and tools for studying the problems of curriculum? Many a school building has been constructed with primary attention to classrooms to house pupils, and offices to house secretaries and administrators, but with no attention to a place for teachers to work individually or in groups on curriculum problems.

What should be provided by way of a curriculum laboratory in a local school building? The minimum essentials would seem to be a *place* in which to meet and work, *materials and equipment*, and the *resource personnel* needed to help in the organization and carrying forward of curriculum projects. The place might be a room or several rooms designed to accommodate individual, small group, and large group activities. The materials might include a group of professional journals, some of the newer professional books, and a careful selection of courses of study, sample texts, and other resource

materials related to specific problems being tackled by staff groups at the moment. A file of resource materials and resource personnel available for classroom use would be valuable. The equipment should surely include a typewriter and a duplicating machine; possibly, a coffee maker! Resource personnel could include other staff members, the principal, consultants from the central office, parents, and college staff members. The provision of such a curriculum laboratory might easily be one of the keys to effective staff participation.

The listing of these problems which interfere with the realization of all the high values we have assumed were to be found in staff involvement in the curriculum improvement process may serve to make us defensive . . . or depressed . . . or determined to move ahead in a constructive attack on such problems. I hope it has also served to whet your interest in reading the challenging articles which follow in this issue.

One further exercise I recommend, however, before indulging in the pleasure of sharing ideas with the distinguished panel of authors included within these pages! Just what *do* you consider to be the strengths of including the

school staff in the process of curriculum development? If your convictions carry sufficient vitality they may help you see through the obstacles to the underlying values. As a starter I would propose these:

1. It is important that the teacher carry large responsibility in planning curriculum activities so that such activities may be the most appropriate ones for the particular pupil(s) concerned.

2. Curriculum improvement depends in large measure on a change in behavior on the part of the teacher. Changes in behavior are most likely to occur through participation in problem solving activities.

3. While subject matter experts, curriculum specialists, supervisors, administrators, and many other people concerned with the curriculum have roles to play, the teacher is in the unique position of carrying curriculum plans into action. The teaching staff can contribute practical ideas born of this experience. We must not fail to exploit such a resource fully.

—ROBERT S. FOX, *director, University School, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.*

## Balance in the Curriculum

**A**T THIS writing, three months have gone by since that day in early October when Russia triumphantly announced the successful launching of Sputnik I. During this time America's response to the portentous event has presented a spectacle of national hand-wringing and breast-beating which only recently has shifted to a more mature consideration of the implications of Rus-

sia's ascendancy in the world of science and technology.

Educators were not surprised when education became the whipping boy for the loss of American prestige. Schools and colleges have always been convenient scapegoats for those who feel compelled to place blame, or for those who desire to escape responsibility for decisions or actions which have not been

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