

Opportunities for Teacher Participation— in Research

Parish-wide involvement of teachers in classroom research projects has met with considerable success in the Morehouse Parish Schools.

TEACHERS in Morehouse Parish, Louisiana, have for many years participated in various types of in-service activities. Included are experiences in faculty study groups and parish-wide meetings, in which teachers work together according to grade levels in the elementary schools and in subject matter areas at the secondary school level. Most of the teachers annually participate in the voluntary workshop held during the last week of August to work on problems relating to curriculum improvement. Three times each year professional growth days are held, with the teachers planning and assuming responsibility for all speeches, discussions, exhibits and demonstrations. Opportunities are provided for a number of teachers and principals to spend a week observing and studying in some of the most outstanding schools in the United States. Whenever workshops or

conferences of major importance are held within the region, a number of parish teachers attend to bring back to their respective faculties anything that may be helpful.

Each year the program of in-service education training and other activities devoted to professional growth has been expanded whenever the need has arisen. Joint planning on the part of all the school personnel has produced a program enlisting the participation of each teacher in the parish. These activities are promoted with the idea that the time utilized for in-service training is of greatest value when the teachers themselves work together with the supervisor to determine how it is to be spent.

One of the latest additions to the professional growth program is that of research by the individual teacher. Classroom research, or experimentation, is a means of involving teachers as they work with boys and girls to improve their own teaching practices. It is evident even from the brief experience of Morehouse Parish teachers that many benefits can be derived from experimental teaching. Among these benefits is

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the fact that experimentation enables the teacher to look critically at what she is doing and at the same time receive constructive help from her coworkers. It provides a means of locating real problems; it gives practice in securing data necessary for the solution of these problems; and it demonstrates for teachers the importance of withholding judgment until sufficient facts have been secured.

Experimentation provides an opportunity to use a variety of techniques for teaching the same thing to determine the superiority of one. It enables a teacher to realize her own responsibility for improved classroom work and for her self-improvement. Of the many benefits accruing from the Morehouse Parish program of classroom research, one of the foremost is the fact that the teachers, by conducting the experimentation within their own classes, are able to test at firsthand the many modern teaching theories. Learning through actual experience thus makes the teachers more willing to supplant with newer and better methods outmoded practices of teaching.

The project of classroom research in Morehouse Parish began with a small nucleus of teachers who voluntarily formed the experimentation committee. In February of the past year the supervisor invited all teachers expressing an interest in this type of work to meet with William M. Alexander, of the University of Miami, for the initial meeting. The consultant explained to the group the purposes, methods and values of classroom research. The group discussed the necessary procedure for making a beginning. Most of those present participated in the program of carrying on some research in the classrooms.

During the ensuing months the teachers selected individual problems on

which they wished to do organized experimentation. Most of the problems selected arose from dissatisfaction with the results of certain classroom activities. Others represented the desire of teachers to evolve new and more effective methods of helping children develop various desirable characteristics.

Variety of Projects

In undertaking the actual research, the teachers were able to obtain help and suggestions from the supervisor, the consultant, the school principals, and from each other. References on action research, such as *Research for Curriculum Improvement*, the ASCD 1957 Yearbook, were supplied to the participants. Records were kept by the individual teacher of the project, of the various steps involved, and of some of the values derived through the project.

In April the group met again with the consultant and the supervisor to discuss the problems selected, the progress being made in attempting to solve them, and any difficulties being encountered. At this time many of the participants presented encouraging reports of the success of their work in research. The supervisor and consultant were able to observe many of the research projects in action by classroom visits and to offer further recommendations.

The problems worked on covered nearly every aspect of the total school program, including those concerned with the physical, mental, emotional, and social development of children. Much of the research resulted in the modification of a particular method of the teacher or the use of a completely different method.

Several teachers found that children's written work was improved considerably by individual conferences with the child-

ren about their compositions and by the keeping of folders for the written work. One teacher found a number of causes for the poor listening habits of children and formulated steps to remedy this situation. Much improvement was apparent as a teacher changed her method of teaching number combinations.

A number of teachers undertook research dealing with the children's social adjustment to the school environment. One teacher's project, for example, uncovered valuable ideas for helping children work more effectively in groups. Another effected a plan to improve the relationship of children on the playground.

By working out with her pupils a unit on healthful eating habits and proper table manners, one teacher was able to improve to a great degree the conduct of her children in the cafeteria. The entrances and exits of another class became quieter and more orderly after the teacher undertook classroom research to solve the problem.

In eliciting greater pupil participation in teacher-pupil planning, certain methods were found to be effective. One teacher chose to use certain ideas to promote better group work in her classes.

One of the best examples of the type of research done and the steps involved in its accomplishment is the project undertaken by two teachers at the same school. Both expressed dissatisfaction with the kind of writing their children were doing. One was interested in having her children develop greater independence. In their writing she felt they were leaning too much on her for ideas and accuracy. The other teacher was interested in helping children develop more fully their creative abilities. Their ideas and expressions, she felt, lacked originality.

As these teachers discussed their problems among themselves, with their principal and the supervisor, with the larger group and the consultant, they soon realized that their concerns were closely related and could be caused by the same or by similar reasons. Following a consideration of many possible causes of their problems, they decided to work from the assumption that the children needed more experiences on which to base their creative writing. These experiences should be in the utilization of sources other than the teacher to promote the children's independence of her.

Many materials and sources for information were provided and used. Teachers, children and parents worked cooperatively in securing those needed materials. Pets were brought in; aquariums were set up; field trips were made. Children visited the public library to bring in books on topics for which they lacked information.

One group set up a post office in the room for writing and posting real letters. Another group visited a bird farm where they saw both song and game birds, such as quail and pheasant. Charts and other types of records were kept. The children were encouraged to write about the experiences they were having.

At the end the teachers reported that the children's enthusiasm had spread to the parents. In addition to bringing in materials and talking with the teachers about the projects, the parents offered their assistance on arranging and conducting field trips.

Teachers Evaluate

The teachers are continuing to work with the same idea this year with their new classes. In evaluating their work, both teachers were well pleased with the results of their first organized class-

room research. Language skills of both groups were noticeably improved; the interest of both pupils and parents was stimulated; and a sense of independence was developed in the children. Of the personal benefits derived, both teachers felt they had learned to organize work better. Both felt closer to the children, their interests and their needs. The enthusiastic response of these teachers is typical of the feeling of the entire experimentation group.

Working with the teachers on their research problems caused the supervisor to become interested in trying out some experimentation in his supervision of instruction. He wanted to find out whether a teacher can improve his teaching by reading a good professional book and conscientiously testing the ideas contained in the book.

In carrying out the first step, the supervisor contacted seven junior and senior high school teachers in four schools and asked each one whether he would be willing to participate in an experiment. When the explanation was given, each teacher agreed to begin reading *Effective Teaching in the Secondary Schools* by Alexander and Halverson. Whenever he found an idea that seemed valuable the teacher would record this idea and try to incorporate it in his teaching. Notes were kept on each such attempt. These seven teachers worked in this manner throughout the year.

At the Professional Growth Day for junior and senior high school teachers one hour was allotted for these teachers to report on the topic: "These Ideas I Discovered Through Reading; This Is What I Did; and This Is What Happened." The project consultant attended the meeting to present his reactions to the reports and to answer questions raised by the teachers. The conclusion jointly

arrived at was that a teacher can improve his teaching by conscientiously testing ideas from professional literature.

All the teachers who are involved in the use of scientific methods for problem solving are members of various parish-wide curriculum groups which meet monthly for a two hour period. Each group is in the process of developing curriculum guides for the purpose of helping teachers provide better learning opportunities for each boy and girl in Morehouse Parish. It is hoped that one of the major goals of each curriculum group will be to include in the guide suggestions which have been tested out in classroom situations.

The growth of the teacher as she works through the process involved in action research, coupled with the added experience of working in a group with other teachers in helping to develop a guide filled with the results of much research, will, no doubt, promote increased opportunities for wholesome growth and development of the children of Morehouse Parish.

After the completion of the various projects in classroom research last year, each teacher was asked to submit a brief record of the experimentation he had conducted in his own classroom and his evaluation of the work. A central committee compiled a general report on the entire program, including an over-all evaluation and recommendations for the program for this year.

The committee found that:

1. The teachers felt that the consultant was excellent in helping them carry out the entire program.
2. It was the consensus that organized experimentation is highly beneficial and productive of greater results.
3. The program stimulated much pupil and teacher evaluation.
4. A program of this sort enables the

teacher to single out more problems and apply scientific principles in solving them.

5. The entire group felt the work to be very stimulating and rewarding.

6. Experimentation makes teachers more willing to change their methods when better ones are found.

7. Teachers using the experimental method learn to look at facts before drawing conclusions.

In making recommendations for this year, the committee urged that the program be activated early in the year and that more teachers be encouraged to participate. Many of the group expressed a desire to have the same consultant work with the program again this year. Further recommendations made included suggestions that teachers working on similar problems might profit by working more closely with each other and that the same experiments might be tested with other groups.

In accordance with the committee's recommendations, the group for class-

room research has already held its initial meeting.

A suggested form was given to each teacher as a guide. One-half page was allowed each of the following items on the actual form. The teacher will record on this form throughout the year.

(Form)

School Teacher

Grade

Record of Classroom Research
1957-1958

1. I am dissatisfied with—
2. Some of the possible causes could be—
3. I have discussed this with—
4. My problem is—
5. My course of action is—
6. My plan for collecting evidence is—
7. These are the results—
8. I draw these tentative conclusions—

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Esther J. Swenson, Chairman \$4.00

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