

Does Faculty Participation Produce Curriculum Improvement?

Evidence from research gives a clearer picture of specific benefits to be derived through staff participation in policy formation in a program of curriculum improvement.

FOR a number of years it has been asserted that faculty participation in decision making will bring about improved school programs. Little evidence has been collected to test this thesis. In some schools such a method has seemed to work. In others both faculty and administration have been frustrated in their attempts to implement it. Is there any validity in the idea or is it a fantasy which has gained credence through repetition?

Studies in Industry and Education

Although the hypothesis has not been tested by carefully designed research, certain studies in industry and education supply evidence as to its validity.

The work of DeHuszar (1) suggests that participation in decision making will result in the securing of more ideas and the consideration of possible solutions. A typical example presented in *Practical Applications of Democracy* was the attempt of the manager of a department in a manufacturing plant to improve the truck used for transporting materials within the department. The five opera-

tors of the truck were called to his office, one at a time, and were asked for suggestions. The employees were shy and reticent but each suggested one way to improve the truck. Still dissatisfied, the manager called all five operators together, told them they knew more about the truck than anyone else because they worked with it every day, and asked them to suggest improvements. He left them to work out their recommendations together. Fourteen suggestions were made.

If the experience reported by DeHuszar is typical, it would seem that faculty participation in decisions provides the opportunity for the faculty to choose from among a wider range of solutions because of the greater number of possibilities suggested. One caution that needs to be considered before making this interpretation is that the operators had had much experience working with the truck. Sometimes faculty members are asked to consider problems with which they have had very little experience and they do not have the background out of which to formulate recommendations for desirable changes. Do suggestions made by someone without experience with the particular problem have sufficient significance to justify their consideration?

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Some experimentation conducted by Leavitt (2) suggests that faculty participation in decision making is necessary if faculty members are to continue to be interested in the development of the program of the school. In this experimentation, four problem solving groups were set up. Each group contained five members. One group was seated in the form of a Y, one in the shape of an I, another as an X, and the fourth in an oval arrangement. In the I, X, and Y groups, the problem and the data were fed into the leader, who was situated at the center of the I, X, or Y. The physical arrangements were such that information had to be passed along from one individual to another. The leader had to decide on how the problem would be attacked and which phases of the problem and which data should be made available to each member of his work team. In the O group, the problem and the data were made available to all members. In the beginning the X, Y and I groups solved more problems more accurately than the O group. More discussion and analysis occurred in the O group and the interpretations were not as clean cut. As the work proceeded, however, the O group became more productive than the I, X, or Y. Efficiency in the O group had not increased noticeably. The change in the relative productivity occurred because the persons at the ends of the I, X, and Y groups, who did not have access to the definition of the problem or the data except as a portion of the information was passed along by the leader, lost interest. The three people who remained most interested throughout the entire experiment were the persons who were in the leadership spot in the I, X, and Y groups. On the other hand, interest remained high for the people in the O formation.

The Leavitt research suggests that when the identification and definition of problems and the amount of data are restricted, the faculty members who are on the fringe will lose interest in the development of the program while the portion of the faculty in the inner circle will continue to be highly motivated and highly professional.

Coch and French (3) found that resistance to change is lowered through group participation in planning the modification. At the Harwood Manufacturing Plant, records showed that a change in assignment or work procedure resulted in an increased number of employees terminating their work with the company. Apparently dissatisfaction with the job and with the company resulted when a change was made. An experiment was designed to test the hypothesis that participation in the planning of change would decrease the amount of termination that typically resulted from a change. Four groups were established. In the control group, which involved no participation by employees in planning the change, an explanation was given to the group of the change that would be made and the reasons for it. In the second group the workers selected representatives from among themselves to work with management in planning the change. In two groups all the members involved in the work unit participated with management in redesigning the procedure that would be followed. All four groups were roughly matched with respect to efficiency rating, the amount of the change involved, and the amount of cohesiveness observed in the group. In the group with no participation there was lowered efficiency after the change. Resistance developed. Marked expressions of aggression against the management occurred. Seventeen percent of the

employees quit in the first 40 days. In the group in which the employees were represented production gradually increased and the attitude was cooperative and permissive. No one quit in the first 40 days after the change. The representatives increased in efficiency at about the same rate as the rest of their group. In the groups where there was total participation in the planning the recovery of efficiency after the change was faster than in the others and showed a sustained progress thereafter to about a 14 percent higher efficiency than the pre-change level. The members worked well with their supervisors and showed no signs of aggression. No one quit in either of the total participation groups during the first 40 days after the change.

In light of evidence such as Coch and French collected, it would seem that decisions concerning change in program should be made by the people who will be asked to implement it. Plans as to how to proceed should be thought through either by all members of the group or by representatives who have close contact with all members of the group. Any administration that attempts to make decisions concerning change and how to effect it without involving faculty members in the decision courts lowered morale and lowered efficiency.

A study reported by Sherif (4) gives the reader pause. The subjects in the experiment went into a darkened room and observed a pinpoint of light. After they left the room, they were asked to estimate how far the light had moved. Judgments as to how far the light moved differed greatly. Following the recording of the individual guesses, all the subjects were brought together and time was provided for discussion of the movement of the light. At the completion of the discussion, the subjects once again en-

tered the darkened room one by one and made a second individual estimate of how far the light moved. As the group members discussed their observations apparently some movement toward agreement occurred because after the second observation the extremes in judgments had moved nearer the average estimate of the distance the light had moved. The part of the experiment that must give those who are considering faculty participation in decision making cause for serious thought is that the light did not move at all.

Process is Critical Factor

Group thinking will not always result in wiser decisions. It may result in agreement on error. Compounded ignorance does not equal wisdom. Any faculty needs to be sure that in its work procedures time is provided for the collection of evidence on which to base decisions. A decision made on the spur of the moment without taking the time or making the effort to collect sufficient data to make an intelligent decision may result in a deterioration rather than an improvement in the school program.

One study deals directly with the effect of participation on program improvement. Sugg (5), as a part of the Kellogg Leadership Project at the University of Florida, studied the relationship between the operating patterns of principals and curriculum change within the schools in which they worked. The 24 most autocratic and the 24 most democratic out of a total of 125 principals in one county system were selected for study. Democratic operation was interpreted to mean bringing people in on decisions that would affect them, informing teachers and students of actions before they were taken and respecting the welfare and dignity of individuals. Authoritarian action

was considered to be the opposite of this pattern. No principal in the study operated democratically more than 70 percent of the time and no principal failed to operate democratically at least 30 percent of the time. Thus the comparison was between the effect of relatively more democratic behavior and more autocratic behavior of principals. Sugg found that in schools with more democratic principals: teachers were more ready for curriculum change, were not threatened as much by change and were making more changes in their work; more courses were modified and more changes were made in school services, daily schedules and guidance procedures. On the basis of Sugg's research, it would seem that if a principal hopes to carry on a program of continuous curriculum change he should involve the faculty in the decision making.

Needless to say, change does not mean improvement. Judgments concerning the quality of the change depend upon values held by the individuals making the judgment.

The evidence from these studies leads

to the conclusion that participation of the faculty in decision making will result in higher morale, maintenance of interest and willingness to change, but does not guarantee that the changes will be more intelligent or improve the program. Whether improvement is made will be determined by the quality of the group problem solving process used. Securing participation is not enough.

Bibliography

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4. SHERIF, MUZAFER. *A Study of Some Social Factors in Perception*. Archives of Psychology, No. 187. New York: Columbia University, 1935. 60 p.
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duced. Changes in staff members are evident. Some of the most promising changes are:

The experimental attitude and behavior of teachers

The increased insight and understanding of teachers and administrators regarding the way children learn

The new role which teachers demonstrate as they work with children

The increased objectivity on the part of

teachers as they work with their own data

The increased interest in professional reading materials

The use of educational principles as a basis for answering questions and making decisions.

Though the problem points are real and at times most discouraging, more and more we are experiencing days when we look over our shoulders "to see if wings are beginning to show."

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