

Curriculum Research

Column Editor: Alexander Frazier

Raising Our Sights in Curriculum Research

THE reports appearing in this column each month during the current year have been concerned with exploring research findings in related areas for their curriculum implications. The areas so reviewed were defined by the ASCD Research Commission last spring in St. Louis as part of its attempt to raise our sights in curriculum research. The Commission's viewpoint is that the Association membership wants and needs help in defining what is most worth studying. The present writer, in his introductory column (October 1957), reported that "there are expressions from the field that reveal personal and professional commitment to action research—but that then ask, 'Research on what? Toward what ends?'"

Again, the year's contributions to this column have attempted to provide some answers to these questions.

Now the ASCD Research Commission has undertaken another approach to the same problem. If registration materializes, the Commission will be sponsoring the Third Curriculum Research Institute in Chicago about the time this issue of *Educational Leadership* reaches its readers. In two earlier research institutes (East Lansing, 1955; Grafton, 1956), the emphasis was on improvement of research techniques and leadership. This third institute, organized around the theme, "Learning: An Area in Need of Study and Research," will have as its central purpose the development or sharpening of insights that will

lead to a higher quality of research undertaking.

It is hoped that out of five days of study, participants will clarify their own understandings of new developments in learning and shape up propositions for further field study and research that will be more rewarding than some that may have been pursued in the past.

The areas in which research will be reported by persons proficient in learning theory and research are to include these:

Culture—What are we finding out about its bearing on learning?

Perception—What do the new studies mean for methods, materials, etc.?

Personality—How can we tie in to the revelations about the importance of the self in learning?

Communications—What does the most recent research seem to indicate that we should be trying out?

The experts will report research in their fields for discussion and analysis by the participants in terms of possible significance for curriculum improvement. The guiding questions will be: What implications do these findings have for us? What do we need to know more about? What kinds of action research projects will improve our understanding of learning and make for more successful teaching?

One of the expected outcomes of the institute will be the publication of the reports prepared by the experts along with lists of proposed research problems defined by the total group. It is antici-

pated that the over-all outcome will be to raise the sights in the type of action research being undertaken by Association members.

Whether or not the institute as described above does take place, the basic problem to which its deliberations will or would have been turned remains: How can we develop new horizons for field study and research?

The answer may be indicated in the summary sentence from Bernard R. Corman's chapter on "Action Research: A Teaching or a Research Method?" in the December 1957 issue of *Review of Educational Research*:

If educational research, whether done cooperatively or noncooperatively, by action or inaction, by professional or amateur, is to be valued, it is necessary that the researchers make explicit the preferences that undergird their efforts and tackle the problems which are most pressing rather than those which are most convenient.¹

We need to spend more time deciding what deserves to be studied.

This year's research column (and last year's) and the projected Third Research Institute have been oriented in this direction. There are also other ways through which we may spend more time in defining pressing problems and coming up with more significant research leads.

We can keep in touch with what is going on in related fields. Reviewing the journals and new books in such areas as sociology, anthropology and psychiatry

¹ Volume XXVII, page 546.

with anything like systematic coverage may be more than we can accomplish. But we can select for study some of these that may make a difference in our conception of what we need to know more about.

We can review the kinds of projects we are now studying. If we are engaged in field projects of a study and research nature, can we say which of these are more or less routine? Are we investing more time in some than the results will be worth? Can we clear the decks for new concerns? Is there a germ of something a little beyond us in what we are already doing that might be worth nourishing?

We can reflect on what we most need to know. In this particular day, when all kinds of easy answers are being proposed for the most difficult problems, we should take the time to reflect on what we most need to know. Are there some big questions on which we have given up? What new understandings would make the most difference? Are there some new questions which we would like to help frame?

Perhaps reflection on our own needs may be the best place to spend time that would really pay off in terms of new horizons.

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Cowboy to Tractor," and "From Log Cabin to Skyscraper." As the title suggests, the history and development of the state are told through its land and its people. *Living in Denver* provides background information about that city while

showing a pattern of living common to other cities as well. The illustrations include many samples of children's work in both color and black-and-white. Both publications are outstanding examples of locally produced materials for students that show high quality and clear purpose.

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