

Curriculum Research

Column Editor: Alexander Frazier

A Study of Research in Progress

THIS IS both a postscript and a preface. In beginning this year's column, perhaps we should provide a follow-up of the final column for last spring. That contained an account of what the ASCD Research Commission hoped to accomplish if it succeeded in holding the Third ASCD Research Institute.

You will be pleased to know that we held the institute and that we think it accomplished at least a part of what we hoped it would. The June "News Exchange" included a brief report on the institute. A fuller report, including the scholarly addresses presented there, will be published later this year as a pamphlet under the title, "Learning: An Area in Need of Study and Research." We hope you will be looking forward to seeing it.

But of more immediate importance is the announcement of the Fourth ASCD Research Institute. We expect by this time you will already have received some information about it.

The institute, which we hope will contribute to the development of the Association's new Cooperative Action Program for Curriculum Improvement, is scheduled for December 6-10, 1958, and will be held in Washington, D. C., at the Burlington Hotel.

The theme of this institute will be "Underdeveloped Capacity to Learn: An Area in Need of Study and Research." As we are all aware, increasing attention is being given today to the possibility that what we measure as "intelligence" is better thought of as *developed* capac-

ity. The key question then becomes: What stands in the way of and what supports the development of capacity to learn? Many recent investigations in the behavioral sciences bear on this question and promise to provide leads to educators in planning for more effective teaching.

For the Fourth Institute, scholars and investigators in the behavioral sciences will be invited to report their findings on the development of capacity to learn. The fields covered will include underachievement in school, mental retardation, personality theory, and cultural anthropology. From these reports, institute participants will pull out the ideas that seem to promise most for field study and research on the conditions that would make the most difference in producing developed capacity.

We know you will consider seriously the value such an experience as this might have for you in your work.

Learning as We Go

How does curriculum research get started? What is involved in developing design? How do instruments for data collecting evolve? Who handles data? What happens to false starts? Side issues? New problems?

These are the kinds of questions. Research Commission members believe, which are likely to press in upon ASCD'ers engaged in field studies. These, too, were some of the leads that occurred to us as we were trying, last February in

Seattle, to define a theme for this year's column. We were agreed, however, that it would not be enough simply to talk generally about these questions. Perhaps we have done too much of this already. Then someone proposed that reports of curriculum research in progress might provide a little more body for such discussion. Could we persuade persons already in the midst of a study or near the end of it to pause long enough to look around or to think back so that they might tell what it was like on the way? Would that be more helpful than general advice?

We tested out the idea on the Commission members themselves. Various ones who are in the midst of study or experimentation told something of their experiences.

We heard briefly of studies that had begun with teacher concerns, others that started with the interests of institutional research teams. We heard about the anguish of conceptualization, the frustrations of blind alleys, the paralysis in action caused by changing personnel. We heard of the exhilaration and release brought about by new insights and unexpected successes. We got an inkling of the need to be thoughtful all the way, the need for continuous vigilance to the demands of ways and means, the need to take plenty of time.

More than anything else we were impressed with the variety in these reports. There were different levels of concern, differing degrees of formality, widely differing combinations of persons-at-work—principals, college personnel, teachers in the classroom, consultants from state departments, experts from research institutes.

As a result, we decided that a thoughtful self-analysis of some of the research in progress we had heard about could be of value in helping others know what to

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look for, perhaps what to watch out for. Such reports would certainly have more body than would generalized "answers" to research problems. And the series, with its emphasis on real situations, should be an interesting contrast to the kind of column we conducted last year on what most needs to be studied.

Thus, the succeeding columns will report what on-going research looks like from the inside to those who are doing it.

Miriam Goldberg and Harry Passow of New York will analyze their procedures in studying the underachieving gifted. From Kansas, Robert Ridgway will tell what a group of teachers encountered as they developed a program for the mentally retarded.

Several Florida teachers will work with Glenn Thomas in reporting their experi-

ences with individualized reading. Grady Parker and Elmer Ellis will analyze a Texas study on the achievement and personal adjustment of underage first-graders. A Wisconsin study in color perception of elementary school pupils will be reviewed by Arthur Adkins.

In these accounts, we hope to give others help in getting a better picture of what research looks like while it is being undertaken. We hope to offer something of practical value in helping you find better research answers to some of the questions you may have in mind.

We hope you will find what we do useful.

—ALEXANDER FRAZIER, *director, The University School, The Ohio State University, Columbus.*

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on the earth. The development of atomic power and man-made satellites has served to intensify the necessity of examining their effect on the lives of men. Both science and social studies teachers must intensify their efforts to help young people to understand our culture as it is influenced by scientific discovery.

It took a ballistic missile to wake up the American people to a realization that the most underprivileged and undereducated group of students in America is the gifted and the talented. Educators are being asked to explain why the majority of students are put into the same courses, taught in about the same way, using the same textbooks, doing the same experiments, and spending the same number of hours per week and of months per year in a course. Parents

want to know what is really being done for the "bright" youngster. They are not happy with the "special opportunities" provided for the rapid learner which frequently consist of simply doing more of the standard activities. Schools are now charged with the responsibility for devising new curricula and teaching methods that will give the academically gifted educational opportunities at least comparable with those of other students.

What have satellites, rockets and missiles contributed to American education? They have created an awareness of the importance of science and technology to social progress and economic security. The public realizes more clearly than heretofore that it is through the program of schools that science will be advanced and the ideals of a free world perpetuated.

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