

# Teachers Study Use of Bulletin Boards

**Using an action research approach teachers study the educative uses of bulletin boards and draw some significant conclusions.**

SINCE bulletin boards are widely used as a visual education tool in the classrooms in Cedar Grove, New Jersey, the teachers were anxious to find out how their use affected children's interests, learnings and development. Can we make bulletin boards more vital for improved learnings and achievement? Are the pupils actually aware of our bulletin boards in the classrooms and halls? Do pupils gain anything in their work as a result of intensive use of bulletin boards? A consideration of these questions led to a formulation of the problem and the launching of our program. The original problem was stated: Does the display of children's work in the classroom affect their growth and development?

The following summary describes 18 months' work with a core group of supervisors, principals and teachers in an action research study. A consultant was available from time to time and we think provision of such advisory service is mandatory for any group starting a project in action research.

## Assumptions

We began with several assumptions about bulletin boards and their relationships to learning. Assumptions help to

establish the educational premise that we use as a basis of our work. These were:

1. Children learn nothing from having their work displayed.
2. Work on bulletin boards affects their status in the group.
3. The displaying of children's work affects their behavior.
4. Working on bulletin boards establishes self-esteem.
5. Work on bulletin boards motivates children to do better.
6. Use of bulletin boards has no effect at all.
7. Bulletin boards should always be artistically arranged.
8. Bulletin board work creates appreciation of a good arrangement.
9. Work on bulletin boards creates appreciation of others' work.
10. Bulletin boards are a teaching device.
11. Visitors often judge a teacher by the appearance of work displayed in her room.
12. Using bulletin boards will teach children how to organize material.
13. Labeling material makes displays more effective.
14. A child learns more from bulletin boards he has made himself than from commercial or teacher made displays.
15. The teacher's enthusiasm for displays motivates children's initiative and interest.
16. Learning about good displays and

using them will carry over into future classes.

17. It is better to have an artistic or well organized bulletin board than one that is too crowded.

18. Bulletin boards have an effect on children's standards.

It was an easy task to make early assumptions. The data collected seemed to support these assumptions.

We needed also to collect data concerning the actual uses we were making of bulletin boards. Evidence proved to be varied as different teachers conducted experimentation in their classrooms. Teachers began to record anecdotes of children, school personnel and visitors. They made closer observations to watch how children related themselves to bulletin boards. One put up commercial displays without comment, one stripped bulletin boards, another planned to have other classes visit her room and summarize their learnings or opinions about the projects of her class. The following incidents were related by various members of the committee:

1. One kindergarten teacher keeps the class aware of bulletin boards through constant reminding, since the displays are rather above the children's eye-level. As a unit progresses, it is likely that more of the children's work will replace things that the teacher has put up. It is often through the children's own requests that their work is exhibited. This teacher also believes that her bulletin boards are very helpful during parent-teacher conferences.

2. Children in a first grade became aware of Queen Elizabeth's recent tour only when they began bringing in their own newspaper articles about it. Previously displayed articles on the very same subject, brought in by the teacher, had gone unnoticed.

3. Comments overheard by a first grade teacher showed that the children were extremely impressed with the color in a group of first grade paintings.

4. Visual material (pictures) displayed at the beginning of the year in a fifth grade classroom that had been arranged by the teacher, in the hope that they would make the room more attractive, received little or no response from the children. However, as the students required more bulletin board space for their own displays, they requested that the teacher's exhibit be removed. To get a reaction from the children, the teacher said that her exhibit could not be moved. The children's request for the additional space became more adamant.

5. One teacher observed that a child who was arranging a hall bulletin board of class paintings was consciously aware of the "design" of her arrangement. She purposely chose a certain number of paintings to display and, when questioned, answered that any more would "unbalance" the effect she wanted to create.

6. A sixth grader wanted to rearrange a bulletin board in a better way. "Can't we change the stale stuff?" she asked.

7. A fifth grade teacher carried on an experiment, aimed directly at our problem. In social studies the class made an extensive study of the Westward Movement in the U. S., creating maps, pictures and projects. At the end of the unit the class evaluated its own work and also invited other classes in to view and evaluate it. These are the results: Most of the class felt that they had accomplished their purpose—to show the growth of the country. The work was neat and the class had followed the directions as set up in the planning. They felt more had been learned by making the displays and sharing them with others. They acquired additional information as displays were explained.

Other classes that visited made these observations: "We enjoyed the projects of the children themselves." "The trading post

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looked real." "We liked the way the pioneer exhibit was set up, it looked real and we learned a lot about pioneers." "The map showed how the U. S. has grown." "The pictures were neat, they brought out the ideas about the West and we liked the way the lettering stood out on the map." A visiting teacher commented: "The children were interested, they remembered details and it was a good chance for the children to express appreciation of others' work."

### Examining Assumptions

At this time we began to ask, how valid are these assumptions? What are we really after? We need to define the problem and perhaps restate it. Evaluating the status of our bulletin boards at this time seems essential. Through a discussion of the above anecdotes, the following new assumptions were made:

1. Children are anxious to display their own work.

2. Children's work is more valuable than teacher's work, when on display.

3. Teacher's display is not valuable at all.

4. The length of time any kind of work is displayed is an important consideration when determining its value.

5. A bulletin board display is helpful to parents in making comparisons.

6. It is good to display work by all children.

7. Children do not look at things on a bulletin board unless they are pointed out to them.

8. An attractive or different arrangement is more attention getting.

9. Comparisons of children's work on the bulletin board are bad.

10. Children are very aware of other people's work on the bulletin board.

11. The older children are the more critical they become.

12. A class that has studied work displayed on a bulletin board in correlation with other subjects will have a better reaction to it, than will children who have not studied and arranged the work.

13. Children do notice work other than their own displayed on the bulletin board.

What are we after in our use of bulletin boards? We want them to assist in learning. We want our classrooms to be attractive. We want children to assume responsibility for the use of bulletin boards, for their creative work and as a source of information.

Defining terms at this point was considered essential. What do we mean by display?

1. Anything that is to be seen for show

2. An arrangement of visual materials

3. To exhibit—to show

4. Anything the child sees

5. Anything tangible that might attract a child's attention

6. Anything or things that are tangible, and that have been placed in the school, and that attract a child's attention.

Perhaps the word, "children," should be eliminated. Difficulty was encountered as we started to define "display." As we went on there was a feeling that the problem itself might have to be restated. A new problem was posed for consideration. What are the aims and values with which the teacher is concerned in developing the visual environment of the classroom in relation to the child's growth and development? A restatement of the original problem was made. How do displays on bulletin boards in a school contribute to the growth and development of children? This restatement of the original problem was still not accepted as definite.

Defining the problem at hand became necessary. Have we sufficient evidence of the uses of bulletin boards? What results do we, faculty members, expect as we use bulletin boards? What about our assumptions? How can we use our bulletin boards more effectively?

The problem, it was decided, should be

left as previously stated. How do displays on bulletin boards in a school contribute to the growth and development of children? We as faculty members are working for:

1. Attractiveness
2. For children to work and plan together
3. To improve the child's fundamental skills in all areas
4. To get the child to learn how to organize
5. To improve the child's standards of work
6. To bring about visual learning
7. To instill an appreciation of other's work
8. To stimulate, to motivate, and to correlate
9. To be a source of information
10. To clarify ideas
11. To broaden the scope of the child
12. To stimulate the child's feeling of belonging to the group
13. To foster and to keep at a high level good public relations
14. To offer encouragement to the child
15. To show the child's progress.

More assumptions were made during the course of the discussion:

1. A display should be of some interest to students, and should be made by the students.
2. The making of a display helps to clarify children's thinking and ideas.
3. When children bring in their own visual material, it is more important to them than the teacher's work.
4. Students like something up on the bulletin boards, rather than having them bare.
5. Pictures on the bulletin board help children with their work.
6. Glancing at bulletin boards acts as a rest period or break for the child.
7. When children's school environment includes the use of bulletin boards from the first years, they will be more conscious of the bulletin board in the classroom.

8. Children have an interest in things (displays) other than their own work.

9. When we put all children's work up without discrimination, the exhibiting of work becomes meaningless to the child.

Our assumptions have dealt with four things: interpreting work to people in the community, sharing, skills and learnings, and stimulating and provoking thought. One is not obligated to test assumptions, but we can relate these to methodology, learning or common practices.

### Gathering Evidence

After our careful consideration of all the things we hoped bulletin boards would do, it was time to consider what evidence we had to support our thinking. What types of evidence could we get? We are not going to prove anything, but to demonstrate through evidence from pupils, teachers, principals and other visitors that the use of bulletin boards affects the learnings of children. How could we get this evidence? There are various ways: teacher questionnaires for pupils; questionnaires for teachers; collecting anecdotal information; summaries of observations made by teachers, principals, visitors and parents.

Two questionnaires were given to the pupils of grades five through eight. Children were asked if they noticed or enjoyed bulletin boards. Did they feel that bulletin boards helped them to learn? Did they like to see their own work displayed or material that their teachers had brought in? Had they any further suggestions as to how they would like to see bulletin boards used?

As a result of tabulating responses to these questionnaires several things were apparent. Almost all of the children are very much aware of and enjoy the bulletin boards. They feel that they have gained in all areas but particularly in-

formation and understanding in social studies and science, especially from projects and maps that they have made.

Social learnings were very evident in their responses, particularly the realization of the need to learn to work together and for better planning. It was quite evident from our tabulation that whenever a teacher stressed for a time one particular phase of a subject, the children were very conscious of this phase for some time afterward. For example, in one class where penmanship was made "much of," the children stated on the questionnaire that they like to see these papers on the bulletin board.

The results also showed that the children are very much aware of the fact that working on and developing good bulletin boards helps make their classrooms and schools more attractive.

Another type of evidence is an evaluation of a social studies project that was made by a fifth grade. The class planned a large United States map cut into territorial sections with cut paper pictures depicting water and land transportation and scenes appropriate to the Westward Movement. Groups were chosen by children according to their interests and abilities. Many facts were learned about territories, states, people and transportation. Other types of learnings were also most apparent, such as working more quietly and cooperating with their group, organizing, planning and using time wisely and handling materials and tools safely.

Two student teachers expressed their reaction to the bulletin boards in our school. "Upon our entrance to the school, we come face to face with a unique experience—the use of bulletin boards not only as decorative displays, but more important as reflections of knowledge and learnings."

It was obvious that a great deal of group work and planning had gone into the bulletin boards. These are useful as a source of reference, not only to individual students, but to classes as well, and have become a very important part of the school program.

One kindergarten teacher remarked that her children liked the Thanksgiving bulletin board because they all worked on it and because it had a lot of color. As they see their work displayed, they gain knowledge from each other. Soon all art work begins to take on more form.

Parents always comment on our colorful displays when they visit. "My, what lovely work," was a parent's comment. Parents were seen reading questions and smiling as they observed our bulletin boards. Often parents tell us, "Your room looks very attractive," and comment on the variety of displays. Frequently parents and visitors note the improvement in work from one grade to another and frequently observe the attractiveness of our classrooms. They think they are delightful, interesting and comment on the originality of the work displayed and the use of varied techniques. They are also amazed and surprised at what children can do.

After gathering this data we formulated a hypothesis that seemed to offer the best solution to our problem: "As teachers and children explore ways of using bulletin boards in their work, interest is increased and learning fostered." This is an "umbrella" type of hypothesis under which each teacher could make his own hypothesis to suit a particular need and test it. A hypothesis does not have to be proved, but it must be supported with evidence.

Our final step to date has been to try to show the relationship between bulletin boards and learning. We have asked

teachers to describe their ways of working, to describe the growth of children, to show any evidence that they had that showed a change in the children, and how that change was produced.

### Findings

This has not been a problem in action research in the strict scientific sense. It has been a problem study based on the scientific approach to help us think critically about our procedures and teaching tools. We are convinced that bulletin boards are a worthwhile teaching aid, that if used properly with guidance, the work will produce gratifying results. We believe this report is evidence of this conviction.

Teamwork and cooperative effort are essential in a study of this kind. Planning, experimenting, testing and evaluating are the core of the whole idea and genuine enthusiasm and interest on the part of the participating teachers are imperative for the success of the project.

In conclusion we present a brief summary of our evaluation of the entire study; its strengths and weaknesses and how we feel this research has affected our teaching.

Our strengths: The group has continually felt that the study was worth the expended time and effort. They have realized the value of bulletin boards as a teaching aid in the areas of subject matter and social learnings; and that, as in all good teaching tools, the use of bulletin boards is a means to an end rather than an end in itself and as teachers and pupils plan and evaluate together greater learning takes place.

Our weaknesses: The teachers in our group found testing the real value of bulletin boards very difficult and felt very strongly the need for devising more ways of testing learnings we assumed

were inherent in bulletin boards. We were not always sure just where we were going and very much needed the help of our consultant. Some members of our group hesitated to take the time necessary for a study of this kind.

Our teaching has been affected by making us more aware of the value of bulletin boards in changing the behavior of children and providing additional stimulus for learning.

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### A Look at Secondary

(Continued from page 359)

opinion rather than facts. Too little attention has been given to instructional procedures used by education instructors. Attention to methods and specific instructional procedures has been obscured by controversy over the need for methodology. With the aroused interest in college teaching professors of education have the outstanding opportunity to exercise leadership in improving instruction at all levels, a kind of leadership which may rightfully be expected from them.

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