

When Teachers Help Plan the Curriculum

AN essential aspect of a good school and one of its most rewarding enterprises is the involvement of teachers in curriculum planning. When a person becomes involved in planning the curriculum for the students he is to teach, he has a personal stake in the matter and usually does a better job of teaching.

There are numerous ways of involving teachers in planning the curriculum. This article, however, will describe three ways that have been found useful through the writer's experience in one school district. The three are: summer workshops, year round workshops, classroom research (sometimes called action research).

Summer Workshops

The Board of Education finances a workshop for teachers each year conducted during the two weeks following the close of school. Teachers attend on a voluntary basis and may secure college credit or Board of Education credit for advancement on the salary schedule.

John A. Dewar is Assistant Professor of Education at Northern Illinois University, DeKalb; previously he was Principal of Tomahawk School, School District 110, Shawnee Mission, Kansas.

Teachers who are interested in participating are asked to make three suggestions as to the curriculum area in which they prefer to concentrate. When the area is decided upon, an expert in the field is secured to consult with teachers and administrators in their planning and to conduct the workshop.

In past years successful summer workshops have been completed in the areas of arithmetic, art, language arts, and the gifted child. The results of these workshops have been an increased awareness on the part of the participants of the importance of these areas of learning and their relationship to the total program.

In some cases there were no concrete, visible outcomes resulting, but those of us who worked with the teachers saw them benefit, for example, through the use of modern approaches to the teaching of arithmetic and improved techniques in the language arts. Any visitor in our system during the school year would see on display the results of children's work as influenced by our art workshop for the teachers.

The workshop on gifted children was responsible for producing a guide for teaching the academically talented. This

has added greatly to what we had been doing for these exceptional children.

Year Round Workshops

One of the conditions necessary for securing teacher participation in curriculum planning is time. The school district supports teacher participation by providing planned time during the school year for teachers to work on curriculum. Many other school districts follow similar patterns.

The teachers report to their assignment at least a week, sometimes two weeks, prior to the beginning of school. During this time they meet on several occasions on a district wide basis by grade groups. A project or projects for the year are discussed and decided upon. Throughout the school year these same grade groups meet at least once a month to work together. School is dismissed one-half day once a month for this purpose.

To involve teachers in the over-all curriculum planning, interest groups have also been used and have met on a basis similar to that described for the grade groups. These interest groups have been composed of teachers across grade level lines working in an area of curriculum of mutual interest.

The curricula of the social studies, writing, spelling, reading, arithmetic, science, kindergarten, physical education, and music have had the benefit of teacher planning through the activities described here. Areas such as classroom control and reporting to parents have also had thorough discussion and planning by this means.

The results of such practices in curriculum planning have been extremely beneficial for the children of the school district.

The sixth grade social studies program has been completely revised. The idea and the revision were a direct result of teacher interest, initiative and planning. Students no longer go through one text for their social studies program, but use several which are good and appropriate as resource material in a comprehensive social studies program.¹

Over a period of two years the kindergarten teachers have developed a comprehensive kindergarten curriculum guide. This guide has many fine features and has been widely used by other school systems and teacher education institutions.

A handbook to be used by classroom teachers in guiding the physical development of elementary school youngsters was developed by the physical education teachers and classroom teachers planning together in workshop sessions.

The music teachers, over a period of two years, have developed a handbook for music teachers. This will help them plan a comprehensive and well rounded program of music education for elementary school pupils.

Other curriculum areas, through year round workshop sessions, have had the benefit of worthwhile revision. The teachers have seen the need in these areas and have initiated action to the benefit of the children taught.

Classroom Research

Every teacher in this school district is encouraged to carry on classroom research (action research) in various areas of learning in his own classroom. This activity usually takes the form of simple research in the techniques of teaching

¹ For further discussion of this program see: Alma Brown. "Learning about Individualized Teaching." *Educational Leadership*, Vol. 16, No. 6, March 1959.

in a curriculum area or part of a curriculum area. The results of this action research are reported to the appropriate grade groups and other interested groups.

These pieces of research have resulted in benefits such as improved classroom climate and improved teaching of spelling and writing. Many of the advantages of teachers' becoming involved in classroom research of this type are not tangible, yet would undoubtedly be immediately evident to any visitor observing classroom instruction in the schools.

Effective Participation by Teachers

In order that the teachers be able to participate meaningfully and effectively in planning the curriculum there are certain criteria which should be present. This list is not exhaustive, neither is it exclusive: some of the criteria overlap, but for the most part if these conditions are present creative curriculum work can take place.

1. There must be time provided for the teachers to work effectively on curriculum improvement and revision.

2. The teachers must receive encouragement from the administration to carry on curriculum work.

3. The teachers must receive guidance from the administration in the progress of their curriculum planning.

4. The work which the teachers do on curriculum must be recognized and considered by the administration.

5. Effective and creative curriculum revision appropriate to the particular school district should be adopted and implemented by the administration.

6. The teachers should feel free and be encouraged to conduct experimenta-

tion, either in their own classes or on a district wide basis.

The Administrative Team

In our school district the work by teachers on curriculum revision is coordinated by an administrative team. This group is composed of the superintendent, the curriculum coordinator, and the several building principals. These persons meet once a week to coordinate curriculum revision and planning, and to discuss other aspects of the school program. Thus all administrators are kept informed of curriculum activities, and as a group as well as individually can encourage, guide and counsel teachers or groups of teachers in the work they are doing on curriculum at any given time.

In summary, curriculum planning by teachers is an important and fundamental aspect of a good school system. The teachers must have the time, freedom and encouragement to work effectively and creatively on the curriculum. The results of the work done by teachers, either through various kinds of workshops or research, need not be tangible to be effective. Very often, however, significant curriculum plans and guides are developed for the guidance of present as well as future teachers.

The administration must be enlightened in order to permit and encourage creative curriculum work to proceed. The attitude and initiative of the teacher directly reflect the attitude and initiative of the administrator.

The program and activities described here are not new. They are described, however, to show what one school system has been able to do when teachers help plan the curriculum.

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