

When Teachers Evaluate Curriculum Study

AN important part of any curriculum study engaged in by a school is the evaluation by the teachers of their role in the study. The principal, curriculum director, or other status leader should not be satisfied just because the teachers appear to work willingly; there should be concern for the attitudes teachers hold toward their own efforts, the processes they used, and the results they obtained. Study of such teacher evaluations can lead to decisions about responsibilities of the leaders.

How valuable do teachers actually believe their contributions are to the making of the curriculum? Are they satisfied with the results of their work? In their estimations, what personal values accrue to them? What do teachers really think about the methods used in the curriculum work in which they engaged?

An attempt to determine answers to such questions was made following an 18 month curriculum study engaged in by the teachers in the Newton, Kansas, school system. Forty-six teachers and thirteen Kansas State University consultants participated in a scope and sequence study covering four curriculum areas in kindergarten through grade twelve.

Following completion of the work, a questionnaire for evaluation purposes was sent to each of the participating teachers to answer anonymously. From answers to items on the questionnaire certain information was gained which could be of value to the participants in and consultants for the particular study and to other school personnel anticipating curriculum studies. An analysis of the answers led to the enumeration of leadership responsibilities which may or may not have been met in the present study, but which definitely should be considered by participants in future work they may wish to undertake.

The questionnaire sent to the teachers was divided into three sections: Self-Evaluation, Evaluation of the Process, and Evaluation of Results. In each part there were statements or questions with a choice of responses and some for which free responses could be given. The items under Self-Evaluation and the percent of teachers answering each of the responses to these items were as follows:

J. Harvey Littrell is Associate Professor of Education, Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas.

Self-Evaluation

1. At the beginning of the study the purpose was clear to me. (Yes, 11%; Somewhat, 35%; No, 54%.)

2. At the end of the study the purpose was clear to me. (Yes, 85%; Somewhat, 15%; No, 0%.)

3. My interest level at the beginning of the study would best be described as: (Low, 11%; Medium, 52%; High, 37%).

4. My interest level at the end of the study would be best described as: (Low, 4%; Medium, 35%; High, 61%).

5. In comparison with that of other group members, the quality of the contributions I made was: (Poor, 2%; Average, 63%; Good, 35%).

The study revealed that more than one-half of the teachers started the study without a clear understanding of its purposes. At the end of the study 15 percent still did not believe the purpose was completely clear to them. The implication for curriculum directors and consultants is very clear; there is a definite leadership responsibility in this area.

1. At the beginning of a curriculum study, help must be given participants in acquiring a better perception of the objectives of the study, in developing the processes to be used, and in deciding the uses to be made of the outcomes.

The third and fourth items under Self-Evaluation were concerned with the teachers' interest in the study. The percent of teachers responding that their interest was high increased and the percent of those responding that their interest was low decreased during the course of the study. It was not possible to determine causes for interest or lack of interest, but it is possible that as the purposes became clearer the interest of the teachers increased.

2. Interest levels of teachers should be

assessed periodically during the study and, with the participants, the director should analyze interest and disinterest.

Item number 5 asked the teachers to rate the quality of their own contributions in comparison to contributions of others in the group. A study was made of the interest levels of individuals in comparison with their own estimate of the quality of their contributions. It was found that those who felt their contributions were good also had higher interest. Eighty-one percent of these teachers rated their interest as high at the end of the study, whereas fifty-two percent of those who rated their quality of contribution as medium, rated their interest as high. The one individual who rated himself as poor in quality also indicated he did not have high interest in the study. This shows that the greater the involvement and satisfaction with involvement, the greater was the interest in the study.

3. Each participant should be helped in making contributions according to his abilities and those which give him satisfaction.

Each participant was given an opportunity to make free responses in completing the statement, "The two greatest benefits to me from working on this study were:" The 46 teachers gave 85 different responses. An analysis of these showed that 62 percent of the responses were concerned with better understanding of the curriculum or better knowledge of the subject; 17 percent of the statements indicated that benefits were derived from associating with the other teachers and consultants; and 17 percent commented on the stimulation, renewed interest, greater desire to do better teaching and increased interest and knowledge of methods, materials, and evaluation techniques used in the classroom.

4. Participants need opportunities to work closely with teachers from other schools and other grade levels as well as with their daily associates.

In answer to the question, "In what ways could this study have been of more benefit to you?" a total of 53 responses were given. The statements, "Having clearer objectives or background at the beginning of the study" and "The consultants should have given more help, particularly at the beginning" were each mentioned by 15 teachers; 12 teachers believed that more materials could have been available, and eight objected to the work being done on other than released time.

5. Make curriculum materials available so teachers can become acquainted with the new materials and methods being advocated for use by authorities, or being used in other school systems.

6. A discussion of the time to be used in making the study should precede the work on the study. If possible, teachers should be given choices of time to work. Keep minimal the amount of time teachers work outside of school hours.

Evaluation of the Process

To elicit the teachers' attitudes toward the processes used in the study, ten questions were included under the section, Evaluation of the Process. Each of the first eight questions had three choices for responses. The choices were, "yes," "at times" or "somewhat," and "no." These questions and the percent of teachers responding to each choice were as follows:

1. Was participation spread throughout the group? (Yes, 59%; At times, 35%; No, 6%.)

2. Were ideas forced on your group by the teacher chairman? (Yes, 0%; At times, 20%; No, 80%.)

3. Were ideas forced on your group by the university consultants? (Yes, 0%; At times, 20%; No, 80%.)

4. Did difficulties and communication lessen as the study progressed? (Yes, 72%; Somewhat, 20%; No, 0%; No answer, 8%.)

5. Did members feel free to express their opinions? (Yes, 80%; At times, 20%; No, 0%.)

6. Did the consultants help members understand the directions to be taken in solving the problems? (Yes, 33%; Somewhat, 52%; No, 15%.)

7. Did group members assume responsibility for the success of the study? (Yes, 76%; Somewhat, 24%; No, 0%.)

8. Did the consultants manifest feelings of superiority? (Yes, 0%; At times, 6%; No, 94%.)

From these responses it seems that further responsibilities of the curriculum leader may be identified.

7. Plan work and delegate responsibilities so that the tasks are accomplished through the efforts of all members of the group, rather than allowing the chairman or subchairman to be burdened with all of the work.

8. Leaders should constantly strive to keep communication channels open, so that all participants feel their ideas have been considered, so that all members of the group feel free to express their opinions, and so that group decisions are based on a free flow of thoughts rather than on ideas forced on the group by an individual or small clique.

9. The role of the consultant should be clarified for the teachers. They should understand that consultants are to aid teachers in making decisions; they do not make the decisions.

Under the section, Evaluation of the Process, the ninth and tenth questions allowed free responses concerning weaknesses and strengths in the process. These questions were stated as follows:

"What in your opinion were the two greatest weaknesses in the process?"

"What in your opinion were the two greatest strengths in the process?"

The major weaknesses stated by the teachers were: (a) lack of clear objectives at the beginning of the study, (b) lack of specific suggestions by consultants, (c) lack of cooperation by some teachers, and (d) problems concerning time and materials.

Responses concerning strengths identified the following as major areas of strength: (a) teachers had a better understanding of the total curriculum and of their own subject matter, (b) improved relationship between school levels as a result of the exchange of ideas, (c) the cooperation and guidance of the consultants, and (d) the democratic processes used.

These responses repeated to a large extent the replies given to previous questions and therefore substantiated the responsibilities which have been identified previously. However, an additional responsibility seems to be implied.

10. Every effort should be directed toward using a process that will result not only in solving a particular curriculum problem, but one which will aid in the development of individuals as better teachers and better group members.

Evaluation of the Results

In the third section of the evaluation questionnaire, Evaluation of the Results, the first four questions and the percent of teachers replying to structured responses were:

1. Do you believe the results could justify the time spent on the study? (Yes, 56%; Perhaps, 33%; No, 11%.)

2. Do you believe that the Newton curriculum can be improved as a result of this study? (Yes, 87%; Doubtful, 13%; No, 0%.)

3. Do you believe that the teachers involved have a broader concept of the curriculum in their subject area as a result of this study? (Yes, 85%; Perhaps, 15%; No, 0%.)

4. Do you believe that the results of this study should be a basis for further work? (Yes, 85%; Perhaps, 11%; No, 0%; No answer, 4%.)

The fifth question, "How do you believe the results of the study can best be used?" allowed free responses. Forty-four of the forty-six teachers felt the results should be used as the basis for in-service education, continued improvement of the curriculum or improved teaching. Seventeen teachers indicated the study should be used as a basis for preparing curriculum guides, planned units, or experimental programs.

11. The leader must see that implementation of the curriculum study is made, so teachers as a result of the study have definite, tangible aids in their teaching.

12. Capitalize on the interest engendered and plan programs of in-service education which will lead to the improvement of instruction, a climate of experimentation, and continued improvement of the curriculum.

From the evaluation study of the Newton curriculum project, 12 responsibilities of the curriculum leader were identified. If these responsibilities are kept well in mind and implemented, then future curriculum work directed by the leader of this study could be improved. Other curriculum leaders also may find this delineation of responsibility of value as they prepare for curriculum work.

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