

Calvert County Develops a Program in Continuity

MARILYN CHURCH

WHILE many schools are starting to move in a new direction, Calvert County, Maryland, has launched a program which is new in three dimensions: curriculum, cohesion, and community.

It all began when a couple of elementary supervisors decided that it did not make sense for children who had been in Head Start programs for a year to come into public school kindergarten and have their teacher there be unaware of what learnings had been included in their Head Start class. It seemed to these educators that there should be a

continuity and extension of learnings, not unnecessary repetition. In addition, records of immunization and other beneficial information were not being passed along with the child to the public schools. The supervisors also felt that parents and others in the community should be included in planning curriculum for these children.

With a small grant from the State Department of Education, the project was begun with the purposes stated as follows:

- To develop continuity among the Head Start, kindergarten, and primary school programs so that children will master, in proper sequence, those developmental skills which are prerequisites for success in learning during the formal school years
- To employ interdisciplinary approaches with existing agencies, such as social services, health department, and county extension services, to provide enrichment and intervention activities
- To familiarize and involve parents and other community adults in the educational programs related to these children.

So that all concerned could begin from a common experience, a three-day workshop was conducted on the preschool child, with special emphasis given to the ways young children learn. This workshop was held dur-



Parent liaison workers visit the homes of children.



The Calvert County program involves parents and other adults in the educational process.



Opportunities for learning experiences are appropriate to each developmental level.



Program continuity enables pupils to master skills in proper sequence.

ing August, shortly before school started. Invited to participate were Head Start, kindergarten, and first grade teachers and principals; and representatives from the State Department of Health and the State Department of Social Services, the county library, University Extension Service, League of Women Voters, and the State Department of Education. Local parents were hired to represent each school as parent liaison workers.

As soon as school started in September, meetings of all participants were scheduled on a regular basis. Substitutes were hired so that teachers could devote the total day to the meetings. A consultant from the Department of Early Childhood-Elementary Education at the University of Maryland served on a continuing basis, and a local project coordinator was hired on a part-time basis.

Before actual work on a curriculum plan could be begun, it was necessary for the group to agree on some common goals. This proved to be quite a soul-searching and arduous task, but a statement of philosophy and goals which all could accept was finally hammered out. Because it was consistent with the thinking of the group, a process-oriented curriculum was chosen, with the four processes of perceiving, communicating, decision making, and creating (as described by Louise Berman¹) used as guides.

New Interest in School

Now that a direction was established, the really difficult task of creating a curriculum guide was begun. In all of the deliberating and deciding, parents and community representatives had as much voice as professional educators. The total group was divided into small groups, each made up of a representative cross section of people involved. Each group took one of the four processes mentioned and worked out opportunities for learning experiences which seemed to be appropriate for four-year-olds, five-year-olds, and six-year-olds in that particular area. After the small groups deter-

¹ Louise M. Berman. *New Priorities in the Curriculum*. Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Books, 1968.

mined what opportunities for learning experiences they felt were appropriate at each level (levels called Initial Experiences, Developmental Experiences, and Expanding Experiences rather than specific age groups) all groups came together to listen to and critique each other's work. The small groups continued to meet between monthly meetings of the total group. Eventually, a curriculum guide called *Sequential Experiences for Children Ages Three to Seven* was developed.

In addition to meeting with others to work on the curriculum, the parent liaison workers began to visit homes of children. There was a twofold purpose: to interpret school and curriculum to parents and to accept suggestions pertaining to school from parents. After an initial visit, when the liaison workers left the booklet *Parents Can Be Teachers Too*, parents were so interested in what they could do to help younger siblings that other kinds of inexpensive toy-like learning materials were developed. The county library helped by providing workshops for parent workers and even initiated a toy-lending library.



In a preschool workshop, teachers and parents discuss the way children learn.

As a result of these activities, new interest in the school has been aroused in parents and new motivation in the teachers. Parent workers continue in their liaison activities. Teachers continue to assess their children and their curriculum—and education in Calvert County continues to improve.

—MARILYN CHURCH, Assistant Professor, Department of Early Childhood-Elementary Education, University of Maryland, College Park.

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