—We need more help in working with slow-learning pupils. We need materials which meet the needs of the over-age pupils and that are of high interest level and low vocabulary.

—We need meetings which have a direct bearing on our different curriculum areas, and demonstration lessons in which desirable teaching techniques are developed.

—We need more appreciative comments from principals and supervisors. Frequently both leave our classrooms without any comment—either encouraging or suggestive.

—We need supervisors who will teach classes occasionally to show the development of certain desirable learning situations.

—We need supervisors who are human, understanding, and willing to accept teachers where they are, and provide such further training as may be needed. We want constructive suggestions, *not merely criticism.*

—New teachers and those having new assignments for the first time need special assistance in becoming acquainted with school policies and curriculum development.

Freeing Creative Group Power

HAROLD G. SHANE

In many schools today an effort is being made to provide more opportunities for teachers to plan together the means of solving instructional problems. Harold G. Shane, superintendent of schools, Winnetka, Illinois, tells how a group of teachers started with a specific problem and moved ahead in the various steps of group planning.

CURRICULUM, community relations, administrative policy, and a thousand similar matters which confront educators! These are matters of common concern in places where experienced teachers meet—graduate classes or educational conferences, for instance—to talk over ways in which school staffs can work together democratically. In such informal conversations there is likely to be as much or more interest in what teachers are actually doing to work together effectively than in theories as to how cooperative work *might* be carried forward.

How Group Planning Moves Forward

The following paragraphs contain a simple account of how our staff attempted to bring their values, including a strong faith in the importance of doing things together, to bear upon the well-worn problem of curriculum revision. No particularly new, unusual, or unexplored practices marked our procedures, but we did confirm our belief that it is more desirable to free group creative power than to delegate to a select few the planning and action involved in decisions and policies by which a teaching staff is expected to abide.

Starting With a Specific Problem

A year ago last September the director of the Winnetka Educational Press, which stocks teaching aids written and used locally, reminded us that most of the books and materials used

in the social studies were out of print or in short supply. Should they be reissued? Replaced by other materials available commercially? Rewritten?

The problem was presented at a general staff meeting by the superintendent just before the schools reopened. There was immediate agreement that the materials should not be replaced without careful evaluation of our work in the social studies. This view quickly was expanded to include elementary science which had become an integral part of school living in recent years.

Once these phases of the curriculum were acclaimed as major topics for study during the year, the staff turned to the question, "Where do we go from here?" After considerable debate the teachers decided to meet in four smaller groups to discuss for several consecutive weekly meetings anything that seemed pertinent to the questions of proceeding constructively to evalute current practices and to propose "next steps" in improving them. The responsibility for dividing the staff into groups which represented all grade levels, buildings, and special fields was delegated to the schools' Coordinating Committee, an elective group which advises the administration on matters of policy.

When the groups convened, each selected a factotum and a secretary. The former served as moderator while the latter kept a running account of the conversations held over coffee, cigarettes, and doughnuts each Wednesday until mid-October.[1] Each week a summary of the various discussions was mimeographed and distributed to all hands to fertilize the thinking of each group with the ideas of the others.

Stopping to Analyze

At the end of the first month, during a general staff meeting, the staff commissioned the four persons who had served as moderators of discussion groups to analyze with the superintendent the discussion records which had been kept and to report trends in thinking that carried implications for curriculum change. Substitute teachers were employed and for two days the committee appraised the record.

It was found that the all-staff discussions would lend themselves to three categories: common assumptions to which no one took exception, objectives which reflected expressed values, and a catch-all category simply called "unsolved problems." Common assumptions inferred from the transcribed conversations are typified by these:

> Learnings emerge in processes of evolutionary change that are better considered as "ramps" than as "steps."
> Standards and aims should be responsive to changing conditions and should be compatible with developmental maturity at any given chronological age.

The small work committee sifted actual teacher comments, listed items that seemed related, and headed the list with a statement of the objective toward which these comments seemed to point. Four primary objectives for work with children gradually emerged. These goals were: to develop devotion to and insight into democratic values in a world matrix, to develop the child's personal adequacy (and his *feeling* of

[1] The reader is referred to a forthcoming Educational Policies Commission, NEA publication, *Education for All American Children* for a visitor's impressions of these Winnetka discussion meetings in their initial stages.

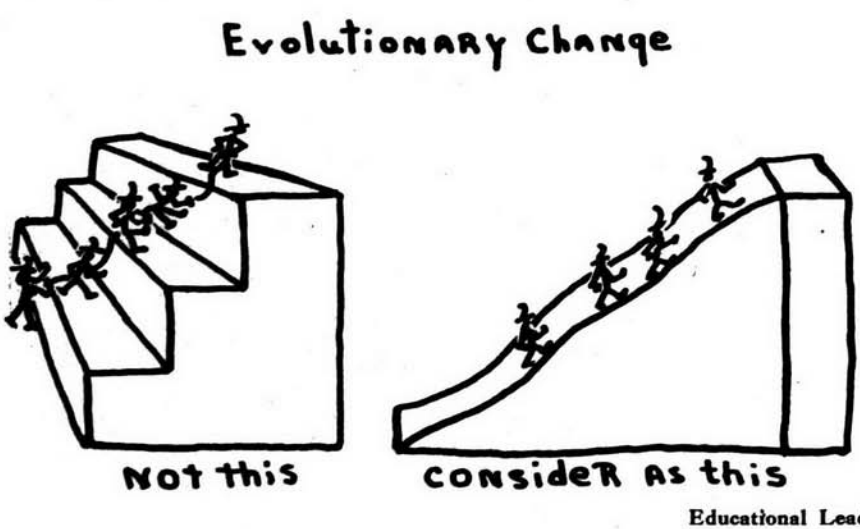
personal adequacy) in immediate social situations, to develop in children the ability to sense and to solve problems (at their level of maturity) by thinking reflectively and scientifically, and to impart the knowledge and to teach those skills which would implement the preceding objectives by helping each child to become of increasing use to himself and to society.

The third category—unsolved problems—was simply a list of such questions as "How can children in a pleasant suburban environment be protected from overprotection?" and "How can we maintain children's faith in the democratic way of life while we evaluate and criticize certain undemocratic influences in American society in order to find means to improve them?"

Going On From the Analysis

When the committee had finished its first effort to analyze the views expressed by the staff, the material described briefly above was mimeographed and discussed at a second series of general meetings which ran on until Thanksgiving. By this date there was a widespread belief that some of our curriculum practices were not entirely consistent with the values which we said we accepted. This was accompanied by an expressed desire to improve the situation and led to a group decision to gather weekly in meetings including nursery school-kindergarten teachers and those from primary, intermediate and junior high school levels. Special teachers and supervisors were in all meetings, too. The purpose of these sessions, to which outside consultants sometimes were invited, orginally was to be the selection of learning experiences—enterprises in the social studies and elementary science—consistent with our objectives and related criteria[2] of use in weighing the value

[2] The following criteria proved acceptable to the staff. Learning experiences planned with children should: (1) Be based upon principles of child development, (2) be compatible with our objectives, (3) make use of persistent life situations, (4) be of value in building toward better community living, (5) recognize forces and problems in the environment, (6) build functional skills and knowledges, and (7) face realistically the limits of time and physical resources. Obviously, an enterprise planned with children would not always meet the test of all of these criteria.



of possible subject matter content. Plans for a summer curriculum workshop were drafted in the event that additional work time became necessary.

Reaching a Consensus

During the weeks that followed it became increasingly apparent that the nature of our criteria made it impossible to settle upon certain "imperative" subject matter content at any level. This proved a difficult conclusion to accept and for six or eight meetings some formula was sought which would enable the teachers working with children of a given age level to agree that a certain phase of the social studies or elementary science was a "must." All such efforts proved futile. Eventually the staff agreed during a general meeting that the best solutions with regard to developing a more adequate program in social studies-elementary science were these:

> Recognize that prescribed in-advance learning experiences for children were inconsistent with a flexible and creative approach to meeting the developmental needs of children.
>
> Set up a summer curriculum workshop for the purpose of reviewing, developing, and making available to all teachers a more thorough knowledge of resources for learning for teachers and children.

Acting on Suggestions

In keeping with this plan a staff group of fifteen met during June and July and prepared a handbook stating briefly our bases for work with children, summarizing what seemed significant developmental characteristics of children at various levels of growth, and proposing several hundred kinds of experiences, any one of which might prove a valuable enterprise when planned and developed cooperatively by teachers and children. Resources for perhaps fifty such enterprises were developed in detail as to teaching aids, persons, and places which could enrich learning in our schools. The summer work group included classroom teachers from all levels, special teachers, a principal, the school psychologist, and superintendent.

Continuing the Study

At present this approach to curriculum making through daily teacher-pupil planning is being tested. At regularly scheduled staff discussions, the work underway in each classroom is evaluated during building meetings. Thus far our criteria for desirable children's experiences seem to be serving their purposes successfully. By June we hope to have an even better idea as to whether our recent efforts are moving in a direction consistent with our educational values.

What We've Come to Believe

Although better ways of planning and working with children originally were our main concern, the experience of sharing responsibility in deciding matters of curriculum policy led us to conclude that certain *process* values were fully as important as any progress that may have been made toward the goal of better experiences for children. Indeed, we came to understand more fully that skill in doing things together was an inseparable part of better teaching. The concluding paragraphs contain some simple conclusions we rediscovered during the year—conclusions

in the realm of better human relations and conclusions as to ways in which creative group thinking can be utilized more fully.

It is important for all persons affected by decisions to share in making them. Understanding of an idea, and belief in its essential rightness comes through direct experience in exploring that idea and from the action toward which it points. Such participation is indispensable in creative, sensitive teaching. Without having this kind of experience herself a teacher cannot be aware of children's needs for it, or of the ways in which all children can be involved in class planning and activity.

Individual activity contributes to group activity. Everything need not (and cannot) be done by an entire group. Certain responsibilities should be delegated in the interests of efficiency, but persons representing the staff are responsible to it for review and acceptance of their proposals or productions. Selection of such representatives is a vital staff responsibility. It requires meticulous group judgment in making choices in terms of the knowledge, experience, and interest of those chosen.

The personal and educational growth of teachers is stimulated through direct personal participation in group planning. Teachers helping children grow toward significant, adult, democratic citizenship must believe in and understand the functioning of democratic processes through personal experience in the school environment.

Group decisions must be based upon accurate and well-assimilated information. Sheer conjecture—"pooled ignorance"— has no place in group decisions for which no single individual has greater responsibility than another. Research, experience, and clear thinking are imperatives.

The best leadership is group leadership. Leadership is a group function and anyone is a leader to the extent that he makes a contribution which furthers common purposes. In this sense there are no élite "leaders" and masses of "followers." This has implications for the maturing of younger staff members who grow rapidly through working with more mature associates.

Genuine authority should accompany responsibility, and vice versa. Teachers need to know beyond question that recommendations and decisions they make together will be recognized. The sure knowledge that they are really shaping the school system is one of the teachers' compensations for the price in time and effort paid for sharing in policy making. Conversely, a staff must accept responsibility for the decisions it carries into action.

Group planning and action is a means to better supervision. A high type of supervisory guidance is possible when consultants or supervisors work with the classroom teacher. Supervisors and teachers become a working unit when there is common purposing, planning, executing, and evaluating.

The greatest single resource of any school system is the teaching staff. Effective use of teachers' talents thus becomes the most important means to a program which is wholesome for children. After a year of intensive work together it seems reasonable to state that an honest sharing of instructional, supervisory, and administrative responsibilities is the best way we have found to free group creative power.

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