

Curriculum Research

Column Editor: J. Bernard Everett

J. Bernard Everett joins ASCD headquarters staff as the newly appointed coordinator of curriculum research. He will serve also as editor of the Curriculum Research column.

Dr. Everett brings to his work a rich background of professional education and experience. He is at present on leave from his position as director of instruction in the public schools of Newton, Massachusetts. He is past president of the New England Regional ASCD and he served as co-chairman for the 1952 ASCD national convention. In this column he discusses plans for the ASCD Research Program and suggests various ways in which ASCD members may participate.

Your Role in Curriculum Research

THE TYPICAL member of the teaching profession is likely to shudder involuntarily when research is mentioned. To him, research is a necessary, but slightly mysterious and somewhat disagreeable activity engaged in by graduate students and professors of education.

He probably once took a course in Educational Measurements, perhaps even Research Methods or Advanced Statistics. He has, in his time, filled out countless questionnaires from well-intentioned, but sometimes overly zealous graduate students. He may be familiar with research findings, and may even quote them if they happen to substantiate his point of view. At the same time, however, it is likely that he has about the same degree of enthusiasm for engaging in research that the average individual has for an appendectomy or a visit to the dentist.

If this is the attitude of a considerable segment of the teaching profession, it probably is due in large measure to the kind of research activities which have been carried on and the way in which they have been conducted. In general, educational research problems have come from the minds of leading

educators, research activities have been centered in the university, and the classroom teachers who have furnished most of the raw data have had little part in planning the research procedures, or in analyzing and interpreting the results. Although this does not affect the validity of the research findings, it may help to account for the unfortunate gap between what we know and what we do in education.

Research with an "Action" Emphasis

A promising recent development in educational research is an increased interest in what we shall refer to as cooperative curriculum research. A major objective in conducting this type of research is the improvement of the situation studied, as well as the accumulation of an increasing body of verified evidence and tested generalizations. Real improvement seems most likely to take place when the research is focused on problems which exist in actual school situations, and is actively conducted by the persons concerned with these problems. The immediate purpose of the research is to attempt to determine through the systematic collection of evidence, whether or not

a particular practice results in the consequences anticipated. In carrying out such research projects, cooperation with teacher education institutions and other outside sources is desirable and at times necessary. However, the persons who are most vitally concerned with a problem and who work together for its solution probably will profit most when they are actively involved in every step of the research process.

Depends on Local Participation

The primary purpose of the ASCD Research Program is to assist local, state and regional ASCD groups in stimulating, organizing and carrying on local projects in cooperative curriculum research. The problems to be studied, as well as the specific research procedures, will be determined in the local situations.

The success of the program will depend primarily upon the active interest and support of the various state and regional ASCD groups. They must take the initiative in stimulating local interest in research, discovering and assisting potentially significant projects already under way, helping interested local groups to get started, and fostering cooperative relationships between school systems and teacher education institutions.

It should be apparent that the program is quite different in emphasis from those usually sponsored by national organizations. ASCD recognizes that as a national association it obviously cannot carry on projects in cooperative curriculum research. It can be most effective by stimulating interest in research through conferences and publications, by assisting in initial planning at the local, state and regional levels, and by acting as a clearinghouse of information regarding specific projects and research methodology.

Role of the Research Coordinator

There are many ways in which the national association can assist the local, state and regional ASCD groups in carrying on research. Perhaps of major importance was the decision of the Executive Committee to provide on the national staff the services of a research coordinator. It is apparent, however, that his functions must be rather clearly defined if he is to operate efficiently. Realizing this, a subcommittee of the ASCD Research Board met with the coordinator to consider, among other things, the definition and clarification of his responsibilities. The following statements are a summary of their recommendations:

The coordinator will work, initially at least, through the state and regional associations rather than directly with groups in local situations. He can be of most assistance in the organizational phase of the program by helping to get projects started—by suggesting patterns of cooperation and sources of consultant services. He will serve also as a source of information about research projects under way and the various materials and resources available. He probably will not be able to render service directly on research techniques at the local level, and obviously cannot serve as a continuing consultant to local projects.

It would seem that some kind of state or regional research committee would be the most effective point of contact between the coordinator and specific local research projects. Time spent in planning with such committees would probably be more productive than an equivalent amount of time devoted simply to talking about research in state or regional meetings.

The coordinator will also try to keep all ASCD members informed regarding

the development of the Research Program through this column and the *News Exchange*. State and regional officers will be kept informed of his itinerary through the *News Letter* so that maximum use can be made of his services when he is visiting a particular area.

Plans for Work Conference on Curriculum Research

Another way in which the national association can help its local, state and regional groups, is through sponsoring conferences for the exchange of ideas. On December 4, 5 and 6 the ASCD Research Board is planning a "Work Conference on Curriculum Research," to be held on the Chicago campus of Northwestern University. Each state or regional ASCD group is being invited to send two or more representatives. Participants in last year's conference are also being invited and will serve as resource persons in the various work groups.

The purpose of this conference will be to assist the state and regional groups in getting research projects started or in carrying them on more effectively and to provide a means of exchanging information about curriculum research and current research projects. It will also provide an opportunity for research representatives from all of the state and regional ASCD groups to establish contact with the research coordinator and to work out with him plans for the most effective use of his services in the future.

Groups with research projects under way will have a further opportunity to meet together and exchange ideas during the open meeting of the Research Board at the national ASCD convention in Cleveland in February. Under



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consideration also is the possibility of either a national workshop or of regional workshops in curriculum research during the summer of 1953.

Partners in Curriculum Research

The term cooperative curriculum research implies more than cooperation between school systems and teacher education institutions. Within any school or school system, teachers, children, parents and members of its supervisory staff are all potential partners on research projects. Schools can cooperate with other schools, school systems with other school systems, perhaps studying different aspects of the same problem.

In the past, we have overlooked many opportunities to work with other agencies interested in the welfare of children. On some studies, schools will find it to their advantage to enlist the support and participation of community councils, P.T.A.'s or any of the

youth serving agencies in the community. In metropolitan areas, Mental Hygiene Associations, Social Service Agencies, and Bureaus of Intercultural Relations could be valuable partners. In rural areas, 4-H Clubs and agricultural extension workers might cooperate on the study of common youth problems.

Obviously, these suggestions merely illustrate a few of the possibilities for cooperative action. The actual participants in any specific research project will have to be determined in relation to the problem to be studied and the factors inherent in the local situation.

Resources Are Needed

Talking "about" research is easy. Organizing and carrying through a research project is much more difficult. Most individuals or groups, after they have identified a research problem, will feel the need for some sort of consultant service. In many instances the most fruitful source of such technical assistance will be nearby teacher education institutions, particularly those with graduate schools of education. They have a common stake in the unsolved problems of education and need practical laboratories in which to operate.

One of the problems which must be faced in providing such services is obviously that of finance. Few school systems or teacher education institutions have adequate funds earmarked for research activities. There are, however, ways of providing consultant service without extensive financial support. Mature graduate students will, in most instances, profit more from participation in "action research" projects in actual school situations than from the more traditional questionnaire studies in which they commonly engage. Extension courses and in-service workshops, both rather universally accepted

forms of cooperation between school systems and colleges can, with imaginative leadership, become projects in cooperative curriculum research.

Nor should one be limited to teachers colleges and schools of education as sources of technical assistance. University departments of Social Relations, Social Research, Public Relations, Anthropology, Psychology and Human Relations may in some cases be extremely valuable sources of consultant service. In any event, their potential contributions should not be overlooked.

On Getting Started

Often the most difficult phase of any new undertaking is the process of getting started. Many potentially worthwhile projects never get past the "talking or planning" stage. This may be particularly true of research since by some people it will be regarded as a new and unfamiliar activity.

Paradoxically, the only way to get started is to start. You need not feel insecure about engaging in research. Nearly everyone, at one time or another, has gathered information to help in decision making. That is research in its simplest form. Nor should you worry unduly over your ignorance of research methodology. No single method is sacred and more effective methods are waiting to be discovered.

It is seldom that any research findings are completely valid—they are more or less so. If a study provides better evidence for guiding future action than was available before, then it was worth while. Mistakes will be made and they can be corrected. But apparently the best way to learn to do research is by doing it. All that you need to get started is a problem that is of real concern to you and the desire to know more about it.—*J. Bernard Everett*, coordinator of curriculum research, ASCD.

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