

Teachers Need Time To Plan

NINA CAREY

Adequate time for planning is essential if teachers are to develop meaningful programs of creative instruction.

SINCE we believe that "the purpose of education is to induct students into the accepted ways of our culture and to provide them with the insights and skill necessary to improve that culture,"¹ we find it wise to look at this broader function in the light of present-day needs. Each teacher needs to analyze the problems and interests of his group, and plan in terms of these needs to meet present conditions. Groups of teachers need to work together in planning for total groups of the same grade level, or the same area in subject fields. New teachers need the security of working with teachers of greater experience. Planning time is frequently necessary on a broader scale. Teachers on different levels need to look at the total picture. A seventh-grade teacher plans more effectively if he works occasionally with a sixth grade teacher. A senior high school teacher of American history plans with better understanding if he has spent some time in understanding and planning with the sixth- and eighth-grade teachers.

When is such planning best done? In special meetings before and after school? No, in planning periods which are a part of the daily schedule. This is not to be confused with the "free" period idea. The word "free" in this usage is a misnomer. Teachers are

often inclined to feel a free period is a personal right. Change the word "free" to "planning" and you change the significance of the period and give immeasurably more weight to the need for such a period in every teacher's schedule. It becomes something imperative for the betterment of the teaching program.

Such a change does not mean that the teacher's planning time is budgeted in a teaching day. There must still be the individual's thinking and planning at all hours when he is truly free even from the confines of the classroom. However, the planning period must be on school time if its accomplishments are to come largely from cooperative activities.

Planning Period Varies

Time allotment for planning periods varies with individual schools. In some, all teachers have a planning period every day; in others, only those who are guidance teachers have such a period. In our particular junior high school, the guidance teacher teaches the same group of students in both English and social studies. This group is his guidance group for three years, and he usually has two such groups at different grade levels. Therefore, such teachers have one planning period a day throughout the three years.

The planning period is used for many kinds of activities. It is a period in which the teacher may counsel with

¹ Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. *Action for Curriculum Improvement*. 1951 Yearbook. Washington, D. C.: the Association, a department of the National Education Association, 1951. 248 p.

individual members of his groups, plan individually or with one or more teachers concerning some phase of his work or work on the necessary counselling record. Frequently these teachers may meet with the principal, coordinator or a supervising teacher to discuss specific problems or to take a look at over-all goals and re-evaluate what has been done. Sometimes these meetings are for the purpose of exchanging techniques of teaching. At other times, books or other materials are examined for future use. Types of meetings in our school, as taken from our records, are shown below:

Group Meeting for Mathematics Teachers with City Director of Instruction. Subject: "Item Analysis of Test Results" (Five teachers attending) 10:30-12:00

Group Meeting for Chairmen of Half Grade Groups. Subject: "Responsibility for Implementing Next Year's English Program" (Eight teachers attending) 2:30-3:15

Meeting of Building Policies Committee. Subject: "Review of Grading Policy" (Eight teachers attending) 9:00-10:00

Individual Conferences with Supervising Teacher, Department of Instruction (For four teachers) throughout day

Meeting of Art Department with Director of Art. Subject: "New Materials in Art" (Three teachers attending) 11:50-12:30

Group Meeting of Social Studies Teachers. Subject: "Planning for a Unit of Work".....11:00-11:50

Whatever the problem is, no teacher is expected to carry out his plans in

Nina Carey is coordinator, Skinner Junior High School, Public Schools, Denver, Colorado.

exactly the same way another does. As pupil groups vary in ability and interests, each teacher will develop his plans in terms of his own group needs. There are times when it is worth while to provide exchange class visitations to see how the planning that has been done together is achieving results in other groups. Techniques discussed in a planning meeting have more meaning when seen in action and can be more readily evaluated. All these types of planning meetings are designed to help the teacher in the classroom and are a part of the in-service program of a school.

City-Wide Program

Besides the individual in-service meetings, central curriculum commit-



A. RANDALL

"SURE I allow for creative expression in my classes. I tell 'em what to do, and they vote!"

tee meetings are called to study the city-wide program of instruction. Such meetings are usually called by the Department of Instruction and supply teachers are provided for those who attend these meetings.

In our school system we use instructional guides developed by teacher committees and consultants. In developing such a guide, there are many problems that must be solved by the committee with the help of all teachers concerned. This means a great deal of group study, discussion and planning by many. School time is essential in such a process and often several consecutive meetings are needed.

When the guide is finished there is need for individual and group planning to implement it. Although teachers need to do individual planning, it lacks much of the inspiration that comes in sharing ideas and experiences. Group planning is accepted by a community that believes in curriculum improvement. Planning periods for all teachers are accepted when the goals achieved are worth while for boys and girls.

Area Planning Groups

Another phase of planning already mentioned is that of the area articulation groups where principals, coordinators and teachers meet to discuss problems that arise between school levels. Here again supply teacher time is provided for teachers attending such meetings.

The following agenda indicates the type of problems presented:

- A round-table discussion of the geography taught at the three levels in the social science program.



"NO, No, No! Little birds fly like this!"

• Questions for consideration:

1. What are we doing in the area of geography at each grade level?
2. What are some of the basic essentials children need to know at each level?
3. What basic facts contribute to the concepts, attitudes, habits, and skills outlined in Chapter 5 of the Social Living Guide?
4. What evaluation instrument might be used to test these basic facts?
5. What does the community expect of the child in the area of geography?

• Members of the group were requested to bring suggestions pertinent to these questions to the meeting after consulting other teachers and checking materials in their building.

Misunderstandings frequently arise between junior and senior high school levels in special subject areas. Just what is taught in junior high school anyway? Why should the junior high have to meet the demands of the senior high? In one area, some of these problems have largely disappeared as a result of discussion and planning sessions. For instance, fewer students are now

dropping Latin in the first few weeks of senior high school and parents have gained new respect for the effectiveness of junior high school teaching because of meetings between teachers of the two levels. Senior and junior high school teachers in many areas in group meetings have arrived at a common agreement on amounts of work to be done, techniques to be used and evaluations to be made. They have come to recognize that teachers on the two levels are the same kind of teachers, wanting only the best for their students. Agreements, too, have been reached on the problem of the slower-learning student's right to take a subject even if he is incapable of making an "A."

One of the most fruitful aspects of our in-service program is the annual pre-session planning period. School opens on the Tuesday after Labor Day with a general meeting for all school employees. At this time the superintendent discusses the several points of emphasis for the coming year. Staff members then meet in groups dealing with areas of special interest. Pupils register in classes Wednesday morning and the following two and one-half days of the week are devoted in each building to planning for the work of the year ahead. These days are peculiarly individual planning days for buildings and no city-wide meetings can be called.

Without the stimulation and encouragement furnished by the administra-

tors and coordinators however such a program would fail in accomplishing its objectives. Educational administrators, if most effective, will provide not only the necessary time and facilities for in-service planning, but will also furnish the needed leadership.

Experience has led us to believe we better achieve our purposes in education when we provide school planning time for teachers in order to establish valuable contacts, cooperative planning, overview of the total picture and consideration of individual problems.

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