

## Leadership for Curriculum Research

**M**OST OF THE curriculum improvement programs of the past and many which are being carried on today are based upon the assumption that an individual or a few individuals can plan and develop curricula for the use of teachers in the classroom. Our belief in this assumption is reflected in our willingness to accept as valid experiences for children what is written in textbooks and courses of study and by our mute approval of the "gospel" expounded by curriculum specialists, administrators and other so-called experts. It is not uncommon for schools and school systems to develop courses of study, teaching guides and other curriculum materials by selecting what appears to be the best from materials produced in other school systems. Neither is it unusual for a school system to permit and encourage the curriculum staff, the administrative staff, small group of teachers or an outside curriculum specialist to determine the experiences which its teachers will carry on with children in the classroom.

When this approach to curriculum improvement is used it is evident that the leadership is completely oblivious of the processes involved in helping teachers to improve their practices in the classroom. Changes in the curriculum involve, first and foremost, changes in the thinking and behavior of teachers. This means at least two things—that the problems which are of concern to teachers should be the

focus of a curriculum improvement program and, in addition, that the teachers concerned should be provided the opportunity to participate in the solution of these problems.

Since changes in the thinking and practices of teachers are more certain to take place if teachers participate actively in the solution of problems which are of concern to them it is important and necessary that curriculum planning be a cooperative enterprise. There is, however, one other essential procedure—that of testing the solution of problems and plans of action in real classroom situations. Too often we are guilty of implementing "paper" plans without setting up ways of evaluating the degree to which the plan of action has resulted in the achievement of the objectives.

### A Frontier Movement

Cooperative curriculum research which involves application of scientific methods of problem solving, participation in the solution of problems of all who are concerned and testing of the solutions against the realities of the classroom or school program is still in its infancy. Although there is much experimentation yet to be done, this comparatively new scientific procedure offers much promise for the improvement of school programs. It is worthy of trial by all who are interested in better education for children and youth.

Whether cooperative research be-

comes the usual and accepted procedure in curriculum development depends, to a great extent, upon the leadership in public schools and in teacher training institutions. Where leadership involves a quest for power, a struggle for self-approval, a drive for security at the expense of others and a greed for achieving personal motives and goals, there is little possibility for a research approach to curriculum improvement. Moreover, the leader who is skilled in group dynamics and understands his role as a leader but does not have the "know how" in cooperative research procedures may thwart teachers and others in their efforts to improve in their work with children. The need, then, is for leaders who are sensitive to the needs of teachers, who have relatively stable personalities, who work democratically with teachers in assisting them to solve problems and achieve goals which they feel are important and significant and who are conversant with the concepts and techniques of cooperative research.

ASCD is one of the few organizations which has pioneered in curriculum research. Leadership in this frontier movement has been provided by the Research Board which was first organized in the late 1940's. Since its inception this Board has planned and carried on many projects and activities designed to further the use of scientific methods in curriculum development. Two major concepts have influenced the work of the Research Board. The first of these is that cooperative research is most effective and feasible when carried on at the "grass roots" level, such as in an individual school or in a teacher training institution.

Since there are so many schools and teacher training institutions the Board has recognized the limitations involved in providing services at this level. For this reason emphasis has been placed upon the second concept—that the development of leadership is essential to furthering curriculum research at the local level.

The Research Board has been consistent and persistent in planning to achieve the goal of developing leadership in curriculum research. A review of the activities and projects planned and sponsored by the Board will indicate an enthusiasm and dedication to the cause which merit the highest commendation. On recommendation of the Research Board, the ASCD Board of Directors authorized an addition to the Headquarters Staff—a Coordinator of Curriculum Research for the years 1952-1953 and 1953-1954. Leadership in this position was provided by J. Bernard Everett during the first year and Robert S. Fleming, the second year. Services of these coordinators were available primarily to state and regional groups where a desire to develop local leadership was requested. Their work has had a far-reaching influence in furthering cooperative research in many parts of the country. In 1951 and again in 1952, the Research Board sponsored national leadership conferences on curriculum research. These conferences were well attended and enthusiastically received by the participants who came from almost every region. Another project which has met with much favor is the ASCD publication, *What Does Research Say About Arithmetic?* This is one of a series of research pamphlets

planned by the Research Board. Several others will be published during the coming year. In national, state and regional conferences study groups have been formed each year to discuss problems involved in curriculum research at the local level. In *Educational Leadership* the "Research Column" has been a regular feature. This column has served well in raising issues and in providing for sharing of experiences in curriculum research. During the past two years one issue of *Educational Leadership* annually has been devoted to research. This current issue is particularly recommended for your reading because it provides a wealth of interesting descriptions of cooperative research projects.

The most recent project of the Research Board is the organization of a corps of research consultants. These consultants have volunteered their services and are available to schools and teacher training institutions to assist in planning curriculum research projects. They serve without honorariums—the only costs involved being their expenses.

The need for using cooperative curriculum research procedures in the improvement of school programs has been and will continue to be a major concern and emphasis of ASCD. Sev-

eral years ago the Association recognized that the need and requests for services in furthering curriculum research were much greater than could be provided with the funds available in the budget. On recommendation of the Research Board, the Executive Committee requested a grant from an educational foundation for funds to carry on an expanded program. Although these funds have not yet been acquired, the search is continuing. Although limited by finances available for this purpose, the Association still includes this project among its major objectives.

It should be reiterated that the use of cooperative research procedures in curriculum improvement programs is still in its infancy. There is, however, much evidence such as that contained in this issue of *Educational Leadership* to indicate that the idea is growing and being implemented in many school and college situations. The future of this new approach will depend to a large extent upon leadership provided by our own membership. We should feel very gratified to be part of an organization which is dedicated to this frontier movement in education.

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