

Working on Curriculum Problems Through University Seminars

Students in university seminars describe in this article various curriculum problems which they are attempting to resolve through a research approach. Some of the potentialities in this method are indicated by the authors.

UNIVERSITY SEMINARS are considered by the authors to offer especially appropriate opportunities for encouraging teachers and other curriculum workers to carry on systematic studies of some of their curriculum problems. Many graduate courses are so organized as to discourage, or make nearly impossible, creative work on students' own problems. The seminar or problems course, however, is more usually organized around the problems of the enrollees. At the two institutions represented by the authors of this article, extensive use has been made of such seminars as means of providing guidance and sharing opportunities for in-service teachers engaged in systematic work on real problems.

At the University of Tennessee a "Seminar in Cooperative Curriculum Research" is developed to help the participants explore the nature of a

research approach to the solution of educational problems. Courses in "Problems in Curriculum Development" and "Problems in Administration and Supervision" are utilized similarly at the University of Miami. In each of these seminar-type courses, extended consideration is given to the processes of problem-solving and action research. Following initial study of these processes, the persons enrolled in the courses define, individually or in teams, problems which they wish to attack in their own school situations. In general, emphasis is placed on the selection of problems which can be attacked with the cooperation of other school personnel. Each student, or team of students, develops a plan of action and begins the exploration of the problem in the school situation. Progress reports are made to the seminar groups from week to week and suggestions are made by seminar members as to procedures to be followed and as to resources to be used at the institution and elsewhere.

In the following sections of this article, brief statements are presented of several typical problems currently being studied by in-service students

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enrolled in the seminars described at the University of Tennessee and at the University of Miami. In connection with each study, a brief statement has been prepared by the student concerned, telling of the problem, its importance, and the procedures used.

By D. F. Adkisson, Knox County Schools, Knoxville, Tennessee

Problem: To help principals better understand boys and girls.

Importance: So that principals can give leadership to teachers in guiding the growth and development of boys and girls.

Procedures: The principals are meeting at regular intervals in small working groups based on the size of the schools in which they work. They identified problems which they encountered in working with teachers in understanding pupils in their school. After a critical examination of these problems, they realized that most were concerned with relationships with students. Effort is being made to help teachers identify blocks to effective relationships and to plan cooperatively ways of overcoming these blocks. This is being done both in small discussion groups and in school faculty groups. The plan provides for principals to analyze their effectiveness in working on such problems with their teachers. Provision is being made for an evaluation of changes made in teachers' feelings, attitudes and relationships with pupils.

By Mary Bartley, Kensington Park Elementary School, Miami, Florida

Problem: To evaluate the first year's experience at Kensington Park Element-

tary School with the employment of a full-time curriculum assistant.

Importance: The position of curriculum assistant in the elementary schools of Dade County is a newly created one. Since I am the first person to serve in this capacity in Kensington Park School, an evaluation of the year's work is of vital interest to me and also of potential value to the school program.

Procedures: 1. Maintenance of informational notes on informal conferences with teachers and the principal to determine whether adequate rapport and working relations have been established.

2. Review of tape recordings to ascertain what type of assistance to teachers proved most successful.

3. Use of group conferences on the duties of the curriculum assistant to determine what changes are suggested at the end of the year.

4. Comparison of the amount and kind of help asked for at the beginning and end of the year.

5. Records of materials selected and used by the teachers, and records of teachers interested in experimenting with new materials.

By Lucy Mae Elliott, Miami Jackson High School, Miami, Florida

Problem: Developing ways of working to maintain continuing improvement in language arts at Miami Jackson High School.

Importance: Ways of continuing improvement are needed so that teachers may plan to meet the needs of their

pupils, become acquainted with new teaching materials, think together on what the school is attempting to do for the students, and relate language arts to other curriculum areas.

Procedures: Varied ways of working are being utilized by the language arts teachers: departmental conferences; subject and grade conferences; preparation of a curriculum guide; consultations with the librarian, guidance director, and testing chairman; planning with the local radio station, and with pupils, parents, businessmen and university instructors. In order to determine the effectiveness of these ways of working, plans are being made to secure the following types of data: test scores to measure pupil progress in reading and in spelling; follow-up study on English grades of graduates in college; questionnaire to the teachers; record of books read by pupils; comments from teachers and pupils; and English achievement test results.

By Grace Smith, Clairborne County High School, Tazewell, Tennessee

Problem: The problem is to identify reading difficulties and factors, and to improve the reading level of ninth grade pupils in Clairborne County High School.

Importance: A high percentage of Clairborne County High School students drop out of school in the ninth grade because of "failure" due to poor reading ability.

Procedures: The faculty is cooperating in various studies designed to locate reading difficulties and their causes. An experimental program of classroom reading instruction has been set up for immediate translation of information

about our pupils' reading difficulties into improved school practices.

By Katherine La Belle, Fort Lauderdale High School, Fort Lauderdale, Florida

Problem: To determine whether grouping in beginning shorthand classes at Ft. Lauderdale High School will result in greater achievement and satisfaction.

Importance: The need for this study was brought into focus when an examination of 11th grade drop-outs showed that discouragement over lack of achievement in shorthand was a frequent contributing factor. This, coupled with the excessive number of failures, indicated the need for some re-evaluation of the course.

Procedures: Students were enrolled for the year 1954-55 without regard to grouping. At the end of the first month of school, the ERC Stenographic Aptitude Test was administered to all classes and these scores and other data were used to place the students in one of three groups. All groups were set up to allow for flexibility, and a few adjustments in the original grouping have been made as the year has progressed.

At the end of the year achievement in all three groups will be measured by timed dictation tests and the scores compared with those made by non-selected groups of past years. Drop-out percentages this year will be compared with former years. A questionnaire to the students will be used to determine their personal satisfaction, and the evaluation of the teachers involved will be checked by their desire to continue the practice of grouping in future classes.

By Adelle C. Luebke, Bearden Elementary School, Knoxville, Tennessee

Problem: Providing and organizing opportunities for meaningful learning experiences outside the classroom into units appropriate for children of the sixth grade.

Importance: The development of the proper organization of excursions seeks to answer the most difficult problem of all classroom education: to effect the carrying over of abstract and symbolic classroom experience to actual and concrete life conditions, and vice versa.

Procedures: This Knoxville area, an urban county of 200,000, provides a wide variety of opportunities for field trips, and a laboratory for their study. Parents, pupils and other members of the community are taking a definite part in planning and evaluating the use of field trips. One useful device is an evaluation sheet prepared for parents. Other data are being secured from pupils, teachers and other persons involved in the excursions.

By George L. Mathis, Hardy Junior High School, Chattanooga, Tennessee

Problem: To decrease the number of drop-outs in our school.

Importance: It is our desire to bring about a better understanding between parents, pupils and teachers in order that the number of early school leavers may be decreased.

Procedures: The faculty and principal of this school are having personal interviews with parents and pupils in order to discuss pupils' school progress

and to discover any possible causes of this problem. Our main goal is to contact every parent and pupil in the school at least once in order that each parent, pupil and teacher may have a closer relationship. This, we think, will tend to decrease the number of school drop-outs.

By Blanche T. Wood, Coral Gables Elementary School, Coral Gables, Florida

Problem: To evaluate the results of faculty cooperation in developing a school handbook.

Importance: In this large (about 1600 pupils) school, there is great need for an up-to-date handbook which would be the outgrowth of a common faculty project.

Procedures: Faculty committees are developing statements of policies to be included in the handbook. When a committee completes work in its division, the findings are brought to the faculty as a whole for discussion, evaluation and adoption for the handbook. During the pre-school planning period the handbook will be used as an orientation program for new teachers, and a quick review for those with previous service. At the conclusion of the period an evaluation device will be used to determine the effectiveness of the handbook in presenting the school policies. Further data regarding the use, modification and effectiveness of the handbook will be collected throughout the 1955-56 school year.

Possibilities of Seminar Studies

The foregoing illustrations of problems studied by seminar members are

too brief to indicate the full potentialities of this approach to curriculum research. Obviously, the procedures used are inadequate from a research standpoint. Yet in some cases these efforts to collect evidence about innovative practices mark the first attempts to compare new practices systematically with former ones. Believing as we do that the collection of evidence is an essential step in any curriculum experimentation, we feel that help and

motivation to this end are appropriate. With the help of such courses, individuals may learn to study their problems more systematically than before, to use more adequately related existing research, and to work more effectively with others in cooperatively defining and attacking curriculum problems. From these beginnings, it is hoped that students will find increasingly accurate means of identifying and testing possible problem solutions.



JULIA WEBER GORDON and ANNE HOPPOCK

Leaders Learn Through Experience

This article is a progress report on New Jersey's experience in preparing leaders for cooperative curriculum research.

NEW JERSEY BECAME INVOLVED in leadership training for cooperative curriculum research by a process of evolution. For several years the State Department of Education has been sponsoring a workshop for the state staff of helping teachers and a number of supervisors and curriculum workers employed by local districts. The workshop, held for a week each January, is a voluntary project, developed by the participants for purposes of their own growth. Its membership numbers about one hundred, divided into study groups of ten each. The group chairmen constitute the workshop council or planning body.

Early in 1953 the workshop completed the study projects which it then had current and in April of that year the council began a series of meetings to explore new areas for study.

As the council studied participants' suggestions, two problems of common concern emerged. One was immediate and pressing—the problem presented by the large number of inadequately trained teachers who, because of the teacher shortage, had been brought into the schools under emergency certification. How was it possible to help them learn the bare fundamentals of teaching quickly enough to “keep their heads above water”? As the council

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