DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 026 405 TE 500 257

By-Danielson, Robert W.

The English Department Chairman and the Process of Educational Change.

Pub Date 7 Apr 67

Note-13p.; Paper presented at the Conference on College Composition and Communication Annual Meeting, Louisville, Kentucky, April 7, 1967.

EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.75

Descriptors-Administrative Problems, *Administrator Role, *Curriculum Development, Educational Change, *English, English Instruction, *Higher Education, *Leadership Responsibility, Program Evaluation

The nature of educational change and the role of the English department chairman are discussed. Varying opinions about the process of change are described. In conclusion two suggestions for department chairmen are: (1) that he help inform his staff by making current research publications available and by stimulating discussions of that research, and (2) that in order to be involved directlywith agencies that exert influence on educational change, the chairman should become a member of a group like the regional advisory group sponsored by the Conference on College Composition and Communication. (BN)

The English Department Chairman and the Process of Educational Change

Robert W. Danielson

Grossmont College

Panel 11 Paper Presented at the CCCC Annual Meeting

Louisville, Kentucky, April 7, 1967

The English Department Chairman

and the

Process of Educational Change

I shall begin with a few lines from a poem by Stephen Stepanchev entitled "The Demolition of Walt Whitman Hall at Queen's College." This may appear to be a rather destructive opening for a hopefully constructive session, but the three reasons for this bizarre opening will appear very shortly. Here, then, are a few lines from the middle of Mr. Stepanchev's poem.

> Sparrows rise in a cloud of dust
> As I climb up a rope and vanish,
> Dreaming among lost verbs.
> I have burned my identity card;
> An eraser crosses the blackboard of memory.
> All my holdings are temporary,
> Like the revolutions of Monet's cathedral. [1]

Obviously this poem would appeal to, or at least attract, an English teacher. We seem to be entangled, somehow, with dreams and lost verbs and "the blackboard of memory." So one of the reasons for using part of this poem is really a very simple one: the poem appeals to me. I like it. And I think that even department chairmen should publicly express what they like and what they do not like.

---

[1] Stephen Stepanchev, "The Demolition of Walt Whitman Hall at Queen's College," The Key Reporter, Vol. XXXII (Winter, 1966-67), No. 2, 4.

Another reason for opening with a few lines of poetry stems from a comment made to me last year by a disgruntled female English instructor in my college. A somewhat censored version of her comment goes like this: If you were ever literate, which I doubt, you have damn well lost it. All you ever think about are those stupid schedules. And you can take that THING you call my schedule and .... Now Miss I is quite willing to share her opinions with the world, but she is not quite so willing to listen to the opinions of her fellow conspirators in the English department, so I have delayed my response until this safe moment in this distant place. I do think of something other than schedules. But when I consider the job of the department chairman, I think of climbing up a rope and vanishing. But I also think that every department chairman should read poetry once in a while. In contrast to many of our activities, it seems a sane thing to do.

The real attraction in the squib from Mr. Stepanchev's poem appears in the next to the last line in the quoted excerpt. "All my holdings are temporary." We all live in a world shifting and changing so rapidly that it seems almost miraculous that we have any holdings--temporary or otherwise. We see change in our educational institutions; indeed, the junior college itself seems a kind of spin-off from the other changing institutions in the total educational enterprise. We see change sweeping through our curricula, our policies and procedures, our methods and materials,

[illegible] I [illegible] the primary rule I suggest for another role, [illegible] the process of educational change originating [illegible] educational researchers and outside the individual school.

[illegible] a [illegible] assumption about the primary role of the [illegible], another assumption about the nature of [illegible] and instruction, and then, after a [illegible] discussion about the process of change, to suggest a [illegible] conclusion about the neglected role of [illegible] in the process of change. I assume that the primary, [illegible] role of the [illegible] teacher is that of a [illegible] in the very focus but I assume the depart- [illegible] should be focused on eliciting and [illegible] the [illegible] it is not about the improvement of the [illegible] and about the improvement of English [illegible]. Another assumption is that improvement in curriculum and instruction [illegible] change but necessarily [illegible] the educational opportunity for the student. These assumptions are the basis for a look at where educational change [illegible], and a [illegible] in the origin and in the development, and the role the [illegible] teacher might play in the whole process.

We are [illegible] aware, of course, of the many change strategies [illegible] within the educational system. The impact of the [illegible] English Language Program, programs for the [illegible] and programs for the culturally disadvantaged is well known. And [illegible] the work of the [illegible] Curriculum Study and [illegible]

Centers has been well publicized. In a March, 1967 CTA Journal article entitled "A Search for Better Ways to Teach Writing," Mr. Kitzhaber has summarized the approach of and the hopes of the Oregon Center, and NCTE has published the highlights of the work of twenty-four NDEE project centers in a Summary Progress Report of English Curriculum Study and Demonstration Centers. So, influential projects and centers for originating and developing change do exist outside the individual schools, and information about their work is readily available. But other kinds of activity, investigating, summarizing, and theorizing about the process of change outside the individual school may not be so well known, and the conclusions of some private research agencies, exemplified in California and some other states by the Arthur D. Little organization, may actually be defining a critical part of the department chairman's leadership role, his associations with change centers operating outside the school.

As part of an excursion into opinions about the process of change, let me recite a few facts about the Arthur D. Little Corporation, cite some excerpts from their report on leadership in California education, and then comment briefly on the citations.

The Little organization provides survey and analysis service similar, in a way, to what is known as market research. The professional staff that prepared The Emerging Requirements for Effective Leadership in California Education [2] included some university people from such disciplines as applied social psychology, clinical psychology, busi-

---

[2] Arthur D. Little, Inc., The Emerging Requirements for Effective Leadership in California Education, California State Department of Education, Sacramento, 1964.

ness administration, and professors of education and educational administration. The Little Report itself is a study undertaken at the request of the Committee of Department Survey, a committee appointed by the State Board of Education, and the primary method of information-gathering used in the preparation of the report is simply interview. Interview teams held confidential discussions with fiteen county superintendents, fifty-eight district superintendents, eleven administrators in the State Department of Education, plus some thirteen other personnel (legislators and education editors of newspapers), "but no teacher at any level of instruction and no elected officials of any professional organization in any subject field" were interviewed.

Here, then, are some quotations from the Little Report, and the first quotation suggests that our traditional methods for bringing about fundamental change in teaching and in the curriculum are really not very effective.

> "Many administrators argue that the teaching of subjects such as English, for example, has not benefited from a critical re-examination of content, sequence, or method of presentation during the span of their memories.... [3] Thus...administrators have found that the efforts of their curriculum study groups are most likely to result in improved sequencing and articulation, improved teaching guides, or improved instructional materials, rather than in fundamental changes in content or approach. [4] [Emphasis mine.]

This conclusion suggests at least two possibilities. One might be that the administrators concerned were wrong and that the work of curriculum study groups in the schools does result

---

[3] Little Report, p. 11. [4] Ibid., p. 12.

in fundamental change. A second possibility might be that the administrators are right. If this is true, then each department chairman should carefully consider the long-range effect of the many committees he appoints to revise course outlines or to re-examine the content and sequence of departmental offerings. Perhaps we need some real assurance, objective evidence plus considered opinions, that our visions and re-visions actually lead to a qualitative difference in the content of the student's experience or to a qualitative difference in the method of the instructor's presentation. We may be suffering from what one critic of the programs for the disadvantaged called "the 'more and better of the same' syndrome."[5]

One chairman of a two-year college English department says this about departmental curriculum committees:

> The department chairman may gain curricular support from aligned colleagues and particularly from departmental committees. By their work in these voluntary curriculum committees English instructors most frequently and generously make their greatest contributions to the department, and one of the chairman's most exacting tasks involves the judicious appointments to and relief from these committees.[6]

Each of us has, I am sure, made his share of "judicious appointments," and each of us has hoped that improvement in curriculum and instruction has resulted from the work of the

---

[5] William F. Johntz, "Innovation and the New Concern for the Disadvantaged," CTA Journal, Vol. LXIII (January 1967), No. 1, 30.

[6] Donald F. Snepp, "The Role of the Two-Year College English Department Chairman," ADE Bulletin, January 1967, No. 12, p. 6.

appointed committees. But what assurance do we have that the work of the committees actually brought about operational change? Do we have--or take--the opportunity to actually observe the implementation of the changes called for in a revised course outline? Do we have--or take--the opportunity to observe, measure, and analyze the results of a different approach to course sequence? And even more critically, what assurance do we have that any change that may have resulted from the work of staff committees is actually positive change: i.e., improvement of the learning opportunity for the student? Perhaps we need rigid evaluation of our "new" methods and procedures before we can say our leadership via appointed committees actually produces improvement.

Now I hold no particular brief for the Arthur D. Little Corporation; nor do I have any particular admiration for the method used in the preparation of their report; and I certainly do not agree with some of their conclusions. And yet, my limited experience as a department chairman leads me to doubt--seriously--both the claims of results and the quality of the results produced by the traditional staff committees on curriculum and instruction. The opinions cited in the Little Report may be right. It may be that very little fundamental change is operationally introduced as a result of the work of staff committees. Here, however, I am simply citing the opinions of some administrators as noted by a research firm, citing the opinion of one experienced department chairman, and adding some personal speculation, and I hope that the citations and the speculation may provide the base for some thought by each of us about the results produced by our own methods, whatever they may be, for stimulating, implementing, and evaluating change.

Perhaps one more quotation from the Little Report will emphasize the main point in a tentative conclusion about the neglected role for the department chairman. The Report says this about the sources and the developers of educational change:

> Our interviews with administrators disclose that most changes of major significance are originated and developed for their schools rather than by them.[7] [Emphasis mine.]
> The main point we wish to stress is that major fundamental curricular change in California is being stimulated, and even forced, by events outside the local school district.[8] [Emphasis mine.]

The Report further describes originators and developers of fundamental change as 1) national foundations, 2) philanthropic foundations, 3) textbook publishers, and 4) legislatures.[9]

Now if the Little people are right in this part of their assessment, and if department chairmen want to be involved in the origination and development of changes of major significance, then it would follow that department chairmen must become involved with groups operating outside their own institutions, and they must bring the work of those groups into their own institutions. It is certainly difficult to work for IBM or Xerox or Raytheon and still be a teacher and department chairman, and it is probably even more difficult to stand for the legislature and still remain in the teaching profession. I have no answers to such difficult problems, but let me conclude with two suggestions that some department chairmen may find worthy of consideration.

---

[7] Little Report, p. 13. [8] Ibid., p. 14. [9] Ibid., p. 13.

One of the products of the groups operating outside the individual school is research information. That research information needs implementation, development, and evaluation by informed teachers. The department chairman can help his staff become informed by making current research publications available and by stimulating and leading discussions of that research. The work of the Curriculum Study Centers is available in the NCTE Summary Progress Report, and some experimental units are available on a semi-restricted basis from the USOE Centers. An enterprising chairman might consider leading his staff through a year's discussion of the curricular and instructional changes necessary in the junior college if the feeding high schools were to adopt a sequential program based on rhetoric (Oregon Center Project) or a sequential program based on language (Minnesota Center Project). If, as Mr. Kitzhaber and others have suggested, there is a "new" English, we should find out what it is and prepare ourselves to teach it. And if there is no "new" English, we might give some consideration to the shape of the "old" English. Some hard thinking is demanded by William Riley Parker's conclusion: "'English' has never really defined itself as a discipline." [10]

In addition to the work of the USOE Centers, other sources of information are readily available. Research in the Teaching of English, a new journal published ny NCTE and edited by Richard Braddock, Chairman, CCCC, contains a twentyseven page bibliography in the first issue (Spring, 1967). Computers and the Humanities, first issue in September, 1966, will soon publish

---

[10] William Riley Parker, "Where Do English Departments Come From?" College English, Vol. XXVIII (February 1967), No. 5, 348.

a survey of computerized research in the humanities. ERIC, University of California, Los Angeles, now offers a variety of bibliographical and abstract services for those curious about research in the junior college. And finally, as a gambit for the deluded staff member who says he has exhausted all the available research information, the department chairman can always pose an intriguing problem. He might, for example, ask the staff member to prepare a department discussion paper based on the following topic: Instructional innovations stemming from the fact that the National Cash Register Company has perfected microphotography to the point where the entire Encyclopaedia Britannica can be stored on a single four by six inch film (cost: $1.00).

This procedure of helping the staff to inform itself about current research is an integral part of the department chairman's basic leadership role in eliciting and directing the talent of his staff. The discussion, implementation, and evaluation of research information will probably lead again to the traditional committees to revise course outlines and to develop plans for the modification of course sequences. But the committees will be proceeding from a knowledge base widened and, hopefully, illuminated by the work of important research groups, and the department chairman will have made a start on one of his frequently neglected roles.

A final suggestion concerns an opportunity through which the department chairman can become involved directly with some of the political agencies that exert powerful influences on educational change. Most of us are aware of the tremendous potential for in-

fluential action that lies within the CCCC Regional Conferences on English in the Two-Year College. The participants at the annual conference in each region, the steering committee in each region, and the soon-to-be-official National Junior College Council comprise a large, representative, and influential group of English teachers. It seems reasonable to hope that one of the groups functioning within each region will be an advisory group of department chairmen, and the voice of that advisory group could quite easily reach out to state departments of education, to state boards of education, to legislatures, and through the NJCC to the CCCC, NCTE, and thus to USOE and to committees of the Congress. The Little Report says that "as we move deeper into the era of educational technology, it is likely that the State will find itself drawn more deeply into the issues of instructional methods and the role of equipment associated with these methods." [11] Through a CCCC regional advisory group of department chairmen, the individual department chairman can influence the state and the other agencies that more and more are originating and developingthe changes that define the possibilites for improvement of the English curriculum and improvement in the teaching of English.

---

[11] Little Report, p. 18.