

demands of our society. To some extent, excessive compartmentalization of the educational system explains the tortoise-like pace; schools, universities, state departments of education, teacher education programs, and the public have found it difficult to work together productively. If we are to achieve imaginative, rapid, effective, and meaningful improvements in the nation's schools, however, compartmentalization must give way to cooperation among these groups.

Fortunately, we have a new opportunity to develop the kinds of relationships needed to implement orderly educational change. Under the enlarged authority of the Cooperative Research Act, the U.S. Office of Education has established a National Program of Educational Laboratories. This program is designed to create a moderate number of regionally based educational laboratories to do several things: 1) conduct educational research, 2) provide facilities and equipment for research, 3) carry out the training of individuals for leadership in such activities, 4) translate the findings of research into feasible educational practices and programs, and 5) assist in the implementation of productive change by disseminating innovative programs and practices throughout the region being served.

The establishment of this program may well mark the beginning of an era of dynamic change in our school system of a magnitude comparable to the recent exciting developments in the fields of health and the natural sciences. The new program will be the capstone to existing and continuing programs in support of project research and the Research and Development Centers.¹

It is useful, I think, to explore some of the assumptions that underlie the establishment of the new program. One of these is that new, comprehensive institutions are needed to foster educational innovation and improvement. Another assumption, evident in the USOE stipulation that laboratories be multi-institutional in character, is that educational improvement depends upon effective patterns of cooperation among several different elements in the educational system, including universities with their research competence, schools as the agencies of practical implementation, state educational agencies where political responsibility for education is lodged, and others such as private industry, social and welfare agencies, and private foundations. (The ecumenical character of laboratory operations does not necessarily mean that in the actual *creation* of these institutions every single interested party must or will play a role, but all educational interests certainly ought to have a meaningful role in the laboratories once they are established.)

The multi-institutional nature of the laboratory program will be paralleled by an emphasis on an all-disciplinary approach to educational research and development. The guidelines for the new program clearly assume that education ought to be approached from every discipline that might contribute to our understanding of the educational process. Just as there is much to be said for developing a political and professional consensus conducive to the support of productive change in our schools, so, too, a case can be made for making use of a variety of research talents, techniques, and interests.

These convictions are underscored by the adoption of an evaluation procedure for laboratory applications that emphasizes cooperation and coordination rather than competition. Rather than follow the usual project research approach of subjecting fully developed applications to competitive review, the new procedure calls for the submission of a prospectus of limited size in which interested parties will be able to identify themselves and their region, plus their interests, concerns, and plans. Only after the approval of a prospectus will a formal application be entertained.

The prospectus will be an indication of the depth of commitment, but it will not entail the risks of prior application procedures which demanded the engagement of extensive human and financial resources in the preparation of a formal application without any guarantees as to the likelihood of success. Submission of a prospectus marks only a preliminary stage in the development of a laboratory. It could be reshaped prior to submission of a formal application, or could be eventually combined with other prospectuses after different groups from the same

¹ Already established at these universities: Harvard, Pittsburgh, Wisconsin, Texas, Stanford, Oregon and Georgia. Also, there is a consortium in New York City, Arizona and California (Berkeley) are bidding for centers.—*The Editor*.