

The Changing World

Harold C. Hand

OUR CEMETERY MENTALITY

ASCD members need no introduction to Harold C. Hand, professor of education, University of Illinois, Urbana, who writes *The Changing World* department this publication year.

PRESIDENT WILBUR of Stanford once observed in my hearing that the problem of revising a curriculum was very much like that of moving a cemetery. All manner of irrational sentiments stand opposed in both instances. It is only the dead that are to be physically disturbed in either situation. But in both cases, most who are identified with the dead feel that any serious proposal to move or to revise borders on sacrilege.

Most of us are the captives of this "cemetery mentality." Emancipated teachers quite generally complain that their principals, supervisors, and superintendents are still in bondage—and hence constitute an almost impossible impediment to curriculum reform. Escaped principals, supervisors, and superintendents assert that the generality of teachers is still imprisoned within this psychic stockade—and regard the engineering of their liberation as the first and most crucial problem of curriculum development. The few professors of education who have been manumitted are inclined to agree with both groups. And all three (the liberated teachers, administrators, and professors of education) find it easy to regard the generality of "academic" professors, university administrators (especially directors of admissions), and accrediting agencies as stalwart champions of the dead.

This cemetery mentality is freighted with terrific hazard to the well-being of the people of this country and the world. It can easily be demonstrated—indeed, among informed persons it is trite to observe—that almost every conceivable type

of "new mind" must be created if societal retrogression and decay are to be prevented and civilized survival assured. Literally hundreds of new and unresolved problems confront the people of this and other lands in reference to providing physical security, making the population healthy and vigorous and safeguarding it against accidents and disease, developing and wisely utilizing the natural resources, enabling the population to make a living, rearing and educating the young, providing adequate wholesome recreation, enabling the people to satisfy their aesthetic and spiritual impulses, providing sufficient "social cement" (a common body of beliefs and aspirations) to unify the peoples of the earth, and so organizing and governing that the peoples of this vastly shrunken world neighborhood may live together in peace based on justice.

Each of these hundreds of crucially important problems can be resolved only as the people *know* what must be known, *understand* what must be understood, *believe* what must be believed, and *do* what must be done in order to resolve them. The discovering and testing out of new knowledge, the engendering of new understandings and beliefs, and the inducing of changed behavior are centrally the functions of education. Consequently, all manner of new enterprises—curriculum matters all—must be undertaken by educators. All who do not do so will have abdicated in what is demonstrably the most crucial period in man's history to date. In my view, all who so abdicate will

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hypotheses, and reaching conclusions which serve as a basis of action. The answer a pupil reaches is not of major concern to the school. If skill in critical and constructive thinking is developed, the pupil's conclusions will change as he comes into contact with new data through additional experience.

To follow the third course, and the writer believes it is the one we should accept, means that study aids treating controversial areas must be secured. Where? They may be secured from partisan groups supporting various sides of a controversy. Biased presentations are valuable because they can be used to help pupils develop skill in analyzing propaganda. But they are not enough. Many teachers are unwilling to use them and many communities will restrict the points of view represented. Pupils also need objective statements. School publishers can fill a real need by preparing two types of materials. One type presents the issue in a way that arouses interest. *Kingsblood Royal* and the film excerpts selected by the Commission on Human Relations of the Progressive Education Association are good examples. After the problem has been defined, unbiased information is needed for class use. Study sources like the *Public Affairs* pamphlets and *Building America* should be available in many fields at all maturity levels.

If schools are to teach pupils to think for themselves, they need materials that

help pupils explore areas that are vitally important to youth, areas in which thinking is being done by adults. Youth lives in the same society, is subject to the same pressures, is challenged by the same problems. We need more publishers who are willing to attempt to help schools do successful work in controversial areas by supplying the necessary tools. But they cannot do it alone.

It is little wonder that publishers of school materials have produced less material in controversial areas than on topics on which there is uniform agreement. School textbooks, workbooks, and pamphlets are published to sell. When school people hesitate to buy and use materials on which members of the community disagree, publishers, with a few notable exceptions, center their attention on products for which the market is assured.

We have our part to play. More curriculum workers are needed who will assist publishers in defining the areas and preparing the manuscripts. More members of this association must take a definite stand that the school should devote a larger proportion of its time to examining the issues on which the community, the nation, and the world have not reached agreement.

Tools for Learning in November will be introduced by Helen F. Storen, assistant professor of education, Teachers College, Columbia University, and will deal with reading for adults.

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zanship and uses the product in shaping the destiny of American education through sound and worthwhile legislation, the teaching profession will remain of minor influence in the attainment of the great ideal of equality of opportunity for all of our citizens.—J. L. McCaskill, director, *Public Relations, Florida State University, Tallahassee.*

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stand convicted of treason to all mankind. To permit ourselves to remain captive to a cemetery mentality is to make this abdication and betrayal inevitable. Either we "bury" this mentality, or we shall before long be buried with it—in the blinding flash of an atomic explosion and in company with the peoples we will have betrayed.

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