

## Letters from Abroad

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*Gertrude Hankamp is a familiar name to all ASCD members who knew her as executive secretary of the Association and editor of EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP for the past four years. She continues to take an active part in ASCD work; editing this monthly department of articles from foreign educators is one of her contributions.*

It is only appropriate that we introduce this department with reflections from a fellow-educator from France whom many members of the Association learned to know and admire. Madame Brulé, as many of you will recall, is the principal of a women's normal school in Tours, France. She visited the United States last spring under ASCD auspices. Just before Helene Brulé left our country, she sat down with us in Washington and wrote some of the things she wanted to say to her friends in the United States.—GHF

*April 19, 1949*

DEAR FRIENDS OF THE ASCD: At the end of a trip which made it possible for me to study the school systems of the United States for four months, I should like to express here some of the countless ideas inspired by this experience.

I have seen many schools of different types: public and private, kindergarten and college, mixed and segregated, for colored or white children. Most of them have been luxurious, where all has been planned in order to give children an attractive and suitable environment.

I spoke with hundreds of teachers, administrators of schools, supervisors, superintendents, consultants, principals, and college faculty members. I met thousands of students: watched them at work, at play, at lunch time. I answered all sorts of questions, from that of the eight-year-old boy who asked me, "Do you sleep in beds in your country?" to those expressing the deepest interest in French life, in the effects of war, or in our philosophy of education.

Everywhere I received the best of hospitality and had an opportunity of discovering for myself the well-known American qualities of kindness and generosity. Living near the students in the dormitory or in friendly homes, I was able to get first-hand knowledge of the life of educators at their jobs or in their families. I was conscious, for instance, of the common interest in children that schools and families share. The school people feel the necessity for making the parents aware of some rudiments of child psychology through lectures, meetings, or some excellent pamphlets intended to prepare young children for school life. The parents help the teachers at the library or at lunch service, make and mend furniture, or attend exhibitions and entertainments arranged by their children.

I was able to appreciate the connection established in their work between the community and the school authorities, their common effort for the improvement of conditions of life; their common preoccupation with the current shortage of teachers and with problems like that of the rural schools and their possible replacement by central schools.

I greatly admired in most of the teachers colleges the use that is made of up-to-date techniques such as records, films, radios, and all types of tests; the attention given to means of expression, especially to the growth in language skills which enable youngsters to address their school fellows or even a larger audience with ease and confidence; the effort towards education of crippled children and the rehabilitation of the severely handicapped.

This has been a wonderful opportunity for me to see for myself the enormous effort made in America at all levels of education. But, more than once I wished that some American educators could have a parallel experience in my own country. For instance, I was surprised and sorry to read in recent books, and in some written by prominent educators, opinions which do not reflect true aspects of education in France today. Among characteristic features which should at least be known are the high quality and devotion of teachers in the nursery schools; the real preoccupation at the elementary education level with development of individual thinking, and in the "Lycées" the wholly new conception of discipline, studies, and teacher-pupil relations promoted in the "classes nouvelles."

The complete centralization of our school system, instead of restricting our freedom, helps to make plain and rational the general plan of studies. One of its consequences is that the same salaries are paid to all of the teachers at the same level throughout the country—a practice which proves of real help in keeping first-class teachers in rural districts.

So great are the differences between what I have seen here and what I was used to, that I found myself re-examining conceptions which I previously had taken for granted. More than once it was not only your unusually strong coffee that kept me awake. I really was feeling worried by doubts and problems. Here are some of the many things I asked myself:

☛ To build a personality, which is the real aim of education, is it enough to en-

able children to live in the best physical environment and to give them plenty of opportunities for good social adjustment? The experience of the war showed us that even for families whose high social standards seemed secure, hunger, cold, and fear can become desperately real. If the solid foundations of personal, critical thought had not been firmly laid at an early age, would our people have been able to resist so strongly the propaganda and to reject the slogans of Nazism?

☛ How is it that the same American educators who are so well informed on the psychology of infants and adolescents appear to take so little interest in the development of the child from seven to twelve; years which are so important for the beginning of objective and rational thought, years in which the child becomes familiar with those abstractions which make up the framework of our scientific interaction of the world; years in which the foundations of a real mental discipline are laid?

☛ What will be the effects on the adolescents of the transition from school life so highly sheltered, cooperative, and friendly, to an adult life which seems to us to be so sternly competitive? May they not suffer a psychological shock which may affect their whole inner being?

Such reflections give only a small idea of the intense interest which this trip has stimulated in me. On leaving I can only express my gratitude and the sincere hope that I may come again—both to see those still unknown parts of your country which so much appeal to me, and to revisit the places and the people who have meant so much to me.—*Helene Brulé*

## Curriculum Research

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they needed to clear up their reading difficulties.

All of these factors suggested by research have direct implications for planning children's reading experiences and are being used in part by schools throughout the land. The quality of our reading

instruction has risen generation by generation. With moderately-sized classes and adequate help for those who find reading difficult, we can carry the success of reading clinics into the everyday classroom and reach a point where there is almost no child who "can't read."

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