

From Our Readers

Can ASCD Do Something?

DEAR EDITOR: Maybe, strictly speaking, this isn't ASCD-type business. Maybe this is one for the administrators to work on. Anyway, for some years now I have felt a deepening concern over a purely practical school problem. It doesn't get much play in educational literature, and yet it is the sort of thing that helps send a lot of our teachers home at night with quivering nerves and a sense of defeat.

I refer to the problem of *noise*. Visiting dozens of classrooms, during the past few years, in widely scattered cities, I have grown steadily more shocked at the noise levels against which we force so many teachers to shout, in order barely to be heard.

Who was the diabolical genius who first thought to build schoolhouses around one or more central courts—and then use those courts for everything from P.E. classes to rallies? A very pretty thing on a blueprint, no doubt! But I can show you buildings where about half the windows face out on such courts. And behind those windows (which have to be open much of the time) are classrooms where, for a large part of each day, discussion in ordinary conversational tones is a luxury reserved for lip readers. Tranquillity and relaxation vanish. An intimate, homey atmosphere is impossible. Tensions mount, and I am positive that in many a classroom over-all efficiency is cut at least half.

Of course, noisy central courts are not the only offenders. How many American classrooms are just over a trolley line—usually, it seems, at a corner where the

cars squeal and grind their way 'round! How many small-voiced children are making reports against the window-rattling roar of a truck in second gear! And what about the stentorian dissonances of the class in beginning brass?

Well, of course, a good deal of water is already under the bridge. The buildings are where they are, and there isn't any playground except the one nestled in a teacher's ear drum. The one thing we can do is to resolve, "Never again."

Or *is* that the only thing? Cities can often reroute heavy traffic away from a given spot; how hard have we tried to get it away from our schools? Have we, perhaps, grown so callous about the whole matter that we haven't really tried a lot of little things that could be done very easily? I have a sneaking hunch we have not generally given it much thought. Off-hand, for instance, I can remember a lot of "Hospital—Quiet Zone" signs, but not the same thing for schools. Could not ASCD gather instances of successful campaigns against noise?

Above all, I venture to guess that if we put our sound engineers on the problem (and gave them funds commensurate with the real importance of the thing) they could find ways to damp down a good bit of the outside noise, keep it from invading the open window. I don't know how it could be done—or even *whether* the attempt would succeed—but I should respect us all more if we'd give it a powerful try.—Fred T. Wilhelms, *associate professor of education, San Francisco State College.*



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