

## Curriculum Issues in Focus

CONFLICTING EDUCATIONAL OPINION is reflected in the varying current practices in our schools. A recent evaluation of experimental curricula which took this writer into many classrooms brought the more significant issues to sharp focus.

The issue of teacher domination versus pupil planning is implicit in the practices of some of the ablest teachers. Our observations lead us to the considered view that young people can have more self direction without sacrificing the standards of performance now attained by strictly teacher-directed classes.

Some teachers wonder whether emphasis upon good living will attain academic respectability. The dissipation of such doubts as well as the resolution of some basic issues is dependent upon long-range experimentation. Only the skill that comes from faith and perseverance will convince the adventurous teacher that boys and girls can have both good living and good scholarship.

Each school determines its own program of balanced living. The average school overemphasizes the isolated learning of the basic skills and neglects the creative and expressive arts. Moreover, the greatest gap in the school life of boys and girls is the neglect of current social living. In consequence, a number of enterprising schools devote a continuing block of time in every grade to the common problems of individual and community living which, on the secondary level, is usually called the *core*. However, very few of these schools have determined a framework to guide the teacher and pupils in the selection of learning units. In fact no single pattern for determining the scope of the *core* has emerged. Whether *core* units should be chosen by the pupils or by the teacher is an issue upon which opinion remains about evenly divided.

In most of the large and in many of the small school systems the elementary, junior, and senior high schools plan their programs independently. A minority of school organizations take the position that the continuing school life of the learner should be unified under common leadership, common point of view, and a coherent curriculum. In these situations, the working group plans a continuous sequence of learning experiences from the first to the twelfth grade.

Life in a democracy demands certain ways of learning together, working together and living together. This basic challenge has stimulated the discerning teacher to create a social environment which enables the young to share in making decisions and to assume the obligations of potential members of a free society.

In those classes in which our heritage of freedom is taken seriously, controversial questions are boldly faced and fearlessly discussed. The young people are cultivating a respect for the opinions of others even when they differ sharply and furthermore, they are slowly mastering the rudiments of objective thinking.

In our way of living people frequently gather in groups to talk things over. They need to be able to find common areas of agreement and to accept the reasonable judgment of the group. Boys and girls are coming together more frequently in small groups to pool their experiences, their information and their opinions.

The needs of life are not met by a continuance of things as they are. Man is inventive. The modern youth is confronted by new discoveries and constantly changing conditions. In consequence, the good school takes the position that the learner needs to cultivate the will to play a more active role in attaining higher levels of living not only for himself but also for his neighbors.

This sampling of educational opinion in these critical times should whet the reader's appetite for the discussions which follow.—*Henry Harap*, associate director, Division of Surveys and Field Services, George Peabody College for Teachers, Nashville, Tennessee; and member, ASCD Publication Committee.

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