DEAR EDITOR: I had some misgivings about attending the 1952 ASCD Convention in Boston since my background (a) in group dynamics and (b) in modern curriculum study, is admittedly negligible. I have not given too much thought to curriculum since I was chairman of the Curriculum Committee quite a number of years ago. After giving thought to what I should attempt to do in Boston, it seemed to me that my time might be best spent in gaining first, some notion of the techniques of group dynamics and second, whatever views I might be able to pick up on modern curriculum development. Of course along with these aims I hoped to be able to gain some ideas of the general views on education held by American teachers.

There were approximately 2,000 people attending the convention which was centred in some four hotels with headquarters at the Statler. The convention was organized into six separate sections with from five to ten subsections or groups in each section.

There were perhaps thirty people in the group to which I was assigned. The majority of these appeared to be teachers and professors from teachers colleges and education departments of universities. I had better state here and now that my experiences in this group were most painful to say the least. The group started out to explore the problems of the individual members. The leader pointed out that such exploration should precede any real discussion on the theme of the group. This seemed a logical approach. However, at this point several professors of education began to outline not what were problems but rather the achievements of their particular institutions during the past year in certain bits of alleged research. As each professor stated his case, others in the group attempted to show that the piece of work was either not particularly significant, or had not been approached from the right end of the educational system, or the original situation had not been properly measured before the change was instituted, or the piece of research had not covered a sufficient number of cases to give it any validity, or proper records had not been kept to assess its significance after five years' time etc., etc., etc.

The end result of this slug-fest was rather pitiful and completely fruitless. It was all carried on in pedagogical jargon and for a time I thought I was the only person who had to translate everything that was being said into plain Canadian English or Anglo-American. However, I found later that about half those present were as much in the dark as I, even though they were Americans and they were equally disgruntled. Two members of
the group finally managed to corral all
the discussion and the thing from there
forward became a dialogue between
these two who apparently were at-
ttempting to confound each other by
the use of advanced "pedagouses."

The second day was simply a con-
tinuation of what happened on the
first day. I had become so completely
disgusted with the aimlessness of the
whole group, and so frustrated in find-
ing that we had used two-thirds of
our total time without discussing the
topic which had been assigned to the
group, that I decided that I must try
to join a second group, if I was to be
able to form any true picture of what
the ASCD was doing in its annual
convention. I was convinced by this
time that the convention could not be
as bad as this sample and that I had
been most unfortunate in putting my
hand in the grab bag and pulling out
this particular specimen.

I did get these notions from listen-
ing to the discussion:

(1) Everybody seemed to be per-
turbed that the teachers were not tak-
ing any real part in the development
of curricula. They felt that it should
be developed largely by the teachers
themselves.

(2) Nobody seemed to feel that it
was safe to let the teachers at the pre-
sent time do too much in forming the
curriculum, since they felt that the
teachers would not come up with the
right answers.

(3) They seemed to believe that it
would be well to interest the teachers
if at all possible in curriculum de-
velopment, so long as the actual plan-
ning and development was left in the hands
of superintendents, teachers college
faculty members and such. In fact one
gentleman said, "If we could only get
the teachers interested in forming a
curriculum such as we would want,
without letting them know, while they
are doing it, that they were doing what
we wanted them to do, then the prob-
lem would be solved."

(4) It seemed to be evident that
when curriculum changes were contem-
plated these professional experts were
in the habit of going into a school sys-
tem in order to initiate and plan the
curriculum changes. In other words a
team of experts went into the job,
prehumably with the help of the teach-
ers and members. However, they
complained that as soon as they went
into a school area, they got a suspicious
acquiescence from the teachers to all
ideas which they proposed, and they
wondered how they could overcome the
teachers' suspicions and fears. I won-
dered why the teachers feared these
people but did not get the opportunity
of asking that question. It seemed to
me that these experts in psychology
would have done a little soul searching
when they recognized that their very
presence in a local school system
seemed to create fear, suspicion, and
lack of security—as many of them ad-
mitted freely and without being
asked.

(5) From this group it would seem
to be evident that very little is being
done in the building of curriculum by
the American teacher per se. They
talked a lot about the present system
of the superimposed curriculum as
against what they claimed they wished
to have, the self-selection curriculum.
Along with this, I made quite a col-
lection of rare items of what I would
choose to call pedagogical terminologi-
cal inexactitudes. I arranged these in
the form of a glossary for later use.

A Better Experience

On the third day of the group meet-
ings, I managed, through special per-
mission, to get into a different group.
This group had been discussing group techniques and when I joined it, was in process of examining a tape recording of a staff meeting in one of the suburban high schools which was conducted on the group dynamics principle. After listening to the staff meeting there followed an extremely lively and complete discussion of strengths and weaknesses, the advisability of taking a vote in a meeting run on group process principles, and a wealth of valuable criticism backed up by people who had had experience in the group dynamic process. I found here a group of people who appeared to be mature, balanced and competent in the fullest sense of the word. While I could not, in the brief time I was with them, gain as much as I would like to have, I was able to observe a group working in a most effective manner following group procedures. Moreover, my estimate of the American educational system which, it must be admitted, was rather low after my first two-day experience, became much higher. During those first two days I felt I had wandered into a pedagogical mad house. My experience with this second group showed that I had first been unfortunate and that the people that I had met in the first group were, as these American professors would say, atypical.

I am extremely glad I went. I feel that I got a great deal from the convention. Some of my pre-conceived views I found were very, very wrong; some were substantiated by what I saw, but I gained many constructive ideas which are of a real value to me personally and I hope may be of value to the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation.—S. G. B. Robinson, executive secretary, Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.