"'The Time Has Come,' the Walrus Said,
'To Talk of Many Things.'"

With this issue of Educational Leadership devoted to the subject, "Teaching Children and Youth—Something," there are indeed many things to talk of. In perhaps no other area of educational theory and practice is there a wider divergence of opinion than in that of content. In such a situation, a little talking may be in order.

Violent variations of opinions are hard to maintain unless there are ideational differences or logical inconsistencies. Perhaps a couple of statements as to the why of this controversy will be worth making.

In the first place, we are much given to “either-or” statements. We tend to regard things as either black or white and seem to reject the whole area of gray which, in reality, constitutes so much of our world. Therefore, we are inclined to think that we are either teaching subject matter or teaching children and seem to overlook the fact that these two items, subject matter and children, are not mutually exclusive. It is very difficult to teach children without teaching them something, and it is equally difficult to teach something without teaching it to somebody. If we would be a little less ready to jump on the “either-or” bandwagon, we perhaps would not find ourselves in quite so many controversies. This is especially true when it is not a matter of “either-or” but, when thought through clearly, both.

There is no doubt that the past twenty years have been fruitful ones in developing knowledge and understanding of how boys and girls grow, develop and learn. Any educational program which negates or does not take advantage of this knowledge can scarcely be called modern and certainly will be relatively ineffective. As a result of our discoveries in these areas, we have become increasingly conscious of the fact that each child is an individual with his own rate of development and that teaching must take into account these individual differences if it is to be effective. With this increased emphasis on the process of teaching, many have tended to feel that the “what” of teaching is becoming relatively unimportant in our concern with the “how.” A few minutes’ reflection, though, should show us that some choices must be made among all of the facts, knowledges, habits, skills, understandings and attitudes that are available.

All knowledge is not of equal worth and while we may not agree with Spencer’s conclusions as to what knowledge is of greatest worth, we can scarcely debate the desirability or even the necessity of seeking answers to his question. Since all knowledge is not of equal worth, then the concern we have and the care we use in selecting those knowledges which are to be included in school experiences certainly amount to attention to content.
Another contributing factor is the willingness of many of us to push on with the new beyond the point of proven worth. For example, within the quarter century of my teaching experience, I have been urged to accept the project method, supervised study, the Dalton plan, the Morrison unit, block scheduling and the core curriculum as panaceas of one kind or another for the problems of education. Most educational ideas and theories have some merit and we might do well to consider the merits of all before we become overenthusiastic about the values of one.

Critics of modern education frequently fall back on tradition to avoid facing new ideas. I am suggesting that our best procedure is not to make a similar mistake in the opposite direction. Becoming an unquestioning protagonist of an idea is no more conducive to thinking than does offering unalterable opposition.

It is hoped that this issue of Educational Leadership will provide help in the selection of content, its organization and its effective use in the educational process. Those who have contributed are particularly competent in the content area which they are discussing. They are also competent in the general area of educational methodology and procedure. They see boys and girls as they are and also have special skill in interpreting the whole field of knowledge and selecting from it those items most usable in school situations. Their efforts are worth reading but more than that, they are worth thinking about.

It is the hope of all who have contributed to this issue that it can make some contribution to the clarification of our thoughts in an area where controversy admittedly exists. May it also help to reduce controversy where it does not center around ideational differences but is merely due to logical inconsistencies on our part.


Members of the Association were saddened to learn of the passing of Dr. Kate V. Wofford, Head, Department of Elementary Education, University of Florida. Miss Wofford, a past president of ASCD, made many important contributions to our profession and our Association, as an officer of the Association; chairman of the committee preparing the bulletin, Instructional Leadership in Small Schools; as section chairman for the volume, The Modern Community School; and most recently as a representative of ASCD to the Council on Cooperation in Teacher Education. She combined a penetrating insight into educational problems with a fine sense of humor in a way which made everyone who worked with her value the relationship. We feel deeply the loss of a real leader in American education.