

## The Tools We Work With

**M**AN THE TOOLMAKER has through the ages busied himself in making instruments that would help him meet his needs. He has been phenomenally successful in this endeavor, particularly in the making of tools that are weapons. Man today is uneasy, however, for he is suddenly awakening to the fact that his inventiveness in such a physical area has far outrun his ability to get along well with his fellow men. In such a dilemma he needs the help of school people. He needs to know well the tools that school people have available to help him continue to grow and develop—in academic areas, in understanding of self, in knowledge of the world about him, and in improving human relations.

The word, "tool," may bring to mind a picture of the chimpanzee laboriously fitting sticks together to draw the elusive bunch of bananas within grasp. This picture of invention at a simple level is helpful. Yet it scarcely illustrates the urgency of our present need for tools that are finely enough conceived and expertly enough designed to assist modern man in achieving his more complex purposes and his longer-range objectives.

What are the tools we work with today in education? Schools in modern times have progressed far beyond the era of a crude log bench, a single textbook and a birch rod. Surely no one today would accept such a limited setting as an adequate one for the education of children and youth in a world

grown suddenly smaller and more perilous. The tools we use in the modern school must be the best that can be fashioned, the most efficient that can be created. For the tools we work with are the keys that unlock the intellect, channel the emotions, release the creative imagination and fire the quickening and cooperative spirit of man.

Undoubtedly the tools most widely used in schools have been text materials. We know, however, that the richness of children's or young people's experiences with printed materials is vastly increased as many and varied resources are made available for their selection and use. Since this is true, we must continue to work at all levels to increase the availability and use of a wider and more appropriate range of text materials, references and general library facilities.

Yet this is today no simple matter. As Virgil M. Rogers<sup>1</sup> points out in a recent article, textbooks—and back of these, *words* and *ideas*—through a growing and inordinate fear of subversion, have become suspect in many communities and by many groups, particularly groups which have little firsthand acquaintance with modern schools. For this reason, school people and other citizens feel a necessity to become much better informed and to improve greatly their ways of working together as they face the responsi-

<sup>1</sup> Virgil M. Rogers, "Textbooks Under Fire," *The Atlantic*, February 1955, p. 42-48.

bility of choosing text and reference materials for use in their schools.

Within the education profession there are contradictory trends. Which published materials are best suited for use with children and young people? One commendable effort to face up to our own mixed purposes in this regard is the recently released, *Text Materials in Modern Education*.<sup>2</sup> This book analyzes the place and purposes of text materials and also gives a realistic description of their writing, publishing, distribution and use. It suggests criteria for a functional analysis of the content of these materials. It recommends means for improving their use in schools—through giving teachers in preparation more effective understanding of their responsibility in selection of text materials, and through helping administrators and others develop policies and procedures that will give the teacher greater freedom and support in selecting materials and resources suitable for use with a particular group of boys and girls.

Yet text materials are not our only tools in school work. The past twenty years are notable for a growing understanding and use of art and craft materials, graphic media, instruments, machines, specimens, natural objects, field trips—all of which may constitute effective tools for learning. These resources, once found only in kindergarten or primary school programs, are now also often encouraged for use in upper elementary and in some secondary schools. Audio-visual aids, once trumpeted as the ultimate “replace-

ment” for the teacher, now are finding their proper place as graphic and moving supplements to the efforts of the skilful teacher.

In science and mathematics, too, effective tools have been developed. The scientific method continues to illuminate, not alone the areas of science, but all fields of endeavor that make its use a yardstick and a guide.

Are music, the language and expressive arts, the creative arts and crafts “tools we work with”? Homemaking and industrial arts? These areas are of increasing importance as effective tools of learning. Each helps to meet the needs of individuals and of groups at the proper moment in a continuing program of growth and development.

### Relationships

Recent years are marked, too, by a growing understanding and use of techniques that are in themselves effective tools for improving learning. Some of these techniques are treated in this issue. Our awareness, understanding and use of group processes now make for a more realistic (and more hopeful) approach to in-service education and to improving group relationships.

A technique which this Association has assisted in advancing is that of the “interdisciplinary” or “interprofessional” approach to solution of problems of teaching and learning. Great benefit seems to lie in the direction of increasing understanding among the various specialists as they concentrate their most effective resources in an over-all approach to solution of the problems of instruction.

Exploration, pioneering and creation are the trends we seek to encourage.

<sup>2</sup>Lee J. Cronbach, editor, *Text Materials in Modern Education*. Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1955. 216 p.

The present generation of young people should benefit through our hard-earned awareness of individual differences and through our growing ability to identify and to foster these rich variations among persons. This movement toward a more humane—individualized, yet socialized—education is basic to all our quest for improved human relations throughout the world.

The tools we work with must be the tools that will help children, young people and adults better understand themselves as persons living with other persons; their own accessibility to the tool of learning itself—the knowledge

of *how to learn*; their understanding of the physical environment; and their ability to improve their relationship with others. The tools we work with must be the tools that will help develop creative living and thinking; that will increase the person's ability to select and to choose the suitable, the timely, the appropriate; that will assist the person's self-enhancement both as an individual and as one who mingles comfortably with others and contributes positively to the joint good.

—ROBERT R. LEEPER, *associate secretary, ASCD, and associate editor, Educational Leadership.*



### *New Discount Policy for NEA Publications*

The following policies and procedures pertaining to the sale of National Education Association publications will become effective June 1, 1955:

#### *I. NEA Discount Policy*

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The new discount policy and the revised procedures for handling the sale of publications are as formally approved by the Departmental Secretaries and informally approved by the heads of most NEA units developing publications for sale.

The new discount policy will be announced in the April and May issues of the *NEA Journal*. The Supervisor of the Publications-Sales section will pass this information on to bookstores and others with invoices during the next several months.

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