

## Our Theme Is Creativity

**T**HE present issue of *Educational Leadership* seems to us, on several counts, to make a notable contribution to educational thinking. In the treatment of its theme, *creativity*, it has kept refreshingly clear of any touch of the sentimental jargon which too often has obscured rather than clarified the meaning of the word. It presents us, on the other hand, with a down-to-earth, working definition and a clean-cut analysis of process. Fundamental in its approach to the significance of the creative life, both to the individual and to society, and to the dangers of its submergence, it is, at the same time, illustrative in its application of the operational principles of creativity to the work of the classroom teacher, the supervisor of teachers, and the research worker.

*Creativity* is defined by one of our writers as the urge to do something and, in the doing, to become something that is understandable and satisfying. The urge to do is manifest from the beginning of life. That it is the raw material out of which all the complex activities of human behavior evolve is generally recognized. That wholesome development of the individual is largely dependent on the opportunity given in early life for freedom of activity is also increasingly recognized. Figuratively as well as literally, we have removed the swaddling clothes from the infant and let him kick and thrash about. In short, we are pretty good at carrying out the first phase of the process as outlined for us in these pages. We are permitting, at least to the early years, that exercise of freedom to move, to explore, to learn of

things and people in which all creativity finds its source. We are shown here how out of such freedom grows sensitivity to color, light, sound, form, words, ideas, human relations and how, with encouragement, there will come the desire to express the enjoyment of these and to share the experience with others. In this phase, too, we have made advances, for we are increasingly sharing with children the pleasure of their attempts at expression and are making available to them many media for their exploration.

From here on, however, we are not so good. In guiding children in the organization of their varied experiences in our rich and complex culture, in helping them in their interpretation of the immediate through its place in the time line of history, in having them see the interrelationships of their many experiences—in these processes we have still much to learn. But once having deserted the comparatively smooth path of merely passing on the cultural heritage in compartmentalized subject matter for the rough and rugged path of relating the past to the solution of the problems of the present and the future of the individual and society—we are compelled to go forward by that same creative urge in ourselves to do and be that we think important for ourselves and others. We know that unless we do go on, there cannot be those moments of insight, of inspiration, of "illumination," as our writer on this theme calls them, in which all that we have lived comes to focus and we know that for the moment, at least, we have realized a potential that springs from our innermost self. It is toward

these moments that our efforts are directed. For an individual who has never known such has missed the very essence of living; and once a culture ceases to cherish such moments, its knell is rung.

The high moments of insight, we have said, grow out of the organization of experience; an organization in which there is much of routine and much of discipline. Similarly, after the first illuminating flash of idea and feeling come more of discipline, often of tedious routine, of objective appraisal, of struggle to give such form to the idea as will make it crystal clear in our communication of it to others. Here, too, we have much to learn. It is a comparatively simple matter to impose external discipline on the learner through rewards and punishment; it is a highly complex matter to develop within the learner himself that discipline which will impel him to arduous labor for the sake of carrying through the task of communicating effectively what he has conceived. Again, we cannot turn back. The values are too great.

As we view the attacks leveled at the schools today, listen to the gibes that are made at our expense when we use such words as "creativity," look at the cartoons ridiculing concepts of freedom of expression—in the light of our present discussion we are moved to a mixture of humility and the questionable virtue of tolerance. Humility, because we know how much we have to learn in the way of developing the techniques for the task we have set ourselves. We realize, perhaps better than our critics, that as yet we are nothing like as skilled in relating subject matter to problems to be solved as our forebears were in devising techniques by which the learner would absorb the subject matter they had decided it was good for him to learn; not nearly as effective in developing self-discipline

as they were in applying external discipline. Tolerance, because if "they" only knew how difficult is our task and how significant to the quality, if not to the very existence itself, of our culture; how honestly we are trying; how hard we are working; how analytically we are forever evaluating our results—maybe "they" would scoff less. We are aware too, and only too well, that at the back of the popular criticism is a value system antithetical to that toward which our efforts are directed and that in this fact exists our problem of communication—one that we cannot side-step. We hope that all this does not have that aura of smugness which tolerance usually carries. We do not mean it so. We are merely trying to face our professional responsibility. All this leads us into a consideration of the treatment in this issue of the significance of creativity and the dangers to it through the pressures to which it is being subjected.

In the discussion of the compatibility of creativity with our highly organized institutional life, many provocative questions are raised. All the age-old problems of the relation of the individual to the group are sharpened and intensified as we develop greater skill in mass production, in group action, in organization of things and people. We are asked to consider what happens to the individual constantly subjected to majority decisions, to the importance placed on orderly routine, to the value set on gross output, to the measure of his worth in terms of his contribution to predetermined goals in the setting of which he had no share. Must he inevitably succumb to such pressures, lose the incomparable zest for living which comes only with the effort to do and become something that expresses his deepest self? If the majority of workers in a culture so

succumb, what will be the quality of that culture? Efficient—probably; smooth-running—perhaps; prosperous—possibly; adventurous—no; joyous—no; creative—no; liberal—no; free—a thousand times, no. A free society is made of free men who cherish their freedom not for their mere personal gratification; but because deep within them—though often inarticulate—is the conviction that only as they are free can they fulfill their human destiny.

Singularly enough, as we pondered the above, the whole cultural dilemma became personalized in the dilemma of a young secretary. She came to us, as she said, "very confused." Until a month ago she had worked in one of the offices of a small college. She had been there two years—her only position since graduation from high school. She left because of a much higher salary offered by an industrial firm. Now—after a month of it, she was "all mixed up." Her words came forth in broken fragments: no longer happy—and she had to be happy—she was beginning to think that the things money could buy were not so important after all—if she had been asked to set up a meeting on the old job she could use her head in going about it and now she had to follow set procedures—there was a book of 463 procedures for secretaries—she never used to have any time on her hands—there was always more to do than she could manage—now sometimes she had nothing to do because she had to do just her prescribed work and was not allowed to do anything else—she felt she had a brain but could not use it—and she was unhappy—might she come back to the old job? She was only twenty, and she had not succumbed. But for one like her, there are thousands who out of necessity, or because all their previous experiences had led to accept-

ance of such situations, who do succumb and will continue to succumb. Unless—we look at the amazing organization we have achieved and make it a means toward greater freedom for the individual to realize himself. Unless—we examine and evaluate the nature of the goals we have set. Unless—we regard our achievements in organization as only a phase, a steppingstone to a way of living of infinitely finer quality than the great multitude of men have as yet achieved.

At the risk of sounding superlative, we assert that the present issue of *Educational Leadership* offers us a springboard from which we, as educators, can dive into the problems that have here been raised. We hope that we will have plenty of company in the dive, for we know that educators working alone within their own discipline—broad as it is—cannot solve the problems of even a single individual, to say nothing of a culture. It is now, as always, "the everlasting teamwork" that counts. The fine beginning made here in the understanding of the nature of the difference in, and the factors conducive and inimical to creativity needs deepening and broadening through the contributions, not only of the psychologist, but of the sociologist, the biologist, and the anthropologist—to name but a few. The educator must be continuously a student of their contributions.

As to the educator's particular contribution, we cannot help but emphasize a point made earlier, i.e., the necessity of developing techniques of teaching and learning commensurate with the vision we believe we have gained. For we humbly acknowledge that our techniques lag far behind our goals of man's creative potential. Again, the present issue of *Educational Leadership* gives us a

beginning in its descriptive account of a classroom experience, in its analysis of the work of the supervisor, and the new vistas it discloses in educational research. We have always new worlds to explore, and as we explore them, we need to submit ourselves to the final phase of the creative act, the discipline required by our own particular medium. We know our goal—a free society of free men in which there are adventure, courage, strength to endure, and a deep joyousness born out of the faith that is in us. The present issue of this journal points the way; it defines the problem in the

large; it indicates the avenues of our endeavor. It remains for us to break down the problem of the development of creativity into the minutiae pertaining to maturity levels, to the complex areas of individuality, to the demands of specifics of time and place. New horizons spread before the creative teacher, the creative supervisor of teachers, the painstaking research worker, as they bring together into unity the needs of the individual and the needs of society.

—AGNES SNYDER, *chairman, Department of Education, Adelphi College, Garden City, New York.*

## “The Importance of People”

PEOPLE are important! This was the idea which guided Ruth Cunningham throughout her career which ended with her death on July 2.

Early in her term as executive secretary of the Department of Supervisors and Directors of Instruction, Ruth used her own style of writing and line drawings to introduce us to the now famous Joe Brown, the school principal whose intentions were so good but who had so much to learn about people.

When ASCD was formed and Volume One, Number One of *Educational Leadership* appeared, the reason for the name of the new magazine was explained in a statement which could well have been written by editor Ruth Cunningham herself, so well did it express her views on people as leaders:

The term *leader* as used to guide the affairs of this magazine will refer to all who in marked degree demonstrate two abilities in education—the ability to help their fellows see ahead those things that need to be done and the ability to help their fellows find the energy enthusiastically to do those

things. The potential capacity for leadership as thus defined is infinitely greater than has been realized in the conduct of educational affairs—at least such is the faith that supports this publication.

The hope of American education, perhaps the hope of America itself, lies in the fullest possible development and utilization of the capacity for leadership throughout its total ranks. It is to the realization of this hope that *Educational Leadership* will seek to contribute.

From the start *Educational Leadership* has carried the column which Ruth conceived, “The Importance of People.” When she left the Washington office to join the staff of Teachers College, Columbia University, Ruth was editor of that column and, again with words and drawings, brought us wider understanding of teachers and supervisors.

Children were especially important people to Ruth Cunningham, and she made us stop to listen to them when she brought out *We, the Children*. She made us understand children better through her research for the Horace Mann-Lincoln Institute for School Experimenta-

Copyright © 1956 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.