

Letters to the Editor

Content Selection

Chicago, Illinois
November 30, 1956

Editor, *Educational Leadership*

Dear Sir:

In the March 1956 issue of *Educational Leadership*, Arthur W. Foshay in an article titled, "Choice of Content," discussed the effect of accepting two concepts about the nature of man on choice of curriculum content. The two assertions, about man which were examined were first that man is a reasoning being and second that man is a self-evaluator. For example, Mr. Foshay indicated that the acceptance of the notion that man is a reasoning being implied that in arithmetic to the extent that arithmetic is taught as a logical tool and not just as a computational *exercise*, the learner is being treated as a rational animal. Mr. Foshay also included in this article illustrations from the content areas of language and science.

This writer should like to suggest that in addition to the acceptance of some notions about the nature of man there are other areas in which basic assertions are made when a choice of curriculum content is made. When Mr. Foshay accepted the idea that man is a reasoning animal and that consequently arithmetic should be taught as a logical tool, I should like to suggest that he, at the same time, was accepting some notion about the role of the school. Possibly the unstated assertion about the role of the school in this case is that the school is to

develop the mind, that is, to give knowledge and develop the powers of thinking. Substantiation of the general point that assertions are being made in other areas than just the nature of man to determine the selection of curriculum content can be easily noted.

While Man is a reasoning being—he is also an emotional being—a social being—a spiritual being. These assertions also should have implications for choice of curriculum. We might state that we should have a course on how to control your emotions, or a course on social dancing, or how to become kind, wise, etc. (These items may appear in some schools but this should not confuse the argument.) If assertions had to be made only about the nature of Man then these aforementioned curriculum items would be automatically in our curriculum. They are not in many curricula because other different assertions about the nature of man are made and/or additional assertions are being made (although they may be contradictory) about the role of the school, the nature of society, knowledge, and the nature of learning, and the purposes of life. And the curriculum which would result from these assertions would be probably quite different from that indicated by Mr. Foshay.

That this is an extremely complex but interesting intellectual task can be readily seen if we think through this process using several different assertions only about the nature of man, the role of the school, about society, and about knowl-

edge. For example, many sincere educators would hold as their basic assertions that *Man is a reasoning animal*; that the role of the school is to *develop loyal American citizens*; that our society is *constantly changing*; and that knowledge (American History) is desirable. With the acceptance of these assertions, one could readily see in a curriculum a course in American History, with different topics each year, that would be developing critical reading skills, and developing citizens devoted to our way of life. Other equally sincere educators would question some of these assertions. For example, the idea that Man is a reasoning animal might be accepted; it might be held that if one develops a reasoning animal (Man) that it is not necessary to postulate the development of loyal American citizens—if Man is rational he will be a good citizen. And the assertion that our society is constantly changing would be denied on the grounds that there are fundamental processes in our society always operating and that only the surface characteristics of society change. The assertion that American History may involve valid knowledge might also be accepted. Now with the acceptance of these notions one might envision a course in the curriculum which was to develop critical skills in analyzing the fundamental problems of our American society.

What the writers would like to suggest would be some further consideration by curriculum specialists of some theory

about the basic areas in which assertions are made and in which areas they should be raised consciously and consistently if a more judicious selection of curriculum content is to be made. It would also be worthwhile to formulate some of these assertions in the basic areas and try to develop some consistency (if possible) from area to area. It is certainly about time that we think and write in a more significant and profound way about curriculum than the following.

"From time to time, special interest groups have affected the secondary school purposes and program. A temperance group was largely responsible for the requirement of teaching the ill effects of tobacco, alcohol, and narcotics. Conservation, safety education, the humane treatment of animals, and driver education are among studies in the contemporary secondary school program that are the result of concerted efforts of concerned groups of people. Changes in secondary education have not been changes dictated by the minds of educators from their ivory towers; they have been responses sensitive to the changed needs of youth and the society served."¹

I agree with Mr. Foshay that we should continue thinking about this area of curriculum research. I also hope my conclusions are of interest to others in the field.

LOUISE L. TYLER
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¹ Annual Report, 1955-56, General Superintendent of Chicago Public Schools, *We Build the Secondary School An Educational Program*, Chicago, Illinois: the Schools, p. 7.

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