

The ASCD 1958 Conference— an In-Service Activity

Careful thought goes into planning and evaluating the annual conference of this Association. This continuing effort pays off in terms of making this an effective professional experience for participants.

IMPROVEMENT of in-service education has been, since the formation of the Association, a special concern of ASCD. At the Executive Committee meeting immediately following the merger of The Department of Supervisors and Directors of Instruction, NEA and The Society for Curriculum Study the unique functions of ASCD were discussed. In the minutes of this meeting is recorded the belief that this organization should provide an opportunity for closer cooperation among groups engaged in preservice and in-service education. Such cooperation has been, and is, fostered by the fact that the Association's membership cuts across all subject-matter lines, services and positions. In the ASCD Constitution the importance of the promotion of professional growth as a means for the general improvement of instruction is stressed.

In implementing its aims to improve instruction and supervision, ASCD engages in various activities which promote more effective in-service programs in school systems across the country. ASCD publications, the work of ASCD committees and commissions and joint efforts with ASCD affiliated units have

focused on this topic. The Association's major effort in this area, however, is its annual conference. This article is planned to give some of the "behind-the-scenes" activities in planning the 1958 conference. One of the most effective treatments of the ASCD Conference Activity is given in the recently published Fifty-sixth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, in a chapter by Kenneth J. Rehage and George W. Denmark.¹

Many professional associations conduct conferences as a means of in-service education. ASCD, as an organization of individuals with direct responsibility for curriculum development, expects more from its conferences than do many educational associations; it expects its conferences to provide a demonstration of effective ways people may work cooperatively for the improvement of instruction. To accomplish this, ASCD has utilized a variety of activities which a supervisor or curriculum director could use in his

¹ The National Society for the Study of Education. *In-Service Education for Teachers, Supervisors, and Administrators*. The Fifty-sixth Yearbook, Part I. Edited by Nelson B. Henry. Chicago 37, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1957.

own school setting. For example, ASCD was among the first of the associations to use small discussion groups in a national conference; this demonstrated the value of their use in local programs for curriculum improvement.

The task of planning this type of conference formerly took an undue amount of time of the Executive Committee of ASCD. In 1953, therefore, the Executive Committee appointed a group to propose plans for the annual conference. This continuing committee is composed of representatives from various regions of the United States and is supplemented each year by several members from the area which will be host to the next annual conference. This group secures suggestions for conferences from other members in a variety of ways.

Continuing Evaluation

One of the sources used by the committee planning the 1958 conference was a questionnaire sent to a random sampling of ASCD members, asking them to respond to such questions as the following:

1. What topic or general problems might serve as a theme for the 1958 conference?

2. Are there some speakers you would like to hear at the national conference?

3. What is there you have particularly liked about previous ASCD national conferences?

4. What have you disliked?

Respondents also were asked to comment

on study groups, clinics, assemblies, and general sessions. Replies revealed general satisfaction with previous conferences, but they also offered a number of specific suggestions that were valuable guides in making plans for the 1958 conference.

A compilation of the returns on the questionnaires was discussed with the Executive Committee prior to the meeting of the group planning the conference. This provided the Executive Committee an opportunity to make suggestions and recommendations to the conference planning committee.

Several conference planning committee members are on the ASCD Board of Directors. Although the Board does not usually discuss the conference in detail, the concerns voiced in Board discussions are also brought to the attention of the conference planning group.

The conference evaluation committee provides a report which is another source of information for the conference planning group. The evaluation committee uses a variety of techniques to determine the feelings of participants toward the following conference activities:

1. Orientation sessions for newcomers to the conference

2. Orientation session for leadership teams

3. General sessions

4. Study-discussion groups.

The evaluation committee also secures participants' suggestions of leaders who might be used in future conferences. It might be noted that the committee planning the 1958 conference had to meet during the time of the 1957 conference and, therefore, found that it had to base its plans on the evaluation of the 1956 conference. In spite of the fact that the data were a year old, the committee still found them to be most helpful.

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When the conference planning committee started work on the 1958 conference, it had the following information: results of its own questionnaire; reactions of the Executive Committee to these results; background of discussion of the ASCD Board meeting; and results of the evaluation of the 1956 conference. Although these various sources suggested a variety of possible themes, the greatest interest centered around developing an educational program for the future. Accordingly, the planning committee began to center upon the theme, "Curriculum Planning for the Years Ahead." It planned the general sessions around this theme and suggested a number of assemblies to supplement the general sessions. The planning committee offered suggestions regarding the number of general sessions, assemblies, clinics, and study-discussion group meetings to be included in the conference. The topics they offered for the study-discussion group meetings were taken from needs expressed by individual members.

Toward the end of the 1957 conference, at an open meeting, the conference planning committee presented its tentative proposal to the members present, for their reaction. After carefully considering the suggestions offered at this meeting, the conference planning committee prepared its recommendations for the 1958 conference to the Executive Committee.

"Curriculum Planning for the Years Ahead," the theme recommended by the group planning the 1958 conference was accepted by the Executive Committee at its May meeting. At this time recommendations for each general session, assembly and clinic were discussed. Guidance was given the ASCD staff for extending invitations to persons for leadership roles and for action necessary to

implement various aspects of the conference plans. The success of the conference will in large measure be determined by the manner in which the more than 900 persons in leadership roles assume their responsibilities, whether in general sessions, assemblies, clinics, study-discussion groups, committees and commissions or on the Board of Directors.

While the ultimate criterion of the success of the conference is the change in behavior which results for the individual participant, some measure of the effectiveness of the meeting will be determined by the Conference Evaluation Committee. This group will be conducting interviews, tabulating questionnaires and using other techniques and instruments to collect data to be used in planning future Association conferences.

Each year following the conference comments regarding the meeting are received in the Washington office from many ASCD members and visitors who have attended the conference. Often these informal evaluations tell of assistance received on a specific back-home problem. Some report their general reactions to the meeting. Others give the reaction of visiting educators to American education. Comments such as the ones below from Brazilian educators attending the 1957 Conference evidence the international and professional scope of the ASCD Conference.

"A strong point of the Conference was the exhibits. I also like the opportunities to make friends, visit schools and observe classes in session, participate in general and small sessions and discuss experiences in an informal way."

"I was most impressed by your decentralized educational system, so different from the one that exists in my country;

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to the regime. However, Dr. Counts raises some very interesting and central questions as to just what the long range consequences of such a program may be. For example, can the well trained mind be made scientifically creative and yet politically insensitive? Can the Communist controlled peoples continue to subordinate freedom of thought to politically expedient interpretations dictated by the Party?

Three chapters of *The Challenge of Soviet Education* are devoted to the moral, political and general education of the younger generation. Because of the importance of this level of operation in the total design for the creation of a new state and society, considerable emphasis is placed on matters relating to bringing up the young. Efforts at developing the "new Soviet man" are directed chiefly toward the elementary and secondary schools, where children are more impressionable, before much unlearning has to take place. While reading about this segment of Russian education, it is interesting to note the many different ways in which political indoctrination is an integral part of regular instruction, resulting, in effect, in a fusion of all aspects of the curriculum to achieve one overarching aim.

The last chapter is addressed to the implications of this system of education for the cause of human freedom in Russia and the world. A factor not to be

underestimated in speculating about future developments, according to the author, is the appeal of the apocalyptic vision of ideal communism for the rest of the world. His thoughts on such subjects as education for all Russians, indoctrination in the new morality, preferential treatment for the intelligentsia, and overemphasized industrial-technological development not only define the challenge of Russian education but inquire into forces that may substantially alter the nature of that education and swing the equilibrium of influence upon the Russian people in a more desirable direction.

Not covered in any detail are the areas of administration, finance, the kindergarten and schools for working and peasant youth, and day-to-day operation at the classroom level. The scope of the book is broadly conceived to include the basic features rather than a detailed account of a few special aspects. Its style is quite similar to that of a novel, interesting and readable, but disciplined and scholarly enough to qualify the book as an important contribution to source works on contemporary Russia valuable both for the student of Russian education and the layman interested in an overview of the philosophy and operation of Communist schools.

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it was really wonderful to see so many people from various places, with really interesting experiences to tell to others."

We wish that every ASCD member could be in Seattle to discuss "Curriculum Planning for the Years Ahead." Since this is not possible, we hope that

each of you will know that during the 1958 Conference, members of the Conference Planning Committee will be engaged in developing the best possible recommendations to make the 1959 ASCD Conference, to be held in Cincinnati, Ohio, an in-service activity of the highest quality and effectiveness.

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