

Needed: A Framework of Theory

YOUR column editor looked back over last year's columns to make some judgment about how adequately they might have served you in reporting the steady stream of curriculum news and in keeping you abreast of the new developments in the ASCD Cooperative Action Program for Curriculum Improvement, the two goals set in the 1958 October issue. This proved to be a revealing exercise, for, from his point of view, the material included fell short of achieving these goals.

Aside from the thoughtful and carefully-focused presentations on selected topics made by two guest contributors, the columns as a whole tended to present a miscellany of bits of information from here and there about a variety of curriculum activities. This is not to say that these activities were not good, but it is clear that the reporting did not offer a framework of theory or an organized set of values which might help the reader to evaluate them.

Where are the clear statements of theory which could serve this purpose? One is reminded of what John I. Goodlad wrote in the Winter, 1958, *School Review* when, in reviewing the school scene, he asserted: "Nowhere in education is there greater need for a conceptual system to guide decision-making than in the field of curriculum." He then

called for a conceptual system which will evolve as new research findings contribute to changes in the system, and he posed ten questions that typify the kinds of problems for which such a theoretical system might serve as a guide. A review of the content of these columns demonstrates the pressing need Goodlad and others have recognized.

This need looms large also in efforts to coordinate and to help individuals give desirable direction to the various aspects of CAPCI. In fact, the CAPCI Committee, which is an advisory committee to the ASCD Executive Committee, has recommended that a conceptual framework be developed in one of the three CAPCI problem areas as a necessary next step in the total program. This column will report the progress being made in this undertaking.

Paralleling this development, there continues to be an important line of activity which also contributes to the formulation of a background of adequate theory. Chief among these activities has been the preparation of working papers which outline the scope of each of the CAPCI problem areas and identify certain key questions. Available in mimeographed form to individuals and to study groups, these papers may be reproduced by ASCD members for wider school distribution.

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Two working papers are now available: "Evaluation of Learning," prepared by Lavone A. Hanna, Hilda Taba and Paul Allen, of San Francisco State College, and Ruth Dodds, of the Sacramento County Schools; and "Balance in the Curriculum," prepared by William M. Alexander, of George Peabody College for Teachers, and Sam H. Moorer, Florida State Department of Education, with the assistance of faculty members and students from George Peabody College for Teachers.

Three annotated bibliographies in the CAPCI series, prepared in cooperation with the NEA Research Division, may also aid individuals and groups in developing a more adequate conceptual framework for curriculum improvement. Available now are: "Grouping," by Erla B. Scull and Nelson R. Scull, of Teachers College of Connecticut; "Acceleration and Enrichment," by Miriam

Goldberg and Abraham J. Tannenbaum, of the Horace Mann-Lincoln Institute of School Experimentation, Teachers College, Columbia University; and "Problem Solving," by Lavone A. Hanna, of San Francisco State College and Richard E. Gross, of Stanford University. Other bibliographies are planned.

Through efforts such as these and through selected publications and papers of the various ASCD committees and commissions, it should be possible to identify an increasingly large and coherent conceptual base for many aspects of ASCD's action program. Obviously, a base of this kind will serve to give more meaning to the reporting of curriculum news. Throughout the year, this column will attempt to keep this need in the forefront.

MANY who have regarded the Michigan College Agreement as a significant approach to providing, within a state, a climate suitable for curriculum experimentation, but who have not recently heard reports of its use, will be interested in the work of the Steering Committee of the Southeastern Michigan Association of College Agreement Schools. This group is now sponsoring a series of activities to throw light on the current issues and problems involved in the agreement. Among other things, it plans visitations among school principals and key personnel to exchange ideas about curriculum improvement. The Michigan Agreement makes it possible for member secondary schools to recommend pupils for entrance into colleges and universities of the state without regard to course requirements if the school agrees to carry out four purposes aimed at curriculum improvement: (a) basic curriculum study, (b) personnel records of pupils, (c) continuous follow-up of

former students, and (d) improved guidance services.

AMONG the October events of interest to those concerned with curriculum experimentation are: The National Conference on Core Teaching, October 23-25, Shawnee-Mission School District, Kansas; and the General Education Committee's Fall Conference on "Effective Communication in Block-Time Courses" to be held October 10, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti.

AS ONE ponders the implications of this month's theme, "Goals of American Education," for his own work in curriculum, he may want to review some of the far-reaching questions raised last spring by the report made on a conference held at Stanford, California, January 24-27, 1959. This meeting was called a "Conference on Policies and Strategy for Strengthening the Curriculum of the American Public Schools." It was convened by Paul R. Hanna of Stanford University, and Ralph W. Tyler, Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, and was supported by a grant from the Fund for the Advancement of Education.

Two recommendations were unanimously adopted by the 15 participants: (a) There should be established immediately study groups for the redefinition of objectives, content and organization of the public school curriculum and for the development and experimentation with instructional materials for the courses thus designed; and (b) There should be established one or more study groups on problems of organization of the curriculum as a whole, its sequence and grade placement, the relations among the several subjects, and the conditions required for stimulating and guiding effective learning.

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A third recommendation was not unanimously adopted. Professor Paul H. Buck, Harvard University, is reported to have expressed the majority view on the recommendation when he said: "We greatly need at this time a commission which would study the American public school curriculum, and would report to the public on (a) how the present curriculum came to be, (b) its scope, that is, what the schools can and should do and what they should not attempt, (c) what the basic aims of the public schools should be, in an exposition which would clarify the conflicting alternative aims, (d) what the functions of the major subjects are, for example, what is history as a subject of study in the schools, (e) methods of instruction, including the role of textbooks and other instructional materials."

James B. Conant, president emeritus of Harvard, who this year will be involved in a study of the junior high school, opposed the recommendation of a national commission. He is reported to have said, "I don't think there is any clear and present danger which requires any single body to issue pronouncements. The competition among study groups would provide more than one point of view for school boards to consider. The layman needs education on diversity because there is so much in the air today about a national curriculum which might lead to a single pattern of education rather than the many diverse patterns which we now have. I strongly dissent from the idea of any national commission. In place of a single body looking at the school curriculum, we should have a number of universities looking at it independently."

—PAUL R. KLOHR, assistant dean, College of Education, The Ohio State University, Columbus.

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