

## In Prospect

AT THE end of a summer session and the beginning of a new school year, some educators are apt to become a bit philosophic. They might even begin to reflect on the course of educational practice and thinking. The writer is no exception. He, too, enjoys speculating about where we have been, what we have done that was good, and about that wonderful bright utopia that is always apparently just a tiny bit in the future. Surely by the end of this year we will have achieved that roseate world!

But before dwelling too long on a land of educational milk and honey let's think back to what has been.

Years ago (and what is the difference how *many* years, none of us was active then!), there was the "Age of Assurance." The educational leader of this age was comparable to the traditional captain of industry, in that he *knew* what should be in the curriculum, he was adamant about how children should be taught, and he was no shrinking violet in communicating his views to the public.

Unfortunately, the pipeline to the fountainhead of knowledge evidently sprang a leak, for this type of leader has long since folded his educational tent and stolen away. The consequence of this was that the educator began to doubt himself and his colleagues, and John Q.

Public commenced to make sounds like a professional. The "Age of Doubt" was in full flower. It seemed entirely unprofessional to make any kind of statement that smacked of some degree of surety.

Musing further, it would seem that we are now well into the "Age of Tentative Surety." We are beginning to point out to interested parties and to critics that we have a more valid basis on which to make decisions about curriculum practices and the educative process as a whole. We are learning that the kind of hunches which may or may not have paid off in gambling are not adequate for determining content, materials and instructional procedures in education: No longer do we scapegoat ourselves and others to rationalize our previous wrongdoings. We have discovered that *research* can give us the direction we need, and the basis on which we can use our creativity in devising strong educational programs.

## Our Objectives

The skeptic could argue that not much research is done by educators and, therefore, our base for making valid decisions is meager. In part, the skeptic would be correct. It is true that school systems generally budget only small amounts for research, though even here the picture is

becoming brighter. Nevertheless, it is equally true that we have many more research findings than we are now using.

The preceding paragraph actually indicates the major objectives of the ASCD Research Commission and, specifically, of this column. Those objectives are to stimulate research in order to bring about curriculum improvement, and to aid in the reporting or dissemination of the findings of research which has curriculum applications and implications.

To further the first objective the ASCD Research Commission will hold a Fifth Research Institute in Washington, D. C., December 5-9, on the theme, "Human Variability and Learning." A Western Section of the Institute will be held in San Francisco in May 1960. Scholarly presentations on the dimensions of human uniqueness are designed to open up new research areas so that the participants may then work through a research design that may be applied "back home."

The dissemination of research findings and procedures is a major responsibility of this column. In the issues that follow we will publish reports of research that has been completed and reports of research under way. The studies reported will be of various types: those done by groups of teachers who have defined and carried out a research study; those done by experimenters who have attempted a more "hard-headed" type of research and those done by individuals who had a great need-to-know. We hope, however, that the research reported will suggest a new twist, a different application, a nuance of meaning and/or a modification of existing procedures. In short, the reports are intended to be provocative and, hopefully, productive. They will range from a description of team learning in the elementary school

to social class influences on teachers' grading practices to a report of a study on underachievement which was initiated following the Fourth Research Institute, held last December in Washington, D. C.

The task of reporting research findings that might have a significant role in bringing about curriculum improvement is a large one. Yet we will enter the "Age of Valid Decisions" only when we engage in research and only when we take responsibility for sharing our knowledge of research findings with our fellow educators. Should you know of important research now being conducted we urge you to send information about it to the editor of this column.

Now to take the next step toward that long-sought roseate world!

—WALTER B. WAETJEN, *professor of education, Institute for Child Study, University of Maryland, College Park; also chairman, ASCD Research Commission.*

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