

Ideas into Action

Contributor: Robert S. Gilchrist

Current Curriculum Developments

Kimball Wiles, president-elect of ASCD, in speaking to the Missouri ASCD last fall, had this to say on the rate of change:

... we still experience the logarithmic effect in the increase of scientific knowledge. If the doubling time for the amount of scientific knowledge is 10 years, then there is 64 times as much to know now as in 1900; and by the year 2000, there will be over 2000 times as much to know.¹

If my mathematical computations are correct, the doubling of knowledge each 10 years from the year 1900 to the year 2000 would mean only 1000 times as much to know; but this is still most startling and difficult to comprehend.

How is this acceleration of the rate of change affecting us as curriculum workers and as a national professional group? Less than a month ago a recognized national leader in education stated that the general curriculum worker in the local school system such as a supervisor or a curriculum director is becoming less and less effective because he cannot keep up with the developments in the various subject fields. This same individual took a very dim view of the ability of a national professional organization such as ASCD to do anything that

really matters much as far as the direction of change in curriculum is concerned.

A superintendent in one of the school systems to which we look for promising practices said to me a few days ago, that the kind of biology which would probably be offered in a school for the next several years is rather often decided upon the happenstance of which biology institute a particular teacher attended last summer. There are, at present, three types of biology courses which are being proposed for consideration by local districts: one version utilizes an ecological and evolutionary approach; the second, a genetic and developmental approach; and the third, a biochemical and physiological approach. These courses have been developed by the Biological Sciences Curriculum Study. The point here is that the local school district should weigh carefully the possible advantages of each approach in its particular situation and then make a choice. All of this, of course, is entirely sound excepting that those of us in local school systems do not generally find the time to weigh curriculum developments with the care that these deserving studies require.

With so many curriculum development projects spawning throughout the United States, the local curriculum director and the school administrator certainly find it

¹ Bentley Glass, "Revolution in biology," *BSCS Newsletter* 9, September 1961, p. 6.

increasingly difficult to keep up-to-date and to decide which developments offer possibilities for their school system.

A New Commission

The leadership of ASCD is well aware of the significance of the task of curriculum decision making in this era of rapid educational change, and of the problem of helping curriculum workers keep abreast of new developments. In the fall of 1961 the Executive Committee of ASCD appointed a new commission. The object of this commission was to establish closer relationship to curriculum projects now under way sponsored by various groups and foundations, to establish liaison with these projects, and to define some standards for evaluating the projects in ways that would be helpful to members of ASCD who must make decisions for use of all or parts of the projects in local school systems. The spe-

cific charge to the new commission was as follows:

Explore ways by which curriculum personnel in local school systems may coordinate such educational resources as curricular proposals, projects and devices for purposes of curriculum construction in school systems

Keep well informed about such educational resources

Develop criteria to be used by local curriculum personnel in appraising such educational resources

Establish liaison with varied educational groups, encourage consideration and discussion of worthy resources, and contribute to evaluating them

Communicate resultant ideas and information to the membership, the profession, and the public.

In considering membership for this commission the Executive Committee of ASCD decided that it should be made up of generalists, public school curriculum people who deal with curriculum day by day, and specialists in subject fields.

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You will note from the listing of the commission members which follows, together with their positions, that eight of our commission members are specialists in subject fields. One is an expert on learning, another on technological developments, while five have positions which cut through subject fields and give them an opportunity to look at curriculum development from a more general standpoint.

William M. Alexander, Chairman, Department of Education, George Peabody College for Teachers, Nashville 5, Tennessee

Mildred Biddick, Director of School-Community Relations, Denver Public Schools, Denver, Colorado

Emma Birkmaier, Professor of Education, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis 14, Minnesota

Paul E. Blackwood, Specialist for Elementary Science, U. S. Office of Education, Washington 25, D. C.

Max Bogart, Assistant Director, Division of Curriculum and Instruction, State Department of Education, Trenton 25, New Jersey

Robert S. Gilchrist, Superintendent of Schools, University City Public Schools, University City, Missouri, *Chairman*

Helen Heffernan, Chief, Bureau of Elementary Education, State Department of Education, Sacramento 14, California

Kenneth B. Henderson, Professor of Education, University of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois

Gerald B. James, State Director, Vocational Education, State Department of Education, Raleigh, North Carolina

Philip Lewis, Director, Bureau of Instructional Materials, Chicago City Schools, Chicago 1, Illinois

L. S. Michael, Superintendent, Evanston Township High School, Evanston, Illinois

John U. Michaelis, Professor of Education, University of California, Berkeley, California

Delbert Oberteuffer, Professor of Educa-

tion, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio

Donald Snygg, Professor of Psychology, State University of New York, Oswego, New York

Don E. Sudlow, Chairman, Division of Fine Arts, San Fernando Valley State College, Northridge, California.

Since November 1961, the chairman has had the exhilarating experience of working with this group in trying to translate ideas into an action program which may prove to be helpful to our ASCD members. Perhaps no commission has ever had more of a "green light," more encouragement, more help from its parent organization and members than ours.

The first regular meeting of our commission was held at Las Vegas at the time of the national conference which had as its theme, "Coordinating Educational Resources." President Van Til in

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his address at the first general session spoke on the theme of the conference and of the job which the Executive Committee had asked our commission to assume.

Throughout the Las Vegas conference, area meetings were held on the broad fields, such as science, mathematics, and communication. New horizons in the various fields were presented by specialists. These were followed by reports of curriculum experimentation and new project development. The third session of the group meetings was devoted to reports of local curriculum development, new patterns of organization, and teaching innovations. In a summary session the coordinators of the area meetings pointed out the relationships among the fields of study.

The presence at the conference of scholars from the various subject fields and specialists in teacher education who can interpret the findings of the various disciplines to us in education provided our commission with an invaluable opportunity in face to face discussions to become acquainted with the current curriculum developments. For example, we discussed developments in mathematics with E. G. Begle of the School Mathematics Study Group of Stanford University.

Three rather clear conclusions emerged from our discussions at Las Vegas: (a) ASCD members would appreciate having available for ready reference a concise, reliable description of the major curriculum projects and developments that are occurring in each field. (b) Members could well make use of a set of guidelines by which to decide the soundness of a particular project in terms of what we know about learning, child development, and the demands of living in the foreseeable future. (c) If our com-

mission is to be helpful, it should move with dispatch in its work rather than taking two or three years to come out with any findings.

Issues Emerge

Following the Las Vegas conference, in June 1962, our commission met in Chicago and heard reports from each of our special field members on developments in their areas. These three days were valuable to all of us as individual members of the commission. For a generalist, this was a golden opportunity to become acquainted with the specific developments in the various subject fields and in technology and learning theory. For the specialist, the experience was perhaps even more valuable, in that he often does not have the opportunity to learn of developments in other fields which may have common elements with

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the new horizons in his own field, or may offer conflicts which should be resolved.

In our discussions, issues emerged which highlighted the need for guidelines by which any of us can finally make decisions on as solid a basis as possible. For example, questions of grouping, the S-R theory of learning, external testing programs, curriculum projects in which classroom teachers are not represented—these and other questions pushed us to think through how we in ASCD can subject proposals to a searching analysis to the end that we can capitalize on the new developments which have promise for education, and sort out and eliminate those which are based on false premises.

Our major decision in June was to prepare a series of papers on each of the fields, together with a general paper dealing with steps that might be taken by a local group in making sound curricular decisions, with the idea that these

might result in a publication for use by curriculum directors, supervisors, administrators, and specialists in various fields. Each of the commission members who represents a special area committed himself to preparing a paper for his field which would bring together the important current developments, point out trends and directions of change. A generalist volunteered to prepare the first draft of a more inclusive paper which would be titled "The Changing Curriculum in the Sixties." It would provide guidelines by which the developments in the individual fields might be evaluated.

Our commission also agreed to ask the ASCD Executive Committee to change its name from Coordinating Educational Resources to the Commission on Current Curriculum Developments. We recognize that the coordinating of educational resources must, in the main, occur at the local school system level. We hope that

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the work of our commission may be helpful to those who have the responsibility for coordination. We think of our major purpose as a commission of ASCD to be that of bringing together in understandable form a compilation of current curriculum developments and providing suggested guidelines by which to evaluate these projects.

Our commission met again in Chicago on September 29 and 30 to review the preliminary reports. Individual members of the commission had been hard at work in drafting their papers. We decided to move toward a publication for early spring 1963.

We are finding that educators are eager to discover ways of keeping up with new developments. A sectional meeting was held at the NEA 1962 convention and at least two state ASCD groups have used "Coordinating Educational Resources" as the theme of their state meetings, and have called upon individuals from our commission to participate in the programs. The ASCD 1963 conference in St. Louis in March will provide opportunities to learn about current curriculum developments and to discuss their implications for practice.

Margaret Mead has said that we must develop horizontal curriculum development techniques. By this I understand her to mean that we no longer can be content to await the slow process of new ideas being published in books which are in turn placed on library shelves as bibliographical references for prospective teachers and for teachers who return to the campus for study. Educators whose responsibility it is to provide curriculum opportunities for the boys and girls in the classroom must be knowledgeable about new ideas within months rather than years after the development occurs. Can and will ASCD be in the front ranks

of professional groups in discovering new approaches to making decisions and taking action concerning curriculum change? Our commission hopes to do its part in helping to attain this worthy goal.

—ROBERT S. GILCHRIST, *Superintendent of Schools, University City, Missouri; and Chairman of ASCD's Commission on Current Curriculum Developments.*

Modern Languages

(Continued from page 242)

the tapes and films, graded programmed readings up to newspaper and magazine difficulty, workbooks and drill tapes, a reference grammar based on the linguistic approach and a student's dictionary glossed in the foreign language should give him the necessary tools to work with another people in another culture.

Behind these language programs must stand an army of humanists in our schools—a highly skilled and dedicated teacher, a wise administration and a school faculty enthusiastic and giving the programs full cooperation. Most of all, we need more than a mere paper and pencil test to evaluate such programs. Now that our students have been asked to increase their experiences in the world at large, international relationships of all kinds ask for people who have read and experienced widely in many languages. Good will rests not alone on economic exchange but on the mutual understanding of different cultures and different peoples. Our government grows hopeful for the day when more Americans will know the languages, the cultures, the literatures and the arts of our neighbors to cement the common bonds of the minds and the hearts of men. Let there be many languages, many races, but one people.

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