

*How can we assess areas  
of professional concern?*

## Our Search for Better Answers

"A cage went in search of a bird."  
—Franz Kafka

IN THE past ten years, the United States has experienced a cultural revolution. We are still not fully aware of all that is encompassed by this revolution. Yet the key seems to be a renewed concern for the full development of our capacity as a people. "Are we demanding enough of ourselves and our children?" is the central question. Our national answer to this question is a resounding "No!"

In education, we have been confronted with innumerable proposals for better ways to develop the total capacity of our children and youth. If we doubt that there has been a cultural revolution, we have only to reflect a moment on our new confusion toward the role of our lay critics and partners. The urgency of their demands and the consequent release of great amounts of money and publicity to implement their proposals have truly left us benumbed.

In order to deal professionally with these demands, we must first of all become aware of what they mean. We need to understand that they are the result of

the revolution in our culture that is affecting us in every aspect of our national life. Yet once we see that, we still have two very large tasks to face up to. We have to bring our full intelligence to bear on the assessment of proposals that may sometimes be less than professional. We have also to mobilize ourselves for more creative leadership in the field of instructional innovation.

### Assessing Less-Than-Professional Proposals

Perhaps, as we begin to look at the less-than-professional proposals that have been made for capacity development, we ought to concede that these cannot all be attributed to "outside" sources. While many of the proposals may have originated in lay or semiprofessional thinking, the responsibility for their adoption has rested largely with the profession. The revolution has brought demands upon school people that have sometimes made it impossible for us to resist doing *something*. The "something" there to do was often the packaged proposal of persons less knowing than ourselves but perhaps more sensitive to the changing expectations of the culture. When we have hesitated, we have sometimes been superseded in decision making by our admin-

---

Alexander Frazier is Director, Center for School Experimentation, College of Education, The Ohio State University, Columbus.

istrative superiors or our boards. The demand for action is such that new roles have been defined at these levels as they have for teachers and perhaps for us.

Let us look, however, at our attempts to respond to the demands. These may be examined in terms of several classifications.

*Special programs and added services.*

In responding to those who question us about what we are doing to promote greater capacity development, we have been most active in accepting or concocting special provisions and services for limited groups of the underdeveloped. We have inaugurated new programs for the gifted, added something for those who excel in the academic disciplines or the arts (Saturday seminars or summer workshops), expanded our remedial reading program, sought to retrieve by more counseling the underachieving or those who have set their sights too low, and played around at enriching our program by offering French or typing before or after school for children whose parents really insisted upon it.

These provisions may sometimes have appealed to us less for their merit than for their manageability. We could add them on, in most cases, without disturbing the rest of our program. And we may have thought that, when the time comes, we can lop them off with equal ease.

Meanwhile, however, we have granted that these special provisions have not been very satisfying. We know that better challenges for the gifted are not adequately supplied by an extra period or two in the library each week nor for the ablest science students by a six-weeks' summer course in astronomy. More reading clinics may be needed by some school systems, but their multiplication does not improve the reading program. More

counseling services do not necessarily affect the quality of instruction. As to appended programs for volunteer pupils in new or "neglected" content, their value is something we prefer not to think about.

In short, while such special programs and added services may have the virtue of manageability, they are less than likely to make a major difference in capacity development, even for limited groups and certainly not for all pupils. By their very nature, these provisions are adjuncts; and something added on is just not enough.

*Grouping and scheduling schemes.* We have also, in trying to meet the challenge of fuller capacity development, accepted or devised a bewildering array of novel or newly resurrected schemes for grouping learners more efficiently, scheduling groups more expeditiously, and assigning teachers more advantageously. We have found a variety of new names for achievement grouping ("afternoon" grouping, nongraded grouping, track systems, etc.) and of plausible justifications for it. We have expended considerable ingenuity in shaking up or reshuffling our time schedules (the "Trump plan"). We have turned with new hope to earlier specialization in teaching (departmentalization and team teaching in all its definitions).

Again, such procedures have the virtue of manageability. We do know how to group learners, schedule classes, and assign teachers. We can make changes there without any very great effort on our part.

Yet we also know that changes of this kind, in the institutional structure of the school, are almost too easy to make. Even if we are willing to grant that the changes are not harmful to learners (and some of us have grave doubts about several of these changes), few of us will claim any very great gains in the quality of instruction. These administrative solutions for

the problem of better instruction do not get at the basic issue: Can we imagine and implement new kinds of learning experiences that will really challenge fuller capacity development?

At their best, some of these structural changes might be found to enable us to realize present intentions for some or a few learners a little better. The public quarrel, however, is with present intentions. Our current goals, even if achieved, are not any longer acceptable. Trying to do better what we have always done pretty well is just not enough.

*Materials and equipment.* What we are being asked to do is to upgrade our entire program for everybody. If special provisions for a few and ingenuity in schedule-making and the like are inadequate, then perhaps better or at least more materials and equipment will turn the trick. So we may be presumed to have thought from our eagerness in exploring this solution.

A great deal of our time has gone into trying to find ways to use the new media to better advantage, particularly television. We have been pressed, too, to expect that programed learning will help to solve the problem. From the new federal sources we have been able to add substantially to our supply of teaching materials and equipment in some of the favored fields. We have come to expect that there will be authoritative textual materials issued by each commission charged with developing new content.

Of course, we can use more materials and equipment. Most of us have properly been glad to get them. Likewise we are happy to have the best that are available or can be devised. Yet most of us know, too, that better resources alone will not assure better teaching. The lay position that what is needed is the multiplication of master teaching via televi-

sion, programed learning, or the perfected text cannot be ours. The search for some way to protect the learner from incompetent teaching through interposing foolproof teaching materials and equipment we know professionally to be a dead end. We want the best resources, but for the task at hand these resources are just not enough.

Perhaps these categories of less-than-professional proposals can stand as representative. In their eagerness to inspire action toward doing more for all children and youth, the lay and semiprofessional sources have centered on the aspects that are most manageable—and perhaps most visible. We have ourselves responded to special programs and added services, to grouping and scheduling schemes, and to materials and equipment as possible answers. We should concede that some aspects of what we have been responding to may have merit. We know that new ideas sometimes come in first as special programs and that overdue services are sometimes gained by being sold as meeting special needs, that certainly some ways of grouping and scheduling are superior to others, and that materials and equipment are important. Yet we know, too, as we have said, that these are not enough, that at least alone they are not enough.

Our question, then, is whether as we assess these approaches more professionally we can at the same time balance the expenditure of effort which we may have to make in working on the conditions of learning and teaching by an equal effort in trying to improve the quality of the learning experience for everybody.

Here let us note briefly what seem to be some of the areas in which we are already looking at the quality of learning experiences. Then let us suggest a few

guidelines that perhaps we should use in choosing where to invest ourselves.

### Defining Areas of Professional Concern

What are the areas of true professional concern? Perhaps any definition of these areas is inadequate. Nevertheless we may be able to look at certain characteristics of proposed areas. These may serve as reminders for us rather than as an introduction to recent findings in each field of study.

1. *Language development.* We are learning by taking another look at children's language that, on entering school, most of them have already mastered the basic structures of our language. The investigations of Strickland and Loban are opening up for us a whole new need to think through once again our expectations for children and the possible limitations we may have imposed upon them. Similarly, at later levels, the more recent work in linguistics is being explored with increasing attention to the development of an approach to language analysis that can really make a difference in the power to use language more effectively.

2. *Cultural deprivation.* On all sides we have come to see that we need to re-study our conception of what contributes to and interferes with the capacity development of children and youth from culturally deprived or different backgrounds. From a beginning at the secondary level, these investigations have quickly moved into the primary and now the preschool years. The most exciting reconceptualizations are taking place in the role of adult interaction and of language development, but these are only two of many approaches being developed and tested out.

3. *Creativity.* Here, again, the widespread interest in reexamining our own limitations in thinking about the concept of capacity is linked with exploratory efforts to see what it might mean to teaching if we decided that creativity not only is learned but that we ought to make an effort to develop more of this capacity in all children and youth. The work of Guilford in identifying some of the characteristics of the creative person has been followed by that of Getzels and Jackson and now by that of Torrance. We are moving at once into a truly professional concern for defining a new vision of possibilities and implementing this vision.

4. *Better start in reading.* Another exciting movement, with a truly phenomenal base, is that of making use of a broader range of materials for the teaching of reading, even with beginners. The growth of this movement has become a kind of criterion of the professionalization of both teachers and supervisors. The partnership that has emerged in agreeing to learn together about what this new approach means is one of the best examples of a new experimentalism in curriculum development.

5. *Study of the self-concept.* The work being done with the exploration of new insights into self-perception and with what these may signify in teaching is harder to check out than some of the other professional developments. Nevertheless, the attention being given to this area also marks a high level of professionalization. Despite all the limitations that are to be found in most definitions now being used in talking about providing for individual differences, we find a great deal of hope in the attention centering upon the self-concept. A generation of child study has left us with a heritage of understandings that will, we be-

lieve, enable us to break through to help children retain or develop attitudes toward self and others that will enable them to make fuller use of their innate potentialities.

6. *New content for young children.* Various studies are supporting the expression by teachers that, to use Kenneth Wann's words, "Today's children know more and *can* know more than children of another era." (Or perhaps children here, as in language development, have always been ahead of our conception of their capacity for learning.) Huck's work with the sources of information used by six-year-olds and McAulay's investigations of social concepts of young children are indicative of a new interest in making certain that what we offer children in science and social studies is meeting their needs.

7. *Teaching roles and functions.* We are newly interested in a thorough analysis of the teaching act, as exemplified in the work of Marie Hughes, Ned Flanders, and B. O. Smith. What do teachers do to support the kind of learning that causes children to develop their powers for learning? What may they sometimes do that shuts down on learning? Here we have research directly on the teacher-pupil relationship that not only brings investigation as a process close to home but promises to help us all move toward more support for the full capacity development of all learners.

8. *Study of the disciplines.* Attempts to get at the essential nature of the disciplines hold much promise. We need to see whether emphasis on the generalizations and relationships that separate one way of looking at the world from another may help us in teaching. At present, much thinking is still needed to test out what will make the greatest

difference: key concepts, ways of working, or what? We all need to participate actively in reflecting on these matters so that we come out with a better sense of our own as to what counts for most in the various disciplines. The tendency to leave the job to scholars alone or to rush in with newly abstract content may prove damaging. Here, in truth, is an area in which our best thought is needed in trying to push out the boundaries on learning for everybody, ourselves included.

9. *New concern for aesthetics.* Perhaps this area may stand to represent another approach to defining a new concept of capacity development. In our culture, attention to the arts may have proceeded faster than in the schools. With more time for self-development, we have as a people moved rapidly into the selection of better books and their purchase, into providing ourselves not only with the finest sound equipment but with records of great variety, and into buying art reproductions and objects and more fully supporting museum exhibitions. A truly professional concern with all aspects of capacity development will deal too with new horizons for ourselves in subject areas that may have suffered from some neglect. The attention now going to the teaching of literature in the elementary school and to assaying the meaning of the new criticism for secondary English are evidence that we are on the move.

These several examples are of the areas in which we are already striving to improve what we are doing in order to move toward a higher level of concern for capacity development as demanded by our culture. While all of these seem highly promising, to stand on these alone would not be enough.

Perhaps we might try to point up a few guidelines that could help us as we seek other areas in which an investment of our

time would be most professional. We may wish to think of these as criteria by which we would judge whether an area would warrant our giving ourselves to it fully.

1. Does the proposal promise a real enlargement of our thinking beyond our present vision of possibilities? What we are asking ourselves here is whether we think the attainment of new insights or understandings in a given area might make an actual difference. Would such attainment open up the fuller development of capacity as presently conceived or would it help us envision new kinds of capacities with which we ought to be concerned?

2. Does the proposed study give actual promise to involve us deeply in achieving new insights, values, understandings and skills? What we must do in providing vital leadership in instructional innovation is to find those points of concern at which somebody ought to be working and begin. We ought to combine our full resources of professional personnel in this kind of endeavor, as we have long agreed. Teachers have a professional right to expect an opportunity for continuous assessment of teaching needs and to have the kind of assistance that will help them meet these needs more satisfactorily. We all have a responsibility for working on what really does touch us deeply.

3. Will the proposed study be difficult to do? New knowledge of the kind that actually counts accumulates gradually, sometimes with less than the final answer. In fact, if we wanted to build out this idea, we might say that the process of gaining genuinely significant new knowledge (not information only) is always slow; always uncertain and risky; always arduous; always, of course, exciting—and always, finally, inadequate. The search is never over.

Let us return to Franz Kafka's aphorism: "A cage went in search of a bird." This symbolizes for me our current less-than-professional over-concern with the arrangements for learning. Our more truly professional search is one that begins with the learner and his processes and ourselves and our insights—and moves outward from imagining new possibilities for learning to their implementation. Our quest should always be in terms that will support as fully as may be the learner's own search for more knowledge, satisfaction and significance in his total experience.

---

### Focusing

*(Continued from page 437)*

work, various aspects of preparing and scoring examinations.

New avenues are also opening for research on teaching and learning. Recording of behavior is at last available through sound and picture. The treatment of multiple variables, always a major problem in behavioral sciences, can yield to the speed of electronic computers.

It would be idle to gainsay the threat of unimaginative use of new media. Most of the new devices have within them a potential for stereotyping students, curriculum and teaching; of submerging the individual in the mass; of focusing on passive reception rather than dynamic learning. They also offer a golden promise of adding new and creative dimensions to education, of relieving the teacher of non-creative chores, and arming the teacher with powerful tools in individualizing his work. Where we place our emphasis, how creative we are in using these new aids will determine whether they are used for ill or for good.

Copyright © 1963 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.