

● Letters to the Editor

Contributors: William H. Fisher
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NATIONAL TESTING—ITS CORRECT NAME

March 23, 1966

Editor, *Educational Leadership*

Dear Dr. Leeper:

As a longtime reader of your magazine and as a sometime member of ASCD, I am constrained to react to the two letters by Professors Turney and Altman which were published in the issue of March 1966.¹ In the main, their point is that the "fuss" over national assessment amounts to a tempest in a teapot. Events may in due course prove them correct, but the circumstantial evidence at the present time is running strongly against their perspective.

Those of us who have been teaching Foundations courses (Historical-Philosophical-Comparative, etc.) are well aware that a major "prop" to the rather rigid structure of society in the nations of western Europe, has been the test-centered theory and practice of education. These systems in the

European countries are founded upon a progression from one kind of school to another kind, with the pupil's educational and occupational future determined almost exclusively by test results.

An implied answer by Professors Turney and Altman to the above is: "Who says that national assessment must necessarily take the form of a vast testing program?" I repeat: The circumstantial evidence so far is on the side of those who claim that it will take that route.

A reading of Francis Keppel's article in the *NEA Journal* for February 1966 can only convince one that national standardized testing is, at least, one aspect of his plan. When John Gardner, now secretary of HEW was with the Carnegie Foundation, he was instrumental in setting up experimental testing programs on a "sampling" basis in the full knowledge that these might lead toward their future use on a nation-wide basis. Harold Howe, the new Commissioner of Education (like Kep-

¹ David Turney and Burton E. Altman. "National Assessment—Why All the Fuss?" *Educational Leadership* 23 (6): 442-46; March 1966.

pel and Gardner) has pronounced Ivy League educational ties. President John H. Fischer of Teachers College, Columbia University, along with other prominent educators, are unofficial advisers to the former three members of LBJ's educational team. As an alumnus, I receive *TC Topics* which in the issue of January 1966 quotes President Fischer specifically as, "Calling for a nationwide testing program in elementary and secondary schools" (see page one).

Who at this stage of a number of LBJ's programs, educational and otherwise, would make so bold as to claim that none of these programs has been characterized by political double-talk, as a means of bringing them to fruition? One of many instances might be cited in the recent historic reversal of our traditional policy of separation of church and state with respect to education. The law says that the money will not go directly from the federal government to the parochial school, but rather to the individual parochial school pupil. With fifteen percent of total school enrollments in parochial schools, grades one-twelve, would any serious person deny that the bureaucracy involved in this plan will necessarily be considerable? And this, even before the law has been tested in the courts!

National assessment, say Turney and Altman, does not axiomatically mean nationwide testing. Or even if it did, they ask, would this be all bad? I question again: What is the trend, to date? Beyond political maneuvering on the church-state question, let's have a look at government controls in the

way in which monetary grants to local and state districts, as well as to higher education, have been handled. Absolutely no federal control? But a thousand times a thousand, we have been reassured that federal aid could never lead to federal control! While there is still time, I want to ask the question—Who has been kidding whom?

Also from among the advocates of that euphemism known as "national assessment," I want a thorough appraisal of the nature and kind of *objectives*. So far I have seen not so much as one statement regarding well stipulated educational objectives. In lieu of these, is it any wonder that some of us are joining with Harold Hand, Harold Taylor and a few others who have had the courage to stand up and be counted? We have long been aware that, when called by its correct name—national testing—it becomes clear that the test-makers will ultimately control teachers by forcing them to teach for the tests, and thus, they will also control the curriculum.

One final point offered for the consideration of those who advocate compromise on this important problem: His statement has been reduced to a well known colloquialism, but it was Dante who first of all made the cogent comment, "The hottest places in hell are reserved for those who, in times of moral crises, preserve for themselves an attitude of—neutrality!"

Very truly yours,

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TEAM TEACHING VS. CORE? A REPLY

March 29, 1966

Editor: *Educational Leadership*

Dear Dr. Leeper:

I do not question my good friend Nelson Bossing's right to say what he wishes to about my book *Principles and Procedures of Curriculum Improvement*,¹ for that is a reviewer's privilege. However, I want to take issue with him on his misinterpretation of my statements concerning the core curriculum and team teaching. In his review, he has chosen to concentrate a major portion of his comments on these topics, to which I devote five pages of my book.

Dr. Bossing indicated that I consider the core "largely a curriculum movement of the past, now being superseded by, of all things, team teaching."

My writings will document the fact that I am a proponent of the core idea which focuses the curriculum on the personal-social problems of the learner. I am not one who welcomes the fact that this is no longer as vigorous a curriculum movement as it once was. But the evidence from Wright's studies² shows clearly that the core conceived of as an experience-centered approach has materially diminished. This is true

¹Published by The Ronald Press Company, 1965, and reviewed in *Educational Leadership* 23: 434-36; February 1966.

²Grace S. Wright and Edith S. Greer. *The Junior High School: A Survey of Grades 7-8-9 in Junior and Junior-Senior High Schools, 1959-60*. U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Office of Education, Bulletin 1963, No. 32. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1963. p. 18-20.

in my own state of Maryland, which was one of the states in the forefront of the core movement. Anyone who believes the core is as healthy a movement today as in its earlier history, equates the core with the administrative block-time device, such as Bossing describes team teaching to be. I would fully agree that both can be static developments.

I suspect our essential difference in point of view lies in whether or not the core concept must be confined to what was originally defined as the core. In my chapter on "The Evolving Core Curriculum" in another book,³ I analyzed at greater length the core and team teaching, pointing out similarities and differences. I stated that:

First, it must be recognized that either core or team teaching as a curriculum or organizational design can be a hollow shell. No substantive changes in approach or content need occur. That should be unmistakably clear from the data indicating the small proportion of core programs that actually are of the experience-centered type. But the significant questions are: Can team teaching in some form serve the same purposes as the core? Is it a form of administrative organization incompatible with the core approach?

In order to answer these questions, one has to start with the assumption that neither the core curriculum nor team teaching is a fixed, immutable pattern, rather they are in essence experimental approaches. Otherwise, any answer is likely to be an argument for a never-changing

³Harl R. Douglass, editor. *The High School Curriculum*, 3rd edition. New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1964. Chapter 13.

idea that has its own built-in vested interests.⁴

Bossing neglected to note that in the book he reviewed I characterized the core as "a growing, dynamic, and experimental concept of curriculum which represents a revolt against the rigidity and extreme compartmentalization of the curriculum" and that "it is this dynamic quality that can be traced as an evolutionary process to the present developments in curriculum organization."⁵

Furthermore, I raised the question as to whether this basic concept of the curriculum (core) had "entirely lost its influence on the American secondary school curriculum." I asked: "Have the dynamism, the experimental force, and the flexibility, which represented its greatest contributions to curriculum development, disappeared from the scene?"⁶

If the core is a fundamental curriculum concept that utilizes the problem-solving approach and focuses on the interest of the pupils, rather than an administrative device, then the concepts could be found to live on in other types of administrative devices and settings. The problem, it seems to me, is that some regard the core curriculum as *the core*, in their own image, rather than an experimental approach. When it becomes stratified into any special form, then it is the form rather than the substance that survives. Read the definitions of the experience-centered, problem-solving core given by various experts and note that the concept can still be found in current programs.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

⁵ Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 319.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 320.

Bossing seems to feel that I equate the idea of team teaching with the core, or, as he says in the review, that I believe the core is being superseded by team teaching. A careful reading of the preface of my curriculum book to which he refers (or to my chapter in Douglass' book) will show that this is not so. Vars, in his excellent article in which he compares Bossing's and my statements regarding team teaching and the core, recognizes the fact that I believe that there are good opportunities to use the core concepts in team teaching, not the inevitable results.⁷ His conclusion is that team teaching may be "the Devil in disguise" and may not be the salvation of the core.

I do not profess to be a savior of the core. All I want to do is to preserve the vigor of the idea, the concept. Team teaching may never save anyone except the administrator who wants to be in the swing of things. But this is an opportunity only.

A study of significant social issues is no more guaranteed by team teaching than it is by the core, unless creative, dedicated, intelligent teachers work together under good leadership with a determination to make these things come to pass.⁸

I pointed out in my curriculum book that some team teaching projects have several of the characteristics of the core but in no sense can they be said necessarily to contain these elements. Bossing chose to ignore these passages, which present my position:

These are recognizable characteristics similar to the core. The utilization of these

⁷ Gordon F. Vars, "Can Team Teaching Save the Core Curriculum?" *Phi Delta Kappan* XLVII: 258-62; January 1966.

⁸ Douglass, *op. cit.*, p. 266.

opportunities, or a problem-solving approach, may or may not occur but the chances of its occurring are greater than in the conventional classroom situation. The fact that team teaching may be traditional in nature should certainly be no surprise. The unmistakable evidence from studies of the core programs was that most of these programs were of the same nature.

The team approach in many cases has been opposed to unifying two or more subjects and has gone in the direction of fragmentation of the curriculum, with less stress on individual-personal relationships. However, that trend is no more inherent in the concept of team teaching than it is in the core. The imagination, vision, and perception of the teacher as to what is important for adolescents of secondary school age are the fundamental factors in whether core or team teaching utilizes its potential for integration and understanding of relationships among subject matter from different fields. . . .

But neither core nor team teaching is any guarantee of teacher-pupil planning, problem-solving, integration of subject matter, concern for pupil problems, or adapting of subject matter to capabilities and aspirations of students.⁹

I do not accept team teaching uncritically as a movement which will absorb the core. I have seen good team teaching situations in my state, taught by teachers who were former core teachers and who were utilizing the concepts of the core. I have seen static situations in both team teaching and the core.

There is little to be said for a core class which has become so routinized that pupils go through lengthy, dull reporting as "culminating activities."

⁹ Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 322, 323.

Perhaps we cannot solve the problem of specialization involved in team teaching, but we can try. There are difficulties in developing either a core program or team teaching. A return to the subject-centered approach surely cannot be said to be assured in any form of curriculum organization where teachers understand how to utilize the experience-centered approach.

Team teaching has some promising opportunities. Whether it utilizes them depends on the vision of those involved. I have hopes that educators will be able to devise ways in which a member of the team can serve as a leader in the use of cooperative planning with pupils and teachers and in which personal and social problems can become the focus of the members of the teaching team, using their talents in creative ways.

Even the Muscatine Committee report of a group of professors in the academic fields at the University of California, Berkeley, recommended problem-oriented courses, in which, instead of a traditional academic college subject, "you'd take a problem such as 'poverty' or 'urbanism' and bring an economist, a historian, even a poet, and see what all the different experts had to say about it."¹⁰ Perhaps some of the ideas of the core may live on!

Cordially,

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¹⁰ *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 18, 1966:
p. 20.

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