

Report of a Survey of Readers of *Educational Leadership*

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THE ASCD Publications Committee at its annual planning meeting in 1970 recommended that a survey of the readers of *Educational Leadership* be undertaken to receive feedback which might suggest relevant policy changes to the editor, to the Publications Committee, and/or to the Executive Council.

A preliminary report based on partial returns was submitted to the Board of Directors at the St. Louis meeting in March 1971. Since there appeared to be a high general interest in the study at the St. Louis meeting, it was decided to publish the report in its entirety in *Educational Leadership* rather than merely mailing copies of the summary to those ASCDers who participated in the survey.

Procedures

The Sample. According to the Washington headquarters office, ASCD had 12,938 individual members in 1971. The cost for polling all of the members would be prohibitive, and therefore ways of sampling the members were explored. Drawing a random sample from the population of persons comprising ASCD turned out to be a very difficult task since there were no printed-out lists of members which would facilitate drawing a pure random sample.

After considering various alternatives, it was decided that all persons, either mem-

bers or subscribers, who were renewing their subscriptions during the time interval November 20 through December 15, 1970, would be taken as a sample. Whether or not systematic factors such as attitudes, professional assignments, matters of geography, or reading habits lead a person to renew his subscription in December rather than at a different time of the year is not known. It was assumed that this group of persons, numbering 498, would serve as a representative sample of the readership population of *Educational Leadership*.

The Questionnaire. The purpose of this study was to have the readers describe their reading habits concerning the various sections of *Educational Leadership* and to ask the readers to record their judgments about the general relevance and balance of the journal. To meet these modest goals, preliminary items were constructed by members of the Publications Committee in the early fall of 1970. The suggested questions were duplicated and circulated informally among professional persons both in and out of ASCD at the NEA Building and among ASCD members on the faculty of the University of Maryland. The purpose of this step was to identify

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ambiguity in the wording of the items and redundancy in the responses.

As a result of this exercise, 25 items were selected for inclusion in the final instrument. These items were classified into three general categories: (a) those that described the respondents; (b) those that asked for responses on the part of respondents reflecting their attitudes toward *Educational Leadership* in general and also toward specific features found in the journal; and (c) those that were designed to inform respondents about journal policies. Since the representativeness of the sample was suspect at best, as many as nine questions were asked in the first category so that the nature of the respondents could be described. Fourteen questions were included in the second category and three in the last classification. No efforts were made to assess the reliability of the respondents' judgments over time, nor was an estimation made of the internal consistency of the instrument.

The Mailings. During the first week of January 1971, 498 questionnaires were mailed to those who had renewed their subscriptions between November 20 and December 15, 1970. The mailing included (a) the questionnaire, (b) a stamped pre-addressed envelope for returning the questionnaire, and (c) a prestamped postcard which people could use to indicate that they had returned the questionnaire and that they would like to receive a copy of the final report of the survey.

In the planning of the study, two sets of envelopes had been prepared by the central office. The first set was used in the initial mailing. The second set was utilized to keep a record of those not responding. Whenever a postcard was received indicating that the questionnaire had been returned to ASCD, that person's name was removed from the list of names found in the second set of envelopes. While it is possible that some persons might have mailed the card in without actually sending in the questionnaire, this was considered an unlikely event. By February 1, approximately 230 replies had been received.

At this time, a sample of 100 nonre-

spondents was randomly drawn from the envelopes remaining in the second set and a follow-up mailing was carried out. The mailing for the follow-up study included a brief note from the Executive Secretary encouraging the recipients to respond to the questionnaire at their earliest convenience and a second copy of the questionnaire clearly marked as a follow-up instrument. Within the next twenty days another 109 questionnaires were returned—61 follow-up instruments and 48 original ones. While it is possible that some of the 48 stragglers were prompted to return an original questionnaire as a result of a follow-up letter, the 48 were considered a part of the responses to the first mailing. Thus the final tally included 278 questionnaires returned originally and 61 returned as a result of a follow-up effort, for a grand total of 339 returns—a return rate of 68 percent.

Representativeness of the Responders. Several checks were made to test the assumption that the responders to the instrument in this study were representative of the total ASCD membership of 12,938. The checks were of two kinds: (a) an examination of the differences between the persons who responded at the first mailing and those responders of the second mailing, who represented the original recipients of the questionnaire who chose initially not to respond; and (b) a comparison of the total sample of respondents in this study to some other characteristics of the ASCD membership estimated by a survey carried on concurrently in the early months of 1971.¹

First Mailing vs. Second Mailing. Table 1 presents the findings of the first mailing responses separately from the second mailing responses on several categories. On the whole, the distributions are quite similar. The second mailing had a somewhat higher proportion of administrators—people perhaps too busy to fill in the original request but who responded to the Executive Secretary's note

¹ ASCD Survey Report. "Priorities for Action." 1. Membership Data. Processed by J. Griffin Leshar. (Mimeo.) Dated February 22, 1971. (This report was distributed to the ASCD Board of Directors at the St. Louis meeting.)

	First mailing (N=278)	Second mailing (N=61)	Total sample (N=339)	Con-current sample ² (N=247)
1. Major Assignment				
Administrator	38.0	44.3	39.2	37.7
Curr. Specialist	17.4	9.8	16.0	17.4
Supervisor	13.0	13.1	13.1	13.0
Teacher Educator	19.9	16.4	19.3	22.3
Teacher	4.3	4.9	3.9	3.6
2. Level of School				
Elementary	25.3	37.1	27.4	32.0
Secondary	16.2	11.3	15.3	14.6
Elem/Sec	31.8	17.7	29.2	32.0
Under-Grad/Grad	18.1	24.2	19.1	21.5
3. ASCD Membership Period				
0-5 years	52.9	55.7	53.4	55.9
6-10 years	24.6	19.7	23.7	23.1
11-15 years	12.3	13.1	12.5	10.9
More than 15 years	9.8	11.5	10.1	10.1
4. Highest Degree				
Bachelor's	5.0	3.2	4.7	Not available
Master's	44.8	41.9	44.3	available
Advanced Graduate Specialist	17.2	17.7	17.3	
Doctorate	33.0	33.9	33.1	

Percentages do not add to 100 percent because of miscellaneous classifications which are omitted from this table.

Table 1. Comparisons of First Mailing Responses, Second Mailing Responses, Total Sample Responses, and Responses of Concurrent Survey of ASCD Members on Selected Items of the Readership Study Questionnaire (in Percentages)

of encouragement. The second mailing returns seemed to include somewhat more college and university persons on a percentage basis than did the earlier mailing. These data seem to support the assumption that the 68 percent returns do represent the total population of 498 originally sampled, but the support is not overwhelming.

Total Returns vs. Returns of Another Survey. Also included in Table 1 are the findings of a concurrent survey performed on a sample of ASCD members during the early winter of 1971. While this companion study did not use strict random sampling procedures either, the systematic way in which members were selected on geographic bases suggests that it is likely to represent the total membership of ASCD. The findings of the two surveys are quite similar. The percentages reported for "major assignment" are startlingly close in all areas. The similarity between findings is also apparent in "level of school" categories and in the "ASCD membership period" classifications. These comparisons give support to the contention that the survey responses are quite repre-

² ASCD Survey Report, op. cit.

sentative of the ASCD membership as a whole.

Findings

Since the responses from the first mailing and the second mailing seemed so similar, the findings presented in this section are not broken down between these groups. Instead, the total responses are displayed for each of the questions pertaining to *Educational Leadership*. A brief discussion follows each presentation of findings.

Item I.* On the average, how much of *Educational Leadership* do you read carefully?

27.1%	Practically the entire issue
27.4%	Somewhat more than half of the issue
23.2%	About half of every issue
19.0%	Somewhat less than half of every issue
3.3%	Practically none of the issue

These data indicate that 54.5 percent of the respondents reported that they read carefully more than half of each issue of *Educational Leadership*. This figure compares favorably with a similar study conducted by AERA of *The Educational Researcher* in 1967, which indicated that "slightly over half the respondents claim to read or skim carefully the entire issue."³ The percentages reported under Item I seem to be quite similar for subgroups within ASCD, e.g., administrators, supervisors, teachers, and others entered into Section 1 of Table 1. A chi-square procedure testing for interactions between a respondent's major assignment and his response to Item I produced an observed statistic which was not significant at the .05 level.

Item J. In general, how would you rate the relevancy of the articles in *Educational Leadership* to you and to your work?

15.2%	extremely relevant
50.3%	relevant
31.8%	moderate relevance
2.7%	irrelevant
0.0%	extremely irrelevant

On the whole, the responses to this item suggest that *Educational Leadership* is meeting a professional need in the field. Again, the interaction between responses to this

* Items are identified by their position in the original questionnaire.

³ Memorandum to James Rathes from Jason Millman, dated September 13, 1967.

item and the respondents' major assignments was inspected by chi-square analysis, and the results yielded a null finding. Evidently the percentages reported under Item J hold regardless of the major job assignment of the respondent.

Item K. Articles in *Educational Leadership* are sometimes criticized as too abstract; others seem to be so specific that their meaning cannot be generalized. How would you rate the general thrust of articles from your viewpoint?

17.9% too abstract
76.7% balanced
2.7% too specific

Again, the findings seem to support the general thrust that represents the status quo in *Educational Leadership*. Over three-fourths of the respondents feel that the current selection of articles is in general quite balanced between specificity and abstractness. The percentages reported under Item K are found to hold up for every category found in Sections 1 and 2 of Table 1. There was no interaction observed between the responses to this item and major assignments or level of school to which the respondent is assigned. For both classifications, observed chi-squares fell well below the required critical levels established at the .05 level.

Item N. For each of the following regular features, please check the response that most accurately describes your reading patterns.

Feature	Rating		
	Usually read carefully	Usually skim	Rarely read or skim
Editorial	41.1%	47.9%	7.7%
Theme Articles	50.3	45.2	1.5
Innovations in Education	77.2	20.8	1.8
Research in Review	35.6	51.6	11.0
Letters to the Editor	6.8	44.2	45.7
Research Supplement	30.6	51.6	11.0
Book Reviews	20.0	59.4	18.5
News Notes	25.9	52.4	19.0
Viewpoint	23.5	55.7	15.9
Advertisements	5.0	40.9	50.7

The responses indicate that the section "Innovations in Education" is by far the most popular, as shown by the large number of people who report usually reading it carefully. The theme articles and the editorial follow in terms of the frequency and care with which they are read, as reported by the participants in this survey. In examining

interactions between classifications reported in Table 1 and the responses set out above, only two significant relationships were observed. College persons reported reading the Research Supplement and the book reviews to a higher degree than did public school people in general and teachers in particular. This finding generally held true for the Research in Review column also, but the observed chi-square in that analysis was just short of being significant. All the other percentages reflect the reactions of ASCDers regardless of their major assignment or the level of schooling in which they work. Most noticeable in these findings are the low marks received by the book review section.

General responses or reactions to items designed to inform members of the survey sample or procedures or trends within the organization follow.

Item L. Do you recommend that *Educational Leadership* continue to have theme issues?

52.2% Yes
41.6% Yes, but not every issue
5.0% No

These results seem to support the idea of retaining theme issues at least for some of the issues of *Educational Leadership*. The 93.8 percent who responded in favor of the issues in a general way compares with the 95.5 percent who said that they usually read carefully or skim the theme articles in their response to Item N.

Item M. Did you know that in a recent analysis of all issues of *Educational Leadership*, the category of "Social Involvement," including treatments of minorities, ranked second in frequency of appearance only to the general category of curriculum and instruction?

24.5% Yes
73.8% No

These data suggest either that people are unaware of the general thrusts of *Educational Leadership*, or perhaps they interpreted the question to mean "Is your knowledge supported by data?" In any case, it is important that people have a chance to examine the profile of frequencies of topics appearing in *Educational Leadership*. The responses to this question suggest that every three or four years *Educational Leadership* should run a brief report of the categories it has emphasized over each reporting period.

Item O. Did you know that *Educational Leadership* accepts unsolicited manuscripts for publication?
52.2% Yes
46.7% No

In spite of announcements appearing in *Educational Leadership* soliciting manuscripts from the readership at large, a substantial number of respondents did not realize that unsolicited manuscripts are published each year. The responses to this question suggest that the announcement in *Educational Leadership* be made even more prominent. Parenthetically, the minimum editorial staff assigned to *Educational Leadership* barely has the resources to process the unsolicited manuscripts it receives currently.

Item P. Did you know that the articles submitted to the Research Supplement are reviewed and evaluated by members of the ASCD Research Council?
36.7% Yes
61.8% No

Again, the readership seems to be unaware of some of the mechanism for evaluating the manuscripts that are submitted for publication. The special arrangements for processing research reports submitted for publication in the Research Supplement especially need to be made more public.

Conclusions and Recommendations

- While the theme articles, the editorial, and the feature "Innovations in Education" are read quite thoroughly by the readers, the remainder of the journal copy seems mostly to be skimmed and/or used mainly as a reference resource. This observation suggests that *Educational Leadership* should continue to publish short articles on a wide variety of subjects, with highly selective bibliographies required of all authors.

- The balance found in *Educational Leadership* between abstractness and concreteness seems to be acceptable to a vast majority of the readers. However, a little more than one-sixth of the readers hold that the articles in *Educational Leadership* are too abstract. This percentage seemed to reflect the reactions of members regardless of their major professional assignment. This finding, coupled with the highly positive response to the feature "Innova-

tions in Education," suggests that the editor might do well to give more emphasis to manuscripts which are more specific about practices and programs. This suggestion is made with the realization that the overall response of the membership was that the balance between concreteness and abstractness was in the main satisfactory.

- The low ratings given to the "Book Review" section suggest that this feature receive some special attention by the editor and the Publications Committee. Efforts to make the reviews more timely and more analytical should make this section of *Educational Leadership* increasingly relevant to the readers.

- The "Research in Review" feature and the Research Supplement received rather mediocre ratings in this survey. An analysis of the findings indicates that these features are read primarily by the college-level persons, but the relationships between major assignment or "highest degree received" categories were not significant at the .05 level, notwithstanding the apparent (but not significant) trends in the data. It is recommended that the Research Council take steps to carry out a content analysis of the articles which have appeared in the Research Supplement and the topics which have been covered in the "Research in Review" column to check out the balance that exists between interest areas. Second, it is recommended that because of the large amount of skimming apparently done by the readers of these features, the articles and/or topics found in these sections should vary topically from issue to issue and even within a given issue.

- Unfortunately, the questionnaire was not diagnostic. What aspects of each feature related to a reader's only skimming an article or feature rather than reading it carefully can only be surmised. It appears that the "News Notes," "Viewpoint," and "Letters to the Editor" features need to be examined in the light of these findings for ways they could be improved. The findings may simply reflect the nature of the feature. For instance, the "News Notes" feature indeed is designed and edited to enhance skimming. Alternatively, the large amount of skimming in these features and even in the overall findings concerning the journal may only be a reflection of the diverse interests found within our organization.

- The readers seemed to endorse the idea of issue themes. The Publications Committee

should continue the practice of having themes for issues. It should also continue the use of a large portion of the journal for publishing unsolicited materials selected for their timeliness and significance.

- Because of the evident diversity of professional preparation and responsibility of the readership of the journal, no one issue of the journal should be directed exclusively to a single audience within the Association.

All in all, the results of this survey are very satisfying to those who work with the ASCD publications program. In general, the reactions of our readership seem to be quite positive. It is possible that the sample upon which the survey was based was a biased one. Also, it is possible to argue that the manner in which the questions were posed elicited predictable positive answers.

In our judgment, these arguments do not seem too weighty. Rather, we suspect that the data reflect a general satisfaction with *Educational Leadership* in its present form. That is not to say that we should stand pat. The Publications Committee is eager to receive suggestions about ways the data presented in this report might be analyzed, interpreted, or reinterpreted. In addition, we would be pleased to hear suggestions for ways of improving *Educational Leadership* specifically or the ASCD publications program generally.

APPENDIX 1. Free Responses to Survey Questionnaire

The survey instrument provided an opportunity for "free responses." On the 339 forms returned, there were 70 free responses. The comments included testimonials and criticism, along with specific advice and general suggestions.

It is interesting to note that an item criticized by one respondent was often praised by another. One writer stated, "I do feel that ASCD keeps abreast of and responsive to every educational need demanded by our changing society." Another wrote, "Some of your articles are a bit too-far-out liberal for a middle-of-the-roader like me."

Several respondents mentioned using *Educational Leadership* as a resource or reference. This use of the journal might be explored in the next questionnaire study done of the readership.

APPENDIX 2. Findings of Interest to ASCD Leadership

What follows are some general observations stemming from the analysis of the returns that are not directly related to *Educational Leadership* but which may have some bearing on administrative decisions.

- Almost half (47.5%) of the membership report that they belong to several organizations other than ASCD with equal commitment. Only one quarter (25.5%) reported prime allegiance to ASCD. These figures seemed to represent the membership across all major assignment categories; that is, the percentages reported in the preceding sentence pretty much reflect principals, supervisors, teachers, etc. In addition, the percentages are similar throughout the "years of membership in ASCD" groupings.

- Over half of the membership have only been in the organization from 0 to 5 years (53.4%). Another quarter of the membership have been in ASCD for less than 10 years (23.7%).

- According to the self-report of the respondents, the younger members have not submitted articles to *Educational Leadership*. Only the older members with 15 years or more of belonging to ASCD report that they have published manuscripts in *Educational Leadership* in significant numbers. Sixty percent of those who have been in ASCD for 15 years or more reported having a manuscript published. Only 2.5% of those who have been in ASCD for 6-10 years reported having an article published.

- Almost two-fifths of the respondents were administrators (39.2%). Only 3.9% of those responding to this questionnaire were teachers.

- Of the greatest importance, the reactions to *Educational Leadership* for the most part were independent of major work assignment, level of schooling in which the assignment was carried out, or any other factors. ASCD is apparently composed of persons who come from many different backgrounds, who work at many different assignments, who represent all corners of the United States, but who all share in general similar views about what is important in education. This finding suggests that the ASCD leadership should be less concerned about titles, geography, and other apparently irrelevant variables in making decisions, and more alert to the common ideas people who possess these diverse characteristics share in common.

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