Cities Are for More Than Conventions

Dear Editor:

Cities are many things. They are confusion and beauty. They are architectural mastery and cement blunders. Cities have sound, pace, and feeling, and, most significantly—cities have people. The masses of humanity that move throughout the city do not appear to be involved with the joy of living, the joy of life, the excitement of life. There is a major part of the city day that sadly resembles the deficient curriculum that forces the child to wait out the time, until he can do his own thing.

Educational leadership must find some way to become more involved with the total city. If school people allow themselves to be removed from the city's very obvious massiveness, viciousness, pacing, and forced anonymity, that same anonymity, which causes a separation of people through their not communicating with each other, will begin to affect education.

Since educators deal exclusively with people, large cities should be most useful places for meetings. Such a simple point, however, can obviously be missed. The 1972 ASCD conference held in Philadelphia provides a dramatic example.

Few, if any, of the ASCD membership would fail to emphasize community involvement as a point of the educational program's change process. Is it not reasonable, then, to expect that a group convened to examine curriculum matters might consider the potential for feedback from, and interaction with, those living in the convention city? Yet we effectively sealed ourselves off from more than token involvement.

By using the city's efficient shuttle bus system, we rode past crowds of people daily—without interaction, often without simple recognition. By holding meetings in buildings and rooms relatively inaccessible to the general public, we successfully avoided contact with any but the ASCD membership.

We talked of innovation; we talked of open school; we talked of multimedia and multi-curriculum. We did not, however, make extensive efforts to involve the city's people; we did not consider the possibility of deliberately holding our meetings in places that would cause people to stop and to listen; to cause non-educators to ask questions, to become involved. We did not move deliberately to include others in decision making which could have an important impact on future educational programming. We met in a city that has attempted serious educational innovation, but we still met within safe walls.

Perhaps there is analogy in our recent efforts to begin listening to students, because
even when we listen to them we do not meet them on their grounds. We meet them in our lecture halls, with our executives, with our audiences, and in our buildings.

When are we going to allow people to work with us, so that they may influence us, and we can hear each other out? If we are going to continue holding conventions in cities, are we not failing to enlist the most valuable resource if we stay on the shuttle bus, and meet in tight little rooms?

The city is for living, the city is for action, the city is for survival, but so is education; the two should not be operated in parallel tracks. We must get involved with man as we begin to plan for the destiny of man. Are there not both challenge and opportunity here to be a working example for future efforts in educational program change?

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