

# To Spark a Change

**Robert R. Leeper**

**H**OW CAN a people or a nation survive so many summers of alarm and autumns of trepidation? Out of the months of the Watergate crisis, the Middle East conflict, Cyprus, the Impeachment hearings, what have we learned? Have some instructive new facts, new truths emerged? What can one person do as a result of such a flood of happenings?

It is easy enough for school people in this particular fall to be discouraged. The divisiveness in our nation and society and in our schools is rampant. There is widespread bitterness toward and distrust of government, of political processes, of the role of the citizen, of mass media, and especially of the motivation of persons in positions of public trust. Where do the blame, the influence peddling, the destruction of personal integrity, the uses of governmental powers for selfish or subversive purposes end?

Albert Schweitzer said, "However great the world's evil, I never allow myself to get lost in brooding over it. I always hold firmly to the belief that each of us can do a little to bring some portion of it to an end."

As school people, we *can* do something

to improve this confusing and at times malevolent-seeming world in which we find ourselves. We can identify at least some one practice or process that we regard as "wrong," or "bad," or "evil," and proceed to do something about changing or discontinuing it. We can do something about replacing it with a practice or a process that we *do* believe in and can support with our whole being as representing the very best educational thought and practice that we know.

We can replace dogmatism with respect for open discussion in an atmosphere of warmth, freedom, and support.

We can replace authoritarianism and ruthless use of power with respect for democratic processes and for the rights of all who are affected by decisions.

We can replace grading systems that treat students as "digits" with more personal and cooperative kinds of evaluation.

We can replace the "teaching" of rigid, isolated facts with any of various forms of action and experiential learning.

We can replace the highly structured and isolated classrooms with open, flexible, interacting approaches to grouping for learning.

We are not helpless. We must assess our needs, resources, and potentialities. We must find the areas in which we still have freedom and power to move. These must be the arenas in which we conduct our own small counteroffensives against the forces that seem to us at times so overwhelming. Our resistance and our initiative can make a tremendous difference in the overall struggle. Even in a time of disillusionment and loss of hope, our efforts may serve to spark a change toward the kind of world that will seem to all of us to be better, purer, more worth living and striving for.

This year's issues of *Educational Leadership* are planned to give help where help is needed. This is at the point of contact between the learner and the new element of growth, between the person and the new resource that will help him or her to meet a pressing need. If the reader finds such assistance in our pages in the coming months, then we will have done our part.

## Issues for 1974-75

● "HUMAN RELATIONS CURRICULUM: TEACHING STUDENTS TO CARE AND FEEL AND RELATE" is the theme for this present issue. Our purpose is to emphasize the need for enhancing human relationships through the various aspects of education. Contributors have been asked to emphasize ideas, methods, and insights useful in implementing opportunities for learning experiences that will foster the affective goals in education.

Over a period of years our Association has stressed the "wholeness" of education, emphasizing that the so-called "cognitive" aspects of learning are significant and essential in modern teaching and learning. Yet such aspects must always depend very greatly upon the affective dimensions of the educational relationship.

● "ALTERNATIVE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS: PROMISE OR PROBLEMS?" is the theme for November. Writers will give some inkling of the breadth and richness of the so-called optional and alternative educational programs now being conceived and put into

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practice in both public and private school situations. They will explore some of the contributions these new programs can make through providing appropriate opportunities for experiences for children and young people and through acting as a dynamic force for instructional renewal and reform, both within and outside the "educational establishment."

● "TOWARD CULTURAL PLURALISM" will be discussed in December. One of the strengths of our nation is the rich diversity in its population. Peoples from many other lands joined groups who were already present to continue to build the "new world." Out of this setting came the dream of equality and of brotherhood that was to create an ideal cultural and social milieu. Yet the promise of equality for many of these groups has not come about. The school has an important role to play in helping establish and maintain a culturally pluralistic society. Education can aid in building a society in which diversity is valued, cultural differences are seen as a rich resource, and in which members of all groups and their cultures have an equal and respected role within the framework of a democratic society.

Writers for the December issue are asked to identify and to discuss some of the elements and implications of education's commitment to cultural pluralism. This is extremely important to our organization, since its central thrust in the coming year is toward "cultural pluralism." This issue will help us to define our role both as an association and as individuals in exploring the dimensions of this topic.

● "ALTERNATIVES TO GRADING" is the theme for January. The purpose of the issue is:

To explore alternative evaluative systems that would be more consistent with the ideals of a humane curriculum

To determine ways of helping parents, teachers, and pupils to understand and accept alternative evaluation practices

To communicate more effectively with pupils, with parents, and with the public

To help foster and enhance pupil growth and development.

Writers will explore some of the dimensions of evaluation now extant in schools, will question some of the current processes and practices, and will suggest possible alternatives.

● "SCHOOL-UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP FOR TEACHER GROWTH" is the theme for February. In the past it has been customary for teacher education institutions to assume full responsibility for preservice education programs and for school systems to feel autonomous in providing for the in-service growth of teachers. Usually these functions have been separate and very often a feeling of resentment existed whenever one institution attempted to assist in the established role of the other. An examination of the basic goals of both institutions reveals that they are identical. Both are dedicated to the improvement of teachers and teaching so that children and young people may achieve the goals of education more efficiently and effectively.

Since the basic objective is the same, common sense would indicate that this will

be more certain of achievement if public schools and teacher education institutions can work together in a truly cooperative manner. Fortunately a movement toward this cooperative relationship has begun. It means a teacher education institution works with a pilot school system as an equal in which all concerned, administrators, supervisors, teachers, and college personnel, are involved. Contributors to this issue will try to illustrate such useful programs.

● "INSTRUCTION: PRACTICE, PROCESS, OR PANACEA?" will be the theme for March. The many dimensions of public education sometimes leave the practitioner without a clear, functional concept of the role and significance of instruction. Because instruction and its counterpart, *learning*, are frequently perceived as synonymous, those responsible for educational programs would do well to return occasionally to an analysis and review of these functions. There are many suggestions for the incorporation of ideas and content in the curriculum. Yet it is a major responsibility of supervisors and curriculum specialists to "order the translation of those suggestions into practice."

What is instruction? What is the nature of instruction? And what are the role and emphasis of instruction for ASCD? To what extent must instructional practitioners (teachers, professors) become involved in the direction and design of curriculum in order to implement instruction?

Such an issue is designed to remind the readers of the Association's continuing emphasis on the quality and extent of public

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## Future ASCD Annual Conferences

1975	March 15-19	New Orleans	<i>Rivergate</i>
1976	March 13-17	Miami Beach	<i>Convention Center</i>
1977	March 19-23	Houston	<i>Civic Center</i>
1978	March 4-8	San Francisco	<i>Civic Center</i>

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instruction in America—as well as the direction of that instruction.

● “WHAT EDUCATION CAN AND CANNOT LEARN FROM BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY” is the theme for April. Its content will (a) explore current educational and training practices in business and industry to see their implications for classroom instruction and inservice education; (b) benefit from what industry and labor have learned about governance and contracts; and (c) evaluate training programs and other educational efforts of business, industry, and labor in the areas of staff development and governance and to note the problems and weaknesses (dangers) in these efforts.

● “LEARNING DISABILITY: ROLE OF THE SCHOOL” will be the theme for May. It has been estimated that 15 to 20 percent of pupils in today’s classrooms are “learning disabled” children. “Learning disability” refers to the impairment of the processing skills for encoding or decoding information as distinct from intellectual capacities. The term “processing skills” as used here does not include blindness or second language difficulties. If the curriculum is adequately to serve *all* children, then new proposals and approaches are required. Also needed are diagnostic and descriptive materials relating to these pupils. Contributors to this issue will attempt to clarify and to define some of the concepts that are now being applied in the area of “learning disability.” They will also give some examples of actual practice. Our aim is to assist practitioners and others who are called upon to bring a sense of clarity and of practical direction in this new and burgeoning field.

Continuing inflation and the spiraling costs of every service offered by organizations such as ours have necessitated some budget stringencies. One of the signs of such stringency is the fact that the Research Supplement will not be carried this year as a separate entity in the journal. Research papers will be included in a section called

“Research Reports.” We will continue to use some unsolicited materials in each issue.

Another development in the journal offering exciting possibilities is the initiation of a new department entitled “Caucus Comments.” The various caucuses that meet either formally or informally with our Association are invited to contribute to this new column. The success of this column depends both upon the responsible and effective use that is made of it by the caucuses and upon the consideration of these statements by the readership.

In order to accommodate this new feature only four issues of the “News Notes” will be carried this year. This, of course, is experimental. We will be interested in readers’ reactions to changes of this kind.

Besides plans for the 1974-75 journal year other aspects of our Association should be mentioned. Because copies of the journal go far beyond the membership of our Association, we would like all readers to know of the new developments and services that are especially available to ASCD members. Under new and vigorous leadership the organization plans to extend and to increase its membership services. The working groups of the Association are newly vitalized and are targeted more sensitively toward the areas of greatest need and fullest opportunity. The 1975 ASCD Annual Conference to be held March 15-19, in New Orleans, will have as its theme “Curriculum Action for a Crisis Society.”

ASCD publications will also play an important role in the coming year. The 1975 Yearbook will be on “Schools in Search of Meaning.” In addition, five or six significant topics will be developed as booklets. These new offerings will be presented through careful planning and focusing of the resources of the Association.

These are the overall plans for the year and an expression of our hopes that what we do and say can perhaps in some vital way tend to “spark a change” in practice that will lead to better teaching, learning—and living.

—ROBERT R. LEEPER, *Editor*, Educational Leadership.

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