

# The Power of Educational Ideas

**Robert R. Leeper**

**G**REAT need and great opportunity are ours as we begin a new school year. The evidences of need are often quite apparent, while opportunities are not always as reassuringly visible.

What are some of the needs now pressing upon us in schools and communities throughout the land? One urgent need is for an overall sense of unity and of purpose within the "professional" enterprise of schooling. This is a period of division and separateness such as we have not known previously in education. Such divisiveness indicates that the central thrust of education has been lost or at least dissipated.

When a sense of unity or purpose can be attained only at the adversarial level and decisions reached only after negotiations, then we are vulnerable to the charge of being "nonprofessional," that is, persons who are not truly self-directing and self-motivated within our field of practice.

Yet the need for rediscovery of a sense of unity and of purpose will be met. Even now there are beginnings of moves to bring together the strengths and resources of the education profession into a more flexible and functional relationship based upon mutually identifiable needs and capabilities. This is

tremendously important for the ultimate struggle will be to rewin the confidence and support of the general public for education. This can be done only after the profession itself has again defined worthy goals and has demonstrated devotion to them.

A second need is for a rebirth of idealism and of respect for ethics and morality. Such idealism is immensely difficult to transmit from one person or from one generation to another, whether through the family or the school. The area itself is too easily dismissed as parochial or provincial or reactionary. Yet the moral decay evident in our public affairs, in rising crime rates, and in private functions makes urgent our attention to this need.

And attention is being directed to this need. Through institutes, workshops, conferences, publications, and face-to-face contacts, opportunities are now being created to study and to gain new insight into value questions and relationships. ASCD is playing a leading part in this movement, joining efforts with countless other groups and persons to accomplish this objective.

A third need is for a clearer insight into the fundamental principles of teaching and learning. Much that has been gained through painstaking research and study seems to have

been put aside in current surges toward systematization and mechanization. Use of the computer, with its related systems and the advantages of manipulation and instant retrieval, often causes us to underestimate or to forget the value of the patient, time-consuming efforts that were demanded during the input operations. The individual person—intelligent, intent, meticulous—was indispensable in the early effort.

Systems and accountability play an important role, for they make our operations more efficient and manageable. Yet surely they are not intended to supplant the warmth, insight, and supportive interaction of the teacher-pupil relationship, so essential to individual development. So much of pre-service and in-service education is now directed toward conveying strength, understanding, and practical application of sound principles of teaching and learning. Our Association again is playing a key role in bringing findings of research and theory to the attention of its audiences.

With the need comes searching, and out of the search come new opportunities and resources. Ours is a period of great discontent, of great seeking. In such times, panaceas are inviting, and we have been lured into following many of these. For example, we have just weathered an era in which curricular emphases were largely determined by narrowly defined national needs, and by the deployment of funds and personnel in an attempt to meet these specific needs. The resulting pressures upon schools, however, attained only limited and superficial success. That wave of attempted change through pressure in certain curricular areas has now largely spent itself. Just now the climate seems amenable to a more humanistic and liberal approach in schooling. Again we have a chance to discuss "balance in schooling." We need to recognize this moment of opportunity and to use it to full advantage.

#### Issues for 1975-76

The pages of the journal this year are directed to the needs and the opportunities in education. Plans for the issues are projected

as a result of studies of the interests and concerns of persons in education that should be reflected in the journal. A brief description of the issues follows:

● "CONTROVERSY AND EDUCATION" is featured in this issue. Several persons here comment on constructive approaches to controversy. Others treat specific controversies now relevant in schools, classrooms, and communities. Noted also are some of the basic insecurities, interest conflicts, and communications problems that breed dissent and contention. The school's role is that of assisting children and youth toward better ways of understanding and using controversy for constructive purposes.

● "EDUCATION: THE LIFELONG QUEST" is the theme for November. Noted will be the importance of fostering in each individual an interest in and the ability to make learning a lifelong quest. Contributors are asked to recognize the powerful influence of both school and nonschool experience in shaping the attitudes, knowledge, and aspirations of children, young people, and adults. What are some of the present potentialities and dimensions of nonformal and continuing education? Is learning becoming more truly a "lifelong" quest as a result of attitudinal and structural adjustments in today's schools and schooling?

● "MULTICULTURAL CURRICULUM: ISSUES, DESIGN, STRATEGIES" in December will help us take our organizational and professional commitment in this field an important step further toward fulfillment. A healthy recent thrust for change has been the increased acceptance of ethnic and cultural diversity in America. Public education needs to respond and follow through, in school form and practice, on this development. It holds great promise for effecting important and overdue reforms.

● "BICENTENNIAL REFLECTIONS ON CURRICULUM" is the theme for the January 1976 issue. The 200th anniversary of the birth of our nation affords an opportunity to learn about our diverse cultural heritage and its transmittal especially through schooling



Delmo Della-Dora (left), President of ASCD accepts, on behalf of Robert R. Leeper, editor of *Educational Leadership*, an award for Excellence in Educational Journalism from the Educational Press Association.

William Sherman presented the awards in Los Angeles last July, where the December 1974 journal, "Toward Cultural Pluralism," was cited in the category "One-Theme Issue."

and the instructional program. The act of looking back forces us, at the same time, to reflect on the present and to hypothesize about the future. By examining the past critically and insightfully we should be able to identify more clearly creative and effective guidelines for the future conduct of education and of the instructional program.

● "LEADERSHIP IN EDUCATION: A NEW JOB DESCRIPTION" is featured in February. New movements and new realities in education challenge us to improve the skills and insights of professional leadership. Persons who must marshal resources and services need constant renewal, inspiration, and support if they are to continue to be an influence for change and growth in service to schools and to education. New findings, especially in research and theory will be of great help in this endeavor.

● "TEACHERS CENTERS" will be illustrated and examined in the March issue. As an innovation this year, the issue is being prepared under the direction and guidance of a guest editor, Vincent Rogers, of the University of Connecticut at Storrs. The articles will indicate the specific differences between the British and American experience in developing the teachers centers. Case studies will exemplify the specific purposes and practices in several examples of such centers. The meaning and objectives back of the movement will be probed in depth by well-qualified writers.

● "CURRICULUM INQUIRY: IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING" will be featured in April. We will attempt to share two or three pieces of significant research; to reduce fears that teachers may have when they consider research utilization; to suggest a model that teachers can use to conduct their own research; and to clarify further the relationship between research and teaching.

● May is planned as a non-theme issue. This is another innovation, since most previous issues of the journal, at least for the solicited articles, have been theme-related. Our hope is to attract more and better papers so that the final selection for May will be of such timeliness and high quality as to justify this experiment.

### To Change—To Improve

Our Association is taking a new look at its publications program. Are the journal and the other publications fulfilling the purposes of ASCD and meeting effectively the needs of the membership? Is the program supported adequately? What facilities, staff, and services are needed in such an ambitious endeavor? Are the planning functions appropriate and sufficient to the needs of the audience served? How can the dissemination, promotion, and marketing functions be improved and made more self-supporting? These are some of the questions now being posed for study by a newly strengthened Publications Committee. As its findings are prepared, further information will be presented in these pages.

Ours is a rapidly growing organization. Its ability to attract new members and new readers now, as in the past, relies on the power of educational ideas. The magnetism of powerful concepts and insights, as demonstrated in practice, is our secret in the winning of new recruits. The pages of this journal and the other publications of ASCD are dedicated to the ideas that change and improve our educational thought and practice both now and in the days ahead.

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

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