

Editorial

A View From the Bridge

Elizabeth S. Randolph

The new year, the new century, and the new administration of the United States government mark this as an unusually exciting time in which to live. As professional persons in education, we are inspired once again to examine the continuing problems and issues that fall within the central purposes of ASCD and that challenge our best efforts to achieve creative solutions. Some of these problems and issues are the following:

1. For what purposes do schools exist? In the wake of mounting public dissatisfaction with schools, how can educators help parents and the lay public determine what they want of their schools at this point in the nation's history?

2. How real is ASCD's commitment to cultural pluralism? As the federal government retreats from aggressive school desegregation efforts, there appears to be a corresponding retreat by those who participate directly in the education of children and youth. How can curriculum workers effectively assist in developing schools that recognize human diversity, and reflect and promote cultural pluralism?

3. What is the proper role of the federal government in curriculum development? How can ASCD appropriately participate in the definition of this role?

4. How do we effect necessary curriculum change without sacrificing enduring values?

Involving Laymen in Defining the Purposes of the Schools

The "back to basics" movement, the growing demand for competency standards for high school graduation, the renewed emphasis on standardized testing, and the rejection of school tax levies by the voters are dramatic evidences

that the public perceives that the schools are not doing the job that is expected of them.

Commenting on the failure of tax levies in several school districts in his state, the governor of Oregon stated that "there is broad dissatisfaction here with the product that is coming out of the schools. People are unhappy with the education their children are getting."¹

What do the people want from their schools? Answers to this question can only emerge from dialogue among educators and lay citizens at all levels of our society and through significant involvement of lay citizens in curriculum decision making.

For many years, educators have been giving conditional approval to limited kinds of lay involvement in curriculum decision-making. Current concern about curriculum dictates a great need for serious efforts to develop a rationale that can help guide decisions about the type, level, degree, channeling, and evaluation of lay involvement if it is to become a positive factor in curriculum improvement.

ASCD's open membership policy is an obvious vehicle for lay involvement. In my opinion, vigorous efforts to recruit lay membership and to increase lay involvement in the programmatic activities of the Association will reap significant dividends for American education at all levels. The critics of education are not limited to politicians, business leaders, and scholars, but include citizens from all walks of life, notably the uneducated who still view the diploma as the ticket to a better life for their children.

I recall vividly the concerns expressed in a meeting of a Title I Parent Advisory Council. Parents questioned the lack of articulation of the

¹"Revolt in Oregon." *Newsweek*. December 13, 1976. p. 72.

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skill development activities of the Title I reading labs with the reading program of the regular classroom. Parents have not always asked such questions of educators! We can anticipate more and more "hard" questions; and we must not only interpret more effectively to parents and the lay public what the schools are doing, but we must find creative ways to help them help us. It may be useful to review and evaluate different strategies that have been used in this area. It will certainly be helpful to invite parents and the lay public to "come over to Macedonia and help us."

Harold Shane tells us that "one of our vital tasks as educators is to join other citizens in defining both the emerging potentialities of education and of schooling and the emerging responsibilities that each can begin more fully to bear as the world seeks to heal itself of the inequality, inhumaneness, war, and acute tensions that have demeaned mankind."²

Continuing Commitment to Cultural Pluralism

President Carter, in his Inaugural Address, expressed a hope that his administration will be known for having torn down the barriers that separated those of different race, region, and religion, and where there had been mistrust, built unity, with a respect for diversity. Indeed, Mr. Carter's election is itself, in my opinion, an indication of a giant step in the breakdown of regional barriers.

In speaking of Amy Carter's enrollment at Thaddeus Stevens Elementary School in Washington, D.C., Representative Yvonne B. Burke made several comments. She observed how Amy and her 22 classmates will benefit from the wealth of cultural exchange that will take place among the 13 American blacks, three American whites, two Latin Americans, two Pakistanis, a Bangla-

deshi and an Italian—all about 9 years old and relatively unspoiled by cultural bias. Representative Burke also points out that "Amy can't do it all."³

It is to be hoped that our new President's statement and actions indicate his intent to reverse the slowdown of the federal government's school desegregation initiatives. At the local school level just now there continues to be a minimum compliance with school desegregation orders. Classrooms still demonstrate minimum recognition and utilization of human diversity in organization of curriculum and instruction. Standardized tests are still used to label and classify children. Instructional materials are still racist, sexist, and sketchy in the treatment of minorities. Teachers still need help in human relations as well as in the organization of multicultural curriculum.

Despite the increasing availability of multicultural materials and resources, instructional practices in American classrooms have been only lightly touched by the thrust toward cultural pluralism. Multicultural education is still an add-on, an occasional unit, a token effort. Differences in heritage and outlook among ethnic groups are still not recognized in curriculum planning, and teachers, administrators, and universities still demonstrate little commitment to developing culturally pluralistic curriculums.

ASCD's commitment to cultural pluralism was reaffirmed in a position paper prepared by the ASCD Multicultural Education Commission and approved by the Executive Council in October 1976 for transmittal to the Board of Directors. Recognized in educational terms as

² Harold G. Shane. *The Educational Significance of the Future*. Bloomington, Indiana: Phi Delta Kappa, 1973.

³ "Yvonne Burke's Angle." *The Afro-American*. January 11, 1977.

multicultural education, the concept "includes curricular, instructional, administrative, and environmental efforts to help students avail themselves of as many models, alternatives, and opportunities as possible from the full spectrum of our culture . . . and permits individual development in any culture."⁴

The statement includes an illustrative list of suggestions for implementing multicultural education at both content and process levels. ASCD's governances, employment practices, and programmatic activities at the national and unit levels are visible evidences of the Association's position. Leadership by ASCD members in their local school settings and in their specific educational roles will give credibility to the Association's stated commitment to multicultural education.

The Federal Role in Curriculum Development

Curriculum workers need to join in the discussion of the proper role of the federal government in curriculum development. If we do not, some very important issues will be inadequately developed or given only slight attention.

Gordon Cawelti has articulated the needs in this area.⁵ The Executive Council at its October 1976 meeting shared ideas with Jon Schaffarzick, coordinator of the NIE Curriculum Development Task Force. ASCD was represented at a conference of educators called by the Task Force in Washington in November 1976.

It is my opinion that ASCD should continue to communicate with federal agencies and to lend its influence to the definition of the federal role in curriculum development.

Enduring Values Amid Change

How do we implement change in curriculum

and instruction without ignoring what we know about teaching and learning?

As we change with the changing times we need to identify values that have stood the test of time and that still reflect the best that research has given us.

Multicultural education can be enhanced by what we already know about teacher-pupil planning, active involvement of learners, and the use of community resources to extend and enrich the learning environment. We already know much about involving parents as partners in the educative process.

We need to help teachers improve their skills and insights with a view to freeing them to become creative curriculum workers.

Public support of schools has been seriously eroded. Regaining that support will require meaningful communication between educators and the public. Curriculum workers are skilled communicators. It is our responsibility to help the schools develop creative ways to "let the sunshine in." [E]

⁴"Encouraging Multicultural Education." *Educational Leadership* 34(4):288-91; January 1977.

⁵Gordon Cawelti. "Federal Involvement in Curriculum Development?" *Educational Leadership* 33(8):563-64; May 1976.



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