

Symbol of a Shift from Status to Function: Formation of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

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An account of the dynamic forces, trends, and especially the personalities whose interactions resulted in the merger in 1943 of the Department of Supervisors and Directors of Instruction, NEA, and the Society for Curriculum Study into the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

The 20 men and women had journeyed to windy Chicago from across the war-shocked nation, from as far away as Seattle, Albany, and Nashville. There, during the days of March 27-30, 1943, they worked out the details of the merger of the Department of Supervisors and Directors of Instruction, NEA, and the Society for Curriculum Study. The new Department for Supervision and Curriculum Development was at last a reality.¹

Steps leading to the merger and the new organization had begun seven years earlier. Specific action was initiated in November 1940. At no time had the moves of cooperation between the Department and the Society toward merger been without some dissent. The deliberate merger momentum of the last two years brought forth a flurry of vigorous opposition, not enough to forestall merger, but enough to delay it and enough to dramatize fundamental differences in the practice of supervision and curriculum development.²

This new organization, later to change its name from Department to Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development,³ appears to have symbolized to many a shift in emphasis from status position to educational function. This

shift was already apparent in many school systems. At any rate, the merger was not simply the absorption of the Society, an organization of about 700 members, into the larger Department with its near-2,000 members. Lou LaBrant, editor of the Department's journal, *Educational Method*, noted the extent of expected change by concluding her final editorial with the quotation, "The old order changeth, giving place to new."⁴

¹"Program of the Department of Supervision and Curriculum Development." *Educational Method* 22:344-53; May 1943.

²Preparation of this account was aided immeasurably by several unpublished sources. Galen Saylor's lengthy "The Founding of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development" (n.d) was of special help. Other major sources were interviews with Hollis L. Caswell, Helen Heffernan, L. Thomas Hopkins, Alice Miel, and Harold Spears on deposit in the Oral History Collection, Center for History of Education, The University of Texas at Austin.

³The name was changed officially to Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development effective February 1, 1946, only weeks before its first annual conference in St. Louis. Caswell has remarked that the name change was a formality only and did not alter the thrust of the organization.

⁴Lou LaBrant. "Valedictory." *Educational Method* 22:343; May 1943.



Ruth Cunningham, employed as executive secretary of the Department of Supervisors and Directors of Instruction in 1940, continued as executive secretary after merger and became editor of the new journal, *Educational Leadership*.

Helen Heffernan, an opponent of merger, spoke out against a large "umbrella" organization, believing in the need for many organizations with varying purposes and opportunities.



Emergence of New Roles; Formation of New Organizations

Both of ASCD's predecessor organizations were formalized in the 1920s and may be understood as dimensions of the general drive toward professionalization.⁵ From their quite independent beginnings, each met annually at the mid-winter convention of the influential Department of Superintendence (later to become the American Association of School Administrators). Both developed vigorous programs including publications and additional meetings. Their membership appears to have been drawn from the mainstream of American public education.

In 1921, a group of instructional supervisors organized themselves into the National Conference of Educational Method. Always devoted to the improvement of teaching, the organization was admitted to the National Education Association in 1929 as its Department of Supervisors and Directors of Instruction. The Department, from the first, welcomed all individuals who were interested in instructional improvement to its membership and meetings. Nevertheless, it appeared to draw most of its members and leaders from those holding school supervisory appointments and college professors of supervision and teaching methods. For example, C. L. Wright, the Huntington, West Virginia, superintendent of schools, was its first president. William Heard Kilpatrick of Teachers College, Columbia University, and popularizer of the project method, attracted a large audience to the organization's first session and was elected its third president.

The Department's *Journal of Educational Method* began publication in September 1921, under the editorship of James F. Hosic, also the group's secretary-treasurer. Hosic held both these positions until 1939 when Lou LaBrant of The Ohio State University succeeded him as editor.⁶ He continued as an elected officer of the Depart-

⁵ For a discussion of emergent professionalism, see: Walter Doyle. "Education for All: The Triumph of Professionalism." In: O. L. Davis, Jr., editor. *Perspectives on Curriculum Development, 1776-1976*. Washington, D.C.: ASCD, 1976. pp. 17-75.

⁶ James L. Hosic also was instrumental in organizing the National Council of Teachers of English in 1911 when he was on the faculty of Chicago Normal College.

ment even after the merger. The organization's publications program expanded in 1928 with the issuance of its first yearbook, *Educational Supervision*. Publication of yearbooks continued through the 1943 merger into the present ASCD practice.

Membership in the Department decreased slightly during the mid-1930s, but the decade saw the organization embark on several noteworthy actions. Its headquarters were moved to the NEA building in Washington, D.C., in 1936, and an executive secretary, Mary F. Hazell, was employed. Moves were undertaken to assess its purposes and to strengthen its activities. One such move was the employment of Ruth Cunningham as executive secretary in 1940. Another was the preparation of a long-term plan for development following Department officers' recognition of the question, "Is there a need for a Department . . .?"⁷ A third action was involvement in joint meetings and cooperative projects with other groups, most conspicuously with the Society for Curriculum Study.

The Society, itself a combination of groups of public school and of college workers in the newly emerging curriculum field, had been organized in 1929 under the leadership of Henry Harap.⁸ Apparently, this formal organization followed several years of regular discussion meetings attended by practicing curriculum workers.⁹ Membership was quite small at first, an invited group of 48, but rose to a high of 807 in 1939. W. W. Charters, then at The Ohio State University, was the Society's first chairman and Henry Harap was its secretary. Subsequent executive secretaries were J. Paul Leonard of Stanford University, beginning in 1938, and Gordon MacKenzie, then at the University of Wisconsin, beginning in 1942.

⁷ Julia L. Hahn. "Editorial Comment." *Educational Method* 20:205-206; January 1941.

⁸ Henry Harap of Western Reserve University was also instrumental in organizing the John Dewey Society in 1935. See: H. C. Johnson, Jr. "Reflective Thought and Practical Action: The Origins of the John Dewey Society." *Educational Theory* 27:65-75; Winter 1977.

⁹ L. Thomas Hopkins has recalled that the first rather informal meeting was one he called in 1925. He was a general coordinator of the systemwide curriculum study in Denver, Colorado, at the time.



Hollis Caswell was elected second DSCD president in 1944 and was reelected the following year, the only person to serve two terms as association president.

Alice Miel, one of the first two DSCD vice-presidents, also served as president of ASCD in 1953-54.



For a small organization, the Society developed an extensive publications program. The *Curriculum Journal* began publication in 1935 under Harap's editorship although a "News Bulletin" had been issued to members as early as 1930. Several books, including a few completed cooperatively with other groups, were sponsored by the Society. Significantly, the *Changing Curriculum* was planned in cooperation with and was also the 1937 yearbook of the Department of Supervisors and Directors of Instruction. Likewise, the 1942 *Americans All: Studies in Intercultural Education* was a joint Society-Department project (along with the National Council of Teachers of English). Perhaps the most ambitious Society publication effort was the *Building America* series. Its first issue published in 1935, this innovative and unusual project continued as an ASCD activity until 1948 when it succumbed in the wake of vicious attacks by conservative groups and loss of sales.¹⁰

Department-Society Cooperation Toward Merger

The year 1936 saw the first overt moves toward bringing the Department and the Society closer together. At that time, Hollis L. Caswell, then at George Peabody College for Teachers, was serving as the Society's chairman and was also a member of the Department's Board of Directors. That year, the two groups planned a joint publication, *Changing Curriculum*. Informal conversations were also held between officers of the two groups to explore possibilities of merger and the Society established a standing committee on consolidation with the Department. Subsequent joint sessions at the annual meetings resumed in 1940.

Advantages of a merged organization apparently were increasingly obvious to many including all officers of the Society and most officers of the Department. The desire to build an increasingly strong, dynamic organization within the NEA and one that would have the prestige accorded the AASA were major goals. While overlapping membership probably was not extensive, among the leaders of both groups there was considerable duplication of membership.

At the 1941 convention in Atlantic City, the

previously informal discussions about cooperation became serious proposals for merger. Some of these sessions are remembered as highly emotionally charged. At one Department executive committee meeting, reportedly more than one member wept during merger discussion. Both the Society and the Department instructed committees to gather membership opinion about merger and to propose constitutional changes to be voted on at the 1942 convention in San Francisco.¹¹

Paul T. Rankin of the Detroit schools and H. Ruth Henderson of the Virginia State Department of Education made up the Department's committee and drafted amendments to that group's constitution. During the fall of 1941, the Department's executive committee (by 6-1 vote) endorsed the merger plan as did the board of directors (20-3). A poll of Department members overwhelmingly supported merger (534-95). A similar poll of Society members demonstrated a 10-1 ratio favoring merger.¹² Approval of merger plans at the 1942 convention appeared certain.

By the time members assembled in San Francisco in February 1942, the impact of wartime had disrupted plans for the Department's meeting theme of "Developing Working Unity" and a concern for intercultural education. With national resources undergoing war mobilization, attendance at the meeting was reduced dramatically from that of previous years. Most attendees, as a matter of fact, were Californians. The nature of this attendance was an ill omen for the Department-Society merger plan.

Major opposition to the merger appears to have been carried by Helen Heffernan of the California State Department of Public Instruction, although Maycie K. Southall of George Peabody College for Teachers was also a prominent opponent. Heffernan was particularly vigorous in her opposition at the San Francisco session. In the weeks prior to the convention, she had urged

¹⁰ See: Robert Ernest Newman, Jr. "History of a Civic Education Project Implementing the Social Problems Techniques of Instruction." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Stanford University, 1961.

¹¹ Ruth Cunningham. "Our Twenty-First Convention." *Educational Method* 20:338; April 1941.

¹² Ruth Cunningham. "Our Twenty-Second Convention." *Educational Method* 21:322-24; April 1942.



Gordon N. Mackenzie, executive secretary of the Society for Curriculum Study in 1942, served as president of ASCD in 1955-56.

large attendance by California supervisors and, when the merger vote was taken, the proposal was crushed by a 56-23 vote. Because most members could not be present at the meeting, those attending did amend the constitution to permit an official mail ballot on the merger issue.

The central issues in the merger debates were clear, and positions taken represented fundamentally different responses. Merger supporters¹³ urged that one strong, vital national organization would better serve instructional improvement than would two groups. Further, they contended that modern supervision should be seen as a participatory process in which many persons contributed to the task. Heffernan and other merger opponents¹⁴ insisted that competent, one-to-one supervision be retained and rejected any claims that it was outdated. Further, they opposed a large "umbrella" organization, believing in the need for many organizations with varying purposes and opportunities.

Members departed San Francisco for their long trips home knowing that merger would come, but that it would be delayed again. Official mail balloting by the Department and Society memberships, completed in the late summer, 1942, favored merger. On October 10-11, merger was approved by both executive committees at a joint meeting in Chicago, and plans were announced for the first annual meeting of the new DSCD to be held in St. Louis in February 1943.¹⁵

"War Needs and Long-Range Values" and "In-Service Education of Teachers" were to be the theme of the 1943 meeting. But the convention was canceled by action of the Office of Defense Transportation.

Election of new officers was conducted by mail and 20 of the new Board of Directors were able to come to Chicago in March, at their own expense, to develop a program for the new organization. H. Ruth Henderson was chosen first DSCD president. Alice Miel of Teachers College, Columbia University, and Edgar M. Draper were named vice-presidents. Hoscic was elected field secretary. Jennie Wahlert of the St. Louis schools, Southall, and Caswell were members of the executive committee. Ruth Cunningham continued as the Department's executive secretary and be-

¹³ Caswell had been a merger advocate for years. Those he remembers especially working for consolidation include the Department president Julia Hahn of the Washington, D.C., schools; Edith Bader of the Ann Arbor, Michigan, schools; Rudolph Lindquist of the Cranbrook, Michigan, school; G. Robert Koopman of the Michigan Department of Public Instruction; Gladys Potter of the Long Beach, California, schools; Ethel Ward of the Alameda County, California, schools; and J. Paul Leonard of Stanford University. Heffernan recalls that Leonard was a major architect of the merger.

¹⁴ Heffernan was a member of both Department and Society. After early 1942, she reduced her participation in professional association work for a number of years. She later became involved in ASCD activities for a time. The intensity of her beliefs and feelings about the Department-Society merger issues still runs high, thirty-six years later. Southall was active in the new organization from the beginning and served as an elected officer longer than any other person.

¹⁵ "Merger Approved." *Educational Method* 22:92; November 1942. The announcement was signed by the Department president, Dale Zeller of Kansas State Teachers College, Emporia, and the Society chairman, Edgar M. Draper of the University of Washington.

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came editor of the new journal, *Educational Leadership*.¹⁶

Pressures of World War II prevented most activity by the Department of Supervision and Curriculum Development. In 1944 and 1945, continuing wartime travel restrictions prohibited conventions. Nevertheless, the new journal was launched and yearbook publication continued. Also, committees were established and work was conducted by correspondence. Members of the board of directors were elected annually and the board, at a once yearly meeting, elected officers and conducted other business. Caswell, then of Teachers College, Columbia University, was elected second DSCD president in 1944 and was reelected the following year, the only person to serve two terms as association president.

The new organization had been born "in a period of world strife and reconstruction," editorialized LaBrant, and she asserted that "It is a matter of pride that leaders in education can maintain vision and make advances in such times."¹⁷ With the war's termination in August 1945, and rapid return to peacetime, the organization again planned its first annual conference and again for St. Louis. This time, the meeting would not be canceled. The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, already three years old, began to build on both its heritage and its vision. [7]

¹⁶ "Programs of the Department of Supervision and Curriculum Development." *Educational Method* 22:344-53; April 1943. H. Ruth Henderson. "A Message from the President." *Educational Leadership* 1:39; October 1943. Another date, March 1, 1943, exists as published evidence of the merger date. See Harold Spears, editor. *Leadership at Work*. Washington, D.C.: Department of Supervisors and Directors of Instruction, 1943. This date must be seen as spurious inasmuch as this yearbook was advertised and first copies probably were distributed as early as December 1942.

¹⁷ Lou LaBrant, *op. cit.*



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