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Maximizing Human Potential

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In this 1978 presidential address, the author looks at the traditions of ASCD, its values and concerns. She identifies certain emerging forces and their implications. She also makes recommendations for the future, both for ASCD and the broader education profession.

The Long Range Planning Project of ASCD has motivated us to take a retrospective look at the organization's past, an introspective look at ASCD's impact on education in this country, and to project the appropriate course of the organization in the near and distant future.

A Tradition of Leadership

It has been exciting to realize anew that from its beginnings in 1943, ASCD has been on the cutting edge in the areas of curriculum development, supervision, and instruction and that its influence has extended far beyond the organization itself.

Hollis Caswell, first president of ASCD, in his maiden address to the newly-formed organization, made the following statement:

"The Department of Supervision and Curriculum Development begins its program at a time when dynamic leadership is essential. This leadership is demanded by the uncertainty and con-

fusion in our national life. At the same time, this leadership has an exceptional opportunity because of the unprecedented recognition which education is receiving as a means of solving certain problems which these times present."

This statement could appropriately be made today as a preface to our Long Range Planning effort. As we look at our phenomenal growth and at the diversity of our membership, we are inspired to identify values and competencies that have endured in the nation's schools and in ASCD. We also need to look at emerging forces that will affect the schools and that ASCD must

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confront if we are to remain in the vanguard in the areas of curriculum development, supervision, and instruction.

During the slightly more than three decades of ASCD's history, our nation has experienced the effects of atomic destruction, population explosion, several unpopular military conflicts, political witch-hunting, an arms race, a space race, a promised Camelot, assassinations, riots, a new social order, shocking political scandals, a fluctuating economy, a shortage of essential energy supplies, and a Bicentennial that rekindled our patriotism.

The schools have mirrored the hopes, fears, and anxieties of the citizenry. Educators have attempted to be responsive to a wide spectrum of public concerns ranging from Hiroshima to Watergate, and in the attempt to be responsive, the schools have almost lost their credibility.

During these three decades, our organization has for the most part kept crises and cure-alls in perspective. ASCD has dealt with change but has heeded William Van Til's 1946 admonition that "today's relevancy becomes tomorrow's anachronism." We have instead taken leadership

in pointing out the need to develop and support sound human values and learning principles that are timeless.

Our Values and Concerns

Let us first examine some of the values that have endured despite the changing times.

Secondly, let us focus on some areas that appear to be emerging as major concerns for educators as we approach the 21st century and relate these concerns to our enduring values.

Let us then take a look at some future challenges in the continuing task of maximizing human potential.

ASCD has long been an apostle of the importance of the individual and has promoted the role of the school in enhancing the worth and dignity of all human beings. Our three yearbooks on *Mental Health in the Schools*; the classic 1962 yearbook, *Perceiving, Behaving, Becoming*; and the 1970 yearbook, *To Nurture Humaneness* are all affirmations of our belief that schools should be places that nurture human potential in humane environments. The concept encompasses not only the students, but adults in the school setting and parents. The very essence of our calling is a belief that all human beings have the capacity to learn and grow and that our role as educators, regardless of our job title, is to facilitate that growth. It is not for us to define the limits of anyone's becoming. It is for us to provide the supportive environment where human beings may continually set and test their own limits.

No one will deny that humaneness is one of our enduring values. The concept permeates modern educational thought and is a trademark of ASCD. However, there is evidence that the humane school is more honored than practiced. You may remember that humanizing schools was one of the priority issues in ASCD's 1976 survey of the educational issues that are of greatest concern to its members.

One of the most important tasks of educators is to create school climates that enhance the self-concepts of students—to develop schools that are success-oriented rather than punitive. We need to eliminate from schools all practices that are dehumanizing to students and to teachers.

Many lists of dehumanizing school practices

have been developed, and I am sure that each of us could develop such a list from our own observations.

I examined a list developed in 1970 by the ASCD Commission on Humanism in Education and identified several practices that still persist to a great degree and that challenge our courage and creativity to effect alternatives. The list included the following:

1. The marking system, with its accompanying competition, comparisons, pressures, and failure
2. Corporal punishment
3. Curricular tracking and the caste system it nurtures
4. The grade-level lock-step that ignores what we know about how children learn and grow
5. Testing instead of evaluating.

Adults, as well as students, flourish in humane environments. There are still, in 1978, teachers who are afraid of their principals and supervisors. There are still teachers who are afraid to try new instructional strategies for fear of ridicule by their principals and supervisors. There are negative attitudes at all levels that hamper the effective utilization of the many rich resources that our schools and communities provide. Humane school environments require that teachers and other adults be treated as people of dignity and worth, and that adults at all levels model the behavior that we believe will help individuals develop their full potential.

In order that the individual may develop his or her potential in a humane environment, ASCD advocates the vehicle of a *balanced curriculum*. This has been an enduring value in ASCD. Our constitution states as one of the organization's purposes, "to strive for balance in the curriculum and maintain a perspective of the total educational program." Consequently, ASCD has not succumbed to the hysteria of the current "back-to-basics" movement, but has tried to keep basic skills in perspective with the humanistic goals of education.

ASCD has not forgotten that the unique function of the schools is to teach basic skills; rather, we have opposed narrow definitions of

basic skills that stress the traditional 3R's to the exclusion or reduction of other areas that are also necessary for a balanced life.

I like the way that Arthur W. Foshay describes the other basics that are uniquely offered in school and are as necessary for coping as the 3R's. He suggests "the skills of social interaction—skills arising from the fact that schools offer a unique example of society to students, skills of emotional growth, and skills of spiritual response. Leave out any of these skills," says Dr. Foshay, "and the ability of the person to cope with life is severely reduced."

Through its leaders, its publications, and its

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conferences, ASCD has explored the issues involved in the Minimal Competency and Back-to-Basics movements. While recognizing the necessity for goal setting, we work for a balanced educational program, which Gordon Cawelti describes as "a liberating experience for all—helping them to achieve their fullest potential and to relate in a humane way to all persons with whom they have contact."

What, then, are some of the emerging values and competencies that relate to our commitment to humaneness and our commitment to a balanced curriculum? How do these forces impact upon our efforts to provide schooling that will maximize human potential?

Recognizing Emerging Forces

Let us examine four such emerging forces that I consider significant:

1. The recognition of human diversity in all of its forms
2. The recognition of sexuality as a part of our humanity

3. The recognition of the procedural and substantive rights of students and teachers

4. The recognition of increased parent and community interest in direct involvement in schools.

Although the importance of the individual and the recognition of individual differences has long been espoused in our nation's schools, its application has been limited. It is only during the past two decades that we have begun to bring into the educational mainstream the country's ethnic minorities, its women, and its handicapped.

These groups have appealed to the Congress and the courts to secure the rights and privileges guaranteed all citizens by the constitution. Legislative and judicial decisions have been made that are forcing the community-at-large, including the schools, to address the needs of *all* citizens.

Brown vs. Topeka, the Indian Education Act, Lau vs. Nichols and the other civil rights legislation of the past three decades represent official recognition by Congress and the courts of the heterogeneous population of this country.

Through Title IX of the Civil Rights Act, the law has recognized inequities in the education of women, eliminating some of the overt barriers to the development of the full potential of more than half the nation's citizens.

PL 94-142 establishes for the handicapped the same right to an education that now exists for the nonhandicapped. It has been regarded by many as the most important education legislation enacted since the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. Some states have enacted or proposed legislation of even broader parameters than PL 94-142 and include the gifted and talented in the group of exceptional children for whom appropriate educational programs must be provided.

Advocates for the handicapped are winning a long battle to restrain schools from discriminating against students because of some real or perceived physical or mental deficit.

We are in an era when, as a matter of public policy, we must recognize all of the diverse groups in our population and provide for them an appropriate education.

We must admit that we have not, in our schools or in society-at-large, treated all persons

in these groups as individuals having dignity and worth. We must admit that our schools have not always been humane environments for persons in these groups and that the curriculum, in large measure, has failed to meet their special needs.

ASCD has taken positive positions on these issues by adopting cultural pluralism as a continuing programmatic thrust, adopting resolutions in support of multicultural education, the elimination of sex bias, and on education for the handicapped. The organization's commitment to these issues is reflected in its projects and in its publications and, to a more limited extent, in its professional staff and its governance.

ASCD's Multicultural Commission, in a position statement, identified the essential goals of multicultural education as:

1. Recognizing and prizes diversity
2. Developing greater understanding of other cultural patterns
3. Respecting individuals of all cultures
4. Developing positive and productive interaction among people and among experiences of diverse cultural groups.

These goals are valid as we develop school experiences for all children, regardless of their ethnic identification, their sex, or their handicap. Leadership by ASCD members in their local settings and in their specific educational roles will give credibility to the Association's stated commitment to pluralism. Such leadership will also contribute to the enrichment of the quality of life in our nation by supporting and prizes human diversity.

As educators debate the "back-to-basics" issue and identify old and new basics, we fail to deal forthrightly with the issue of human sexuality. The reasons for this posture are obvious since the entire subject is an emotional one that is closely tied to the values of the home and the community.

The daily media are full of horror stories that reaffirm Kirkendall's view that "the public school system has for the most part fallen flat on its face when it has come to helping children, maturing youth, and the general public cope with complex sexual issues. Sexuality is a function of the total personality, with sociological, psychological, biological, and moral implications."

Kirkendall and Tritsch suggest that, since sexuality is an integral part of the human condition, it should not be studied in a vacuum. They suggest an integrated, comprehensive human relations instructional core that also includes knowledge and attitudes about racial membership, relations between youth and parents, aging, death, making choices, and other personal issues that relate to the development of a fully functioning personality.

This whole issue relates to our enduring values of humaneness and respect for the worth and dignity of the individual. The development of meaningful programs requires creative, courageous educational leadership.

A third area that is emerging as a crucial concern for educators is due process, or the procedural and substantive rights of students and teachers. This issue relates very directly to our enduring values of respect for the worth and dignity of the individual, a humane environment, and a balanced curriculum. Michael W. Apple puts the issue in another framework and asks, "Are schools just?" He suggests that "curriculum leaders, in a field that often seeks to influence concretely the lives of students through the design of educational environments, must be held accountable to notions such as justice and ethical responsibility in our conduct with others, if we are to be more than experts for hire."

Most adults in the school setting are well aware of *their* rights. These adults wholeheartedly agree that students have *responsibilities*, but have difficulty with the concepts of *students' rights*.

Recent court decisions have established a judicial climate for challenges to arbitrary punitive action against students or teachers. Successful challenges have been made in the areas of regulation of student conduct and class placement.

Although court decisions still support conflicting views on these issues, the courts will continue to be used to challenge school authority that in the past has been unquestioned.

While I do not completely agree with Apple that an adversarial relationship between schools and youth is healthy, I do agree that schools cannot be immune to procedural or substantive justice in their educational functions, and it is my hope that, through cooperative relationships be-

tween schools and youth, humane and supportive learning environments will be created.

A fourth emerging phenomenon that I wish to discuss is the increased and continuing interest in educational specifics by parents and the public-at-large. As educators, we must realize that this public concern is here to stay. It is not going to disappear. We need to make positive use of this phenomenon, involve our publics in educational planning, taking their needs into consideration.

During the last two decades, there has been a not-too-subtle change in the quality of citizen involvement in schools. Increased federal funding of curriculum programs includes guidelines for parent participation rather than nominal involvement. Also required is community involvement in program planning through public hearings and assurances.

Parent and citizen advisory councils are required to be more than window dressing; they must have active roles in program planning and evaluation.

The legislation for bilingual and Indian education requires increased involvement of the community.

The legislation for the handicapped requires parental approval of educational programs for their children.

Due process for the handicapped and for all other students assures parents that they have the right to be involved in the educational decisions for their children.

Effective schools need to share power and responsibility with parents and the community.

Our school communities are multifaceted. If we are to achieve any degree of cultural pluralism, we must actively involve the members of all facets of the community, encouraging their input without feeling threatened by a loss of power.

We have to look to the community as a resource. . . . To help teachers understand the backgrounds of their students . . . to provide experiences for students both inside and outside the school . . . to serve as relevant models for the students who live in the community.

We must create a climate of acceptance and growth so that we can nurture the emergence of new, positive leadership in the community.

Most educators have not been prepared by training or experience to deal with "space-age

parent involvement." Most of us have dealt with parents according to the old "blind trust" model. "Drop your kid at 8:00 and pick him/her up at 3:00 . . . (unless the child walks or rides the bus) Don't call us. We'll call you." Those days are gone forever . . . and rightly so.

It is parents who shape the first four or five years of life—considered by many the most important period in life. It is parents who can support and extend the school experience for children in the real world. It is parents who, in a number of ways, pay for the education of their children. Therefore, to ban parents from participating in educational decisions about their children is not only *unwise*, it is *inhumane*.

Parents can clue the school into the individual differences of their children that may not show up on a group test. They can encourage the school to tap capabilities that are not necessarily evident to a teacher. Parents can share the values and concerns of the community so that conflicts between educational goals and community goals can be resolved.

We can neither bar parents from the education of children, nor can we assume that they should blindly support our decisions. Children are products of homes and schools; therefore, parents and educators need to be jointly involved in helping children reach their potential.

Each of these emerging issues needs to be approached from the vantage point of our enduring commitments to helping the individual maximize his/her potential in a humane environment through a balanced curriculum.

Until minorities, women, the handicapped, the gifted, and all members of the community have equal access to the full benefits of the educational system, neither they nor the system can reach full potential.

Until we deal forthrightly with human sexuality and help students develop appropriate attitudes and values, we shall continue to ignore a part of their humanity.

Until all students' rights to an education are preserved through due process and until teachers feel they will be likewise protected, neither can strive to reach their full potential.

Until we can mold parents and educators into a partnership of advocacy for children, we cannot develop programs that fully facilitate each child's total development.

What Does the Future Hold?

What does the future hold? What will the 21st century be like? How can schools help prepare students for a meaningful life in the future? What should be the role of ASCD?

Let me speak to those questions with some prophecy, much hope, and a large challenge.

John Goodlad's new book, *Facing the Future*, identifies the problems that will still be with us long after 1990. He calls them the four P's—"Poverty, Population, Pollution, and Peace." Although racism is still rampant in the United States in 1978, it is encouraging to note that an educator of Dr. Goodlad's stature does not include it in his list of third-century problems. *We can dream, can't we?*

Although we do not yet know all of the implications of the four P's and the other problems that will be with us in the third century, we do know that we will need a citizenry with problem-solving skills and a sound value system if the human race is to survive.

Scientific and technological competencies that are developed can be put to both good and bad uses, as we have seen with atomic power. The uses of computers, nuclear power, and biological advances in genetics must be tempered with sound judgment. Without sound values and a strong feeling of self-worth, the depersonalization of a technological society can immobilize people and hinder their self-actualization. To deal with personal and societal decisions we need adults who are capable of making moral judgments that are derived from clear values.

We need to have scientists who will strive to understand the human implications of what they discover. The late Charles A. Lindbergh articulated the idea in this way: "The salvation of man lies in the balanced qualities of spirit, mind, and body of our people. Without this control, without this balance, our military victories can bring no lasting peace, our laws no lasting justice, our science no lasting progress."

Technological advances and population changes cause life crises for individuals who may need to change careers one or more times during their adult life. Consequently, we must embrace a concept of lifetime learning that encompasses personal relationships as well as employment skills. The schools must address such questions

as "how does a person adapt to changing environments and maintain his/her individuality?"

The increase in leisure time both during the working years and beyond makes it increasingly important for persons to select and develop avocations that will be meaningful to them.

Citizens of the future will need a keen ability to interpret and evaluate the ever-increasing flow of information from the mass media. The national assessment pointed up that one great weakness in our high school students is in the area of critical thinking. This is surely a basic competency that our schools must address.

Most of our communities have multiple resources available for continuing education, yet a lack of coordination often prevents their effective utilization. There is a need for greater articulation between the schools, colleges, community agencies, and the business community in this endeavor. Schools at all levels need to be more flexible—encouraging adults to enter, leave, and re-enter, depending upon their individual needs.

What role do I see for ASCD as we do long-range planning for an unstable, insecure, and unpredictable world? Regardless of the specific programs that we choose, I see three continuing commitments:

1. In the midst of rapid change we need to continue to espouse research, evaluation, and theory development as sound bases for planning the future.

2. We need to maintain and vigorously promote our open membership policy, thereby inviting broad involvement in the identification, study, and evaluation of issues in curriculum, instruction, and supervision.

3. We need to become active rather than passive educational leaders if we are to maximize our potential as an organization. The values we have endorsed for most of this century are the values that will endure in the future when the quality of life will more and more depend upon the quality of communication among people.

The 1962 yearbook committee that produced *Perceiving, Behaving, Becoming* reminded us that "the fullest possible flowering of human potentiality is the business of education."

The celebrated North Carolina author,

Thomas Wolfe, put it this way (and I am sure that he used "man" as a generic term):

"So then, To every man his chance—
To every man, regardless of his birth,
His shining, golden opportunity—
To every man the right to live, to work, to be
himself

And to become whatever his manhood and his
vision can combine to make him."

This, seeker, is the promise of America."

This, ASCD, is OUR CHALLENGE, our
hope, and our commitment. *TL*

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