

THE IMPORTANCE OF PEOPLE

The Importance of Robert R. Leeper

Fred T. Wilhelms

ASCD had barely reached school age in June 1950, when Robert R. Leeper arrived to take charge of its publications program. Even then the young association was making something of a name for itself by the vigor of what it published. But the assorted amateurs who had been getting out the booklets, yearbooks, and all that, in bits and pieces of their spare time must have breathed a sigh of relief when this trained professional came aboard.

For Robert *was* a trained professional. Way back in his undergraduate days he had been poetry editor of *The Carolina Magazine*, and his own verse was appearing in newspapers and magazines as well as in several anthologies. After World War II, in which Sergeant Leeper served three years as a translator working with German prisoners of war, he devoted a year, in Columbia University's College of General Studies, to the study of writing, editing, typography, journalism, and related subjects. When June 1950 came, that fresh Doctor of Education degree in Curriculum and Teaching which he brought with him from Teachers College, Columbia University had as its major project a study of the journals of state education associations. He had deliberately zeroed in on a career in the professional literature of education.

The ASCD officials who hired him must have gasped when they found so exact a match to their needs. Yet even they could not have known, then, how precise that match would turn out to be. They could hardly have known, for instance,

that the young Robert had already developed a philosophy of education so nicely attuned to everything ASCD stood for that Robert himself would become a mainstay of that set of views.

During the McCarthy Era, ASCD had the courage to publish the searching analysis, *Forces Affecting American Education* and to defend its earlier issuance of the *Building America* series, thus demonstrating the rights of a free press to present all sides in controversial issues.

The marriage of association and editor was a perfect one. Publications grew in quantity and rose in quality till they were the envy of other associations in the field. Year by year they won prize after prize. It became a commonplace that educators who saw no other reason to join ASCD would join simply to have the publications. Within any brief period of years the holder of a comprehensive membership would accumulate a respectable and not-so-small professional library.

In a curious way, those publications became the cement that held the association together. They were also the support that kept it afloat financially, when times were hard. In the years when I was Executive Secretary, we counted on publications for a strong third of all our income—and there had been times when the fraction was much higher than that.

Yet, strong as the editor was, all this was accomplished without any hint of the imposition of one man's views. Quite the contrary, Robert steadily sought out the desires and ideas of all

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the members. He kept refining questionnaire techniques, to identify both what needed to be written and who was best to write it. He spent more and more time with the Publications Committee. And, as a veteran member of that committee, I can testify that he listened to us almost too modestly—and then proceeded to shape our groping notions into journals and booklets that far transcended what we had stammered to describe. The process has been as true to the ASCD tradition as the products themselves.

Still, inevitably, the process was mostly the one quiet man in the bare little office, slogging away through reams of manuscript, punishing that one good eye as he hardly looked up for hours at a time; it was in that loaded briefcase that went home with him night after night and every weekend. There are few harder, lonelier jobs—and few men who stick to any job so totally.

Now that Robert Leeper is leaving us for a richly earned retirement, it is time to look at what

he has meant, not only to us, not only to all educators, but to education itself and the young people in it. Some twenty years ago I wrote an Importance of People column entitled "The Importance of ASCD." The decade before had been a long, grim period for all liberal thought, especially for liberal thought in education. Many of our comrades had weakened and retreated before the storm. ASCD never had. I likened it then to old General Jackson, standing there "like a stone wall." ASCD was a place to rally to, a shield to regroup behind. I still believe that. And if ASCD stood like a stone wall against the reactionary forces of the 1950's, it has been equally a home for stability and the strong heart through all the turbulence of the 1960s and 1970s. Steady, idealistic conviction and the unshakeable courage to live by our beliefs may well have been our greatest contribution to the quivering world of education.

Well, if ASCD has done these things, who else has done them quite so much as Robert

National Curriculum Study Institutes

Summer 1978

Learning Styles/Teaching Styles: A Necessary Interface for Achieving Quality Education

June 19-20, 1978, Kansas City, Missouri (Alameda Plaza)

This institute is designed to explore some of the emerging research on learning/teaching styles, to examine the research findings for their implications for modifying teaching behavior and styles and designing curriculum to be more compatible with various learning styles, and to examine some specific educational models that have been developed for diagnosing and responding to teaching/learning styles.

Consultants: *Anthony Gregorc*, Associate Professor of Secondary Education, University of Connecticut, Storrs; *Alfredo Castañeda*, Professor of Education, Stanford University, Stanford, California; *Diane Tessier*, Counselor, Sligo Junior High School, Silver Spring, Maryland; *Rita Dunn*, Professor of Education, St. John's University, Jamaica, New York; and *Kenneth Dunn*, Superintendent of Schools, Hewlett-Woodmere Public Schools, Woodmere, New York.

Your registration must reach ACSD by Monday, June 5, 1978

What Competencies for Graduation?

July 17-18, 1978, Vail, Colorado (Kiandra/Talisman Lodge)

Approximately 17 states have passed legislation requiring special minimal competencies before students are to be allowed to graduate. This institute will analyze the legislation that has been passed, discuss the curriculum and instruction issues that are involved, and share the experiences of people who have been involved with the curriculum work competency-based education (CBE) entails.

Consultants: *Chris Pipho*, Associate Director, Research and Information Department Education Commission of the States, Denver, Colorado; *Gordon Cawelli*, Executive Director, ASCD, Washington, D.C.; *Max Brunton*, Administrative Assistant for Secondary Education, Parkrose Public Schools, Portland, Oregon; *Margaret Labat*, Superintendent, Evanston Township Public Schools, Evanston, Illinois; *John Henry Martin*, Chairman, National Panel on the High School for USOE, Stuart, Florida; *William Spady*, Senior Analyst, National Institute of Education, Washington, D.C.

Optional background material packet at special price—\$14.00. Background Material packet:

Life Skills in School and Society (yearbook) \$5.50, *Vitalizing the High School* (booklet) \$3.50, *Requiring Competencies for High School Graduation*, Chris Pipho and others (cassette tape) \$9.00. Total = \$18.00

----- NCSI REGISTRATION FORM -----

- Learning Styles/Teaching Styles
 Competencies \$14.00

Name _____

Title _____ Institution _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Registration fee: _____ \$85.00 ASCD Member _____

\$110.00 Nonmember _____ Total \$ _____

- My check (payable to ASCD) is enclosed.
 Please bill my institution at this address: _____

Mail completed form to: ASCD, 1701 K St., N.W., Suite 1100, Washington, D.C. 20006. ATTN: Barbara Collins, Institute Manager.

Information on hotel reservations will be sent to you by return mail.

Leeper—Presidents and Executive Secretaries, and boards and councils have come and gone, but this one man has been there. This gentleman of mild manners, have you ever known his publications to take cover, let alone to retreat under fire? For 28 years he has aimed for high purpose and steered accordingly. In the process he has given a clear, strong voice to a great liberal association. The result has been influence far out of proportion to our numbers, and much of that influence must be his.

By any reasonable audit, simply looking with clear eyes at the realities of these swirling decades, we must declare Robert Leeper a Very Important Person.

We'll miss you, Robert, even though we hope to see you often. We wish you everything that you have earned. Even though it took you an unconscionably long time, we're glad you found your sweet and gracious Sarah Lou. It's good to think of the two of you strolling once more among your native Southern pines. Well done, and God bless you! *FL*



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