

Overview

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Worth the Effort?

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As we were assembling this issue, ASCD was itself involved in two interesting and unusual collaborative activities.

The first is a campaign by a coalition of education organizations to improve the teaching of thinking. The idea to join forces with other education groups was one of several proposed at an ASCD planning conference in May 1984. The next fall, Carolyn Hughes, then president-elect, invited the heads of major education associations to participate. Now more than 20 organizations, including NEA and AFT, are engaged in a five-part joint effort to (1) lay out a framework of thinking skills useful for curriculum development, (2) urge publishers to produce thought-provoking tests and textbooks, (3) work for changes in teacher education, (4) encourage needed research, and (5) inform the public about teaching thinking. Task groups, each composed of representatives appointed by the sponsoring organizations, have begun work on these ambitious aims.

It took a long time for the coalition to refine these projects and to appoint task force members, partly because our views of the problem and our conceptions of what needed to be done were quite different, and partly because those attending the meetings, even if they were executive directors or presidents, could not take official stands on behalf of their associations or commit resources without first checking with others.

We don't yet know what will actually be accomplished—some organizations appear ready to do considerably more than others—but I am pleased by little signs of commitment such as an agreement that each sponsoring organization is to provide travel expenses for its own representatives to task group meetings.

A somewhat different example of collaboration is an international conference cosponsored by ASCD in Enschede, the Netherlands, in November. The meeting was planned to help clarify the concept of core curriculum: what all students should be expected to learn. Curriculum specialists from 12 nations, mostly western European, had prepared written descriptions of the core curriculum of schools in their countries. At one of the sessions, ASCD Executive Director Gordon Cawelti called for a "world curriculum," declaring that although each nation should continue to promote its own culture, economic system, and values, students everywhere need to learn a common core of knowledge and skills that would contribute to global harmony. Participants were intrigued, but at this point, no provisions have been established for follow-up other than publication of the conference proceedings (which will be available from ASCD sometime in 1986).

Projects like these are exciting but also ambiguous and, therefore, frustrating. Those involved are sometimes tempted to abandon the effort to work with and through other people, because it would be so much easier to "do it myself." Ironically, jobs like these cannot be done unilaterally; their very nature demands joint effort. More and more frequently in this interdependent world, we have no choice but to drop our guards and join hands. When collaboration works, the results are worth the investment.

Ron Brandt

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