

Tools for Learning

SCHOOL EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES

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SCHOOL EQUIPMENT, supplies, and furnishings are as much a part of the essential "tools of the trade" of teachers as are guns, ammunition, and jeeps to soldiers. Even in this period of scientific miracles, which has witnessed an amazing growth of synthetics of all kinds, the Biblical injunction that "you can't make bricks without straw" still makes sense and remains an unvarnished fact. As educational processes have become more complex and intricate, equipment and supplies have acquired increasing importance. No longer can a good school be had by solely having a Mark Hopkins on one end of a log and a pupil on the other. And among the other things which are necessary, proper equipment and supplies occupy an important place.

In these days when educational planning holds the center of the stage, it is timely, therefore, to direct attention to the importance of careful planning of the equipment, supplies, and furnishings which the schools are going to need during the next school year. Much more is required than scanning the amounts and items used in the past year and comparing anticipated enrollments with those of the past.

What are some of these other considerations?

First, attention should be given to what furnishings, equipment, apparatus, and supplies would aid most in conducting the educational task. The constant addition of new items due to new inventions and refinements of old ones has made available to schools

many new and superior articles. Undoubtedly the period following the war will see the development of many more. Schools will want to keep abreast of these developments. The refinements which have and are being made on motion picture projectors for instance make the projector of even a few years ago as antedated as a 1920 model automobile. It would be as ridiculous for schools to attempt to use prewar maps and globes in 1950 as it would be for a farmer to use a cradle to cut his grain or a manufacturer to use a water wheel as the motive power for his machinery.

Second, care should be devoted to discovering what supplies and equipment are available. Manufacturers of school products are constantly on the alert to provide materials to meet school needs. New articles are put on the market constantly. School people need to know this market if they are to act intelligently on selecting their supplies and equipment. Aids are available to help them in this undertaking. Supply and equipment catalogs, advertisements in educational journals, The American School and University yearbooks, and Sweets Catalog File are sources which are rich in information. All should be used. Two other worthy avenues from which a great deal of assistance can be obtained are: (a) The National Buyers Association of Purchasing Agents, 11 Park Place, New York City, and (b) The Educational Buyers Association, 45 Astor Place, New York City. Only by making a constant study of the available market can the school make sure it has the materials which are most necessary and usable.

Third, it must be determined how much of a given article is required. Again, constant studies are necessary. Past experience, particularly when carefully appraised, should certainly be considered. Studies of present enrollments as compared with past figures provide pertinent facts. A study of inventories of supplies on hand will oftentimes yield

There is no place for guesswork in selecting school equipment and supplies. A number of considerations to which school people might well give their attention in planning orders of materials are discussed in this introduction to Tools for Learning by Walter D. Cocking, managing editor of The School Executive.

illuminating information. The extent to which certain materials are used also should be studied.

In a study made of the use of compound microscopes in one city school system, it was disclosed that in one large high school approximately twenty-five were on the shelves most of the time, while in another high school in the same system the students were handicapped by the lack of a sufficient number of microscopes. Undoubtedly, much equipment can be used more advantageously. Here also is a field in which substantial economies can be made. In large systems, it is possible for many pieces of equipment or apparatus to be used by several buildings. In small systems it may be possible to purchase certain items which can be used by several schools, thus making available through coordinated effort what would be entirely impossible for one school to obtain by itself.

A *fourth* step is the purchase of the items needed. It is common practice now for schools to ask for bids in purchasing. The users of the materials are the ones best qualified to determine whether the item bid upon is the item needed and whether the relative quality of the material justifies the price bid. Since the lowest priced item is not always the best buy, it is important that that decision be rendered by those who are to use the article rather than by the individual who is responsible for the detail of actual purchasing.

A *fifth* step has to do with the checking of the articles when they are received against specifications and samples submitted and on which purchases are based. Again this is a professional, not a clerical, task.

Finally there is the use of the article. Here lies a field for great improvement. It is essential that equipment and supplies should be handled and operated by trained and competent workmen. Such knowledge and skills have to be learned. They are as much a part of a teacher's equipment as anything else. Yet little is done about it. Many a piece of apparatus is either discarded entirely or used with indifferent results because no one has trained the user. Again, many an article stands idle and unused in some classroom when it could be put to good use elsewhere.

School systems might well inaugurate a program where time is regularly set aside for the purpose of teaching the use and care of various types of equipment and supplies. The

results would more than justify the time and effort spent. Not only would the materials be used in a more skillful manner but, more important, teaching efficiency would be increased. Considerable progress has been made in many systems in teaching janitors how to use equipment and supplies to clean and operate the plant. Little has been done, however, to teach teachers how to become expert in the use of instructional equipment.

More than \$50 million a year are spent by schools for equipment and supplies and the chances are that the amount will be greatly increased in the postwar years. To taxpayers and teachers alike this is a sizable amount of money. On those of us in the profession rests the responsibility to see to it that the money is spent to bring the largest possible return in improved educational opportunity. In the final analysis, the value of every individual piece of equipment and every item of supply has to be judged in terms of the extent to which it aids in the improvement of instruction.

Summer experiences for young people will be discussed by Cecil Parker in *Tools for Learning in May*

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