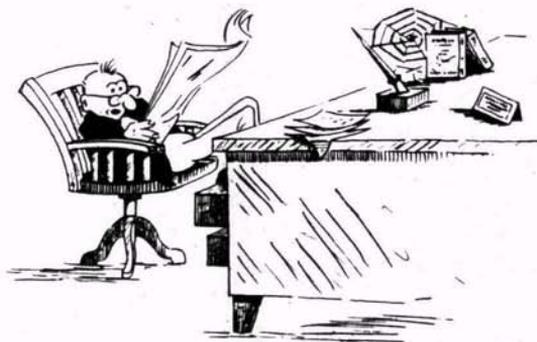


# The Importance of People

William Van Til

## The Community Won't Stand for It



"THIS NEW CURRICULUM STUFF is all very well in theory," said Mr. Inactive Administrator, tipping back and forth relaxedly in his swivel chair. "Dealing with life problems, a common learnings program, meeting real needs, planning with young people—all the rest of that line of goods the curriculum people are peddling. Sounds very good—on paper.

"Matter of fact, personally I'm all in favor of it," affirmed Mr. Inactive Administrator. "One hundred percent in favor! If it were up to me, instead of up to this community, I'd be glad to send out a bulletin and install a new curriculum in my school system beginning tomorrow!

"But you've got to be practical in the school business. This community just won't stand for changes in the schools. This isn't Winnetka or Bronxville or Shaker Heights, you know. This is just an ordinary, everyday American community." And Mr. Inactive Administrator sat back triumphantly in his swivel chair.

"Take these life problems of youth," he continued. "Getting along with others,

budgeting money, using leisure time, and all that. Thumbs down, says the community!"

*(But, Mr. Inactive Administrator, Harold Hand in a public opinion survey of an ordinary everyday community in Illinois, asked parents what things they would like to see the school do more about. Sixty-seven percent asked for more emphasis on teaching children to get along with others. Fifty-five percent asked for more study of how to use money wisely. Forty-two percent asked for more chances for all children to learn sports and recreational activities.)*

"Reading, writing, and arithmetic—the three R's—that's what the community wants and that's all they want from the schools."

*(Yet, Mr. Inactive Administrator, in the same survey, Hand found only thirty-four percent of parents who asked for more attention to reading and only thirty-two percent who asked for more attention to arithmetic.)*

"Why, you just can't touch some of these life problems even with a long pole in a typical American community. Take, for instance,"—and Mr. Administrator discreetly lowered his voice—"sex education. There'd be an explosion!"

*(There was an explosion all right concerning sex education in one Texas community. An able superintendent, one of the most forward-looking schoolmen in his region, judged that in his community he had best refuse a student petition for sex education in the schools. Coronet, a pocket-sized magazine, happened to mention the fact in an article advocating sex education in the schools. The telephone wires to the superintendent's office burned for days. What did the community callers say? We*

want sex education for our boys and girls!

Oregon parents apparently agree with these Texans. Of six thousand parents questioned, 97.2 percent said they wanted their children to see the Oregon film, Human Growth. Only 1.6 percent said definitely no.)

"And as far as this common learnings organization is concerned—not a chance! Any community would fight you tooth and nail if you tampered with the sacred structure of subjects."

(In Springfield, Missouri, the Illini Survey Associates asked the adults in thirty-one city blocks selected by careful sampling techniques, "Should the school program be organized around life problems such as making a home, rearing children, running a business, participating in government, and using leisure time; or would the students learn more if the curriculum were organized by subject-matter fields such as history, civics, literature, grammar, art, and music?" Seven percent were undecided. Thirty-eight percent favored subject matter. Fifty-five percent favored life problems organization.)

"After all, you can't blame the community for these backward ideas," said Inactive benignly. "They don't know any better. For instance, the magazine articles they read make fun of new practices and insist on the Fundamentals only."

(But, Mr. Inactive Administrator, a study which this writer directed, "What Popular Magazines Say About Education, 1946-48," discusses 334 education articles carried by popular magazines for the gen-

eral public. The general tenor of the articles on the schools encouraged a climate of opinion favorable to a functional curriculum with life problems characteristic of content.

Articles asked questions: "What's Wrong with High School?" "Must I Take This Course?" "Just How Good Are Our Schools?" "Our High Schools: What Are They Worth to Our Children?" Still other articles answered. Many called for guidance to overcome maladjustment and to help vocational choices. Several advocated family education, particularly sex education in the schools. Several called for human relations education. A comparable group described and endorsed programs used by schools in fostering international understanding. Others described how students learn government through direct experience. Some advised safety education, including automobile driving. The several articles on communications skills advised varied media and approaches rather than the three R's as ends in themselves. Another group asked expansion in audio-visual aids. Many described programs in which school and community work together.)

Mr. Inactive Administrator felt very virtuous. Obviously, he believed in forward-looking education. It was the community, that arch villain of education, that held him back.

(Straws in the wind, Mr. Inactive Administrator. Perhaps a wind is rising in American communities that may destroy one of the last rationalizations beloved by educational inaction.)



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