

The School's Role in Relation to Area Youth Agencies

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How should the school relate itself to the many other groups and agencies affecting the lives of children and youth? This important curriculum issue is discussed by Lloyd Allen Cook, chairman, Department of Educational Sociology, College of Education, Wayne University, Detroit, Michigan.

WHAT IS the school's role in relation to area service agencies which work with or provide assistance to youth? Take, for example, welfare and goodwill organizations. Dare a public school system ignore them, act superior to them, leave contacts to chance, blow hot or cold? Are these agencies deeply concerned with the upbringing of young people? Do they operate under public or semi-public mandate, and with professional staffs? Do they cut into the community tax dollar, influencing where money is spent? Are they, in sum, *partners with schools* in the larger educational task? If so, should school-agency relations be a matter of school policy, action and concern?

SOME ESSENTIAL SCHOOL TASKS

In the four years of College Study work,¹ we found these questions a prime issue in a good many places. Our job was to assist in area coordination under local college leadership, to unite school and community in a total push effort to better certain phases of

child life and learning. At times, we seemed to get nowhere—nowhere much except to reach a kind of semantic unity, a way of talking across deep cleavage lines. At times too, the work paid off. People caught fire, began action, got something better than they had had. Where persons got acquainted, *really acquainted*, values came to be shared. Under such conditions, school policy was made a matter of serious discussion. Group decisions tended to move along several interrelated lines.

School-Agency Relations

- Locate, describe and assess an area's total social, civic and welfare services to its young people, not excluding churches, government offices and large industrial plants. Make a loose-leaf resources inventory of use to schools.
- Get to know and to understand agency personnel, history, organization and operations. Study especially the agency's conception of itself, its aims, purposes, values.
- Use these life resources in the school's program, planning uses as learner needs suggest. Evaluate, with agency assistance, pupil behaviors, specific learning outcomes and general effects.

¹For concrete programs, *College Programs in Intergroup Relations*; for analysis, *Intergroup Relations in Teacher Education*. Two volume final report. American Council on Education, Washington, 1950, 1951.

- Cooperate with area agencies, giving qualified persons access to school records. Work with agencies on child-care, family-life problems. Refer cases to them where they are equipped and approved to give needed services.
- Support these agencies as a good citizen should in their fund-raising and other programs. Join their rank-and-file or, if time and training permit, offer them technical help on phases of their work, for instance in group-process education.
- Build a permanent structure, such as a school-agency council, for around-the-table thinking, where area changes can be studied, needs located, plans made, services coordinated.
- Teach area agencies about the school, the continued worth of its traditional tasks, the emergence today of a new kind of life-centered, human-relations education.

One cannot, in brief space, deal with these various points, for that is a book-length undertaking.² For instance, the problem of understanding any civic or social agency, any governmental or industrial institution, is more difficult than might appear. Understanding does not come from making a look-see trip, asking unintelligent questions, listening to a pat address, attending public ceremonies. The kind of knowing we have in mind starts from a theory of the agency's place in the total community picture, a conception of its role. Unless one has insight on this, few agency workers would take the time to teach him the ABC's of their business. With insight, a teacher is in position to ask

²For example, Lloyd and Elaine Cook, *A Sociological Approach to Education*. McGraw-Hill, New York, 1950.

the right questions, to put together bit by bit a picture of what is in the other fellow's mind.

SCIENCE, WELFARE AND EDUCATION

One approach to agency understanding is via a dominant element in our culture, the idea of science. Science writers often define science, particularly the psycho-social sciences, in terms of three goals: to understand, to predict, to control. More thought will show, it seems to us, that the control function does not rest with scientists as scientists. It is the job of policy-makers and practitioners, with the public in a democracy having the final say-so. The obvious reason is that control involves moral values, the nation's whole package of rights, mores and ideals. This is, to repeat, our control culture, and its center is public welfare, human growth, child development and well-being. All community service agencies, all schools, share in this welfare orientation. Each must assume in order to work at all that it knows what is *good for people*, at least what is not hurtful to them.

If this reasoning is valid, one has a basis for thinking through school-agency-college coordination. The idea would be to combine welfare, science and good practice in an area-wide program of child-adult care and education.

AGENCY INTERESTS IN EDUCATION

One thing teachers need often to think about is the difference between schooling and education, the fact that schooling may play no major part in child acculturation. Another thing is to realize the extent to which non-school agencies have moved into real-life education. We have seen some mighty good

casework, groupwork and community teaching conducted by agency people, and of course some work that looked only so-so. Best examples come from so-called urban and rural "slum areas," where human needs are greatest, schools are weakest, and social work agencies are, as a rule, the best staffed, best run and best financed.

What, for example, are the major service aims of professional social work? The Association of Social Workers³ has listed these objectives.

All people everywhere need organized provisions to insure opportunities for work and a stable income, to safeguard their homes, to promote mental and physical health and adequate education, and to provide opportunities for religious expression and for the satisfying use of leisure time.

Among all groups, however, some are especially vulnerable, and they may need temporary priorities as long as the total supply of community services remains critically short. . . . A high priority must always be given to services for the very young and the growing, for the injured and disabled, for those friendless, homeless and displaced.

As another illustration, consider the civic goodwill agencies engaged in intergroup education. In a critical study of eleven national programs,⁴ five purposes were central to them all. All agencies hoped to change people, notably

young people. All put primary stress on "real-life learning" as a change technique, usually on group-process teaching. All seek to educate for better human relations. All assume that facts change values, that change effects come most readily to people who work together on a common problem. All tend to evaluate their change efforts in terms of verbal responses, including testimonials, or else make assessment via head counts, i.e., persons contacted, materials distributed, and so on.

Teacher Reactions to Agency "Invasion"

How do school heads and teachers react to such data? They are, first off, a bit defensive of their own vested interests. What is education? Isn't it entrusted in our country to the schools? Who do these agency people think they are? Why don't they do their own work? In short, reactions are hardly conducive to better understandings, to closer school-agency cooperation.

Pre-service teachers react in much the same way, with one exception. Seniors, in particular, ask why they have not been taught about social agency programs, why they have had to spend so much time on a pencil-sharpening, window-blind lowering, form-filling type of educational training. Why did not their courses reach out into the society that teachers are destined to serve, to our community ways of living, our ever-present change-power-unity problems? They claim, many of them, never to have had a college course that reaches down to the social realities they experience in their student-teaching.

We have also found another reaction, a pre- or in-service teacher who knows

³From *A Social Policy for Today*. American Association of Social Workers, New York, 1949.

⁴*A Brief Survey of Major Agencies in the Field of Intercultural Relations*. Department of Scientific Research, American Jewish Committee, New York, 1950.

that (a) children are a society's blue-chip stock, its only life insurance policy; (b) no institution, however well respected, has any certain long-term monopoly on any basic community service function, including education; and (c) *good education is where one finds it*. This person knows, more than most, the competitive character of American life, and he senses that some promising changes are taking place outside of traditional schools.

CLOSER SCHOOL-AGENCY COORDINATION

How do schools move toward closer school-agency coordination? We have noticed no one best way, only a number of variant first steps. Sometimes movement originates from a schoolboard green light but not usually. More often, coordination starts informally on school initiative; after which official board sanction is sought. In reflecting on actual cases, we are impressed with the times that school action has begun on some immediate youth problem, worried along as such processes do, only to wind up months later in some formal need-meeting structure. Such councils, or whatever they are called, tend to function rather well and to last. They are *means to ends*, not ends per se, thus no better and no worse than the insights and concerns fed into them.

Here, for example, is a school group which undertook an elaborate "pupil needs" survey, gathering data on several hundred children at grades six, nine and twelve. Titles were much like the better known categories of the *SRA Youth Inventory*,⁵ a very complete and

reliable picture of adolescent concerns.⁶ As study findings began to shape up, the teacher-pupil-parent group realized that it had bitten off more than it alone could chew, that there was need for help. What about churches, were they interested? Did health agencies have a stake? Goodwill groups, assiduously propagandizing school children? Social settlements, Scouts, boys clubs, and the like? In truth, what "torch drive" agencies were not concerned? With half an eye, anyone could see that this was a community problem. It would take an all-or-none solution, or some facsimile thereof.

At this point, and not before, thinking turned toward school-community coordination. Meetings were held, both public and private. People did not have to splutter around about cooperation, soliloquize about the "*che-el-drun*," clobber up to local power interests. They had something to talk about. They had the most potent motivators-to-action we know, some simple and solid social-science facts. And so, meetings got down to business. What could the school itself undertake by way of improving old services and starting new ones? The churches, settlements, and so on? And how could so many good-doers, really a most varied crew, be kept out of one another's hair, be kept at good doing? So, when the "yes, buts —" had subsided, an over-all "advisory council" was formed. We wish now the tale had a proper Alger ending but it does not. Like so many councils, this one fell victim to sleeping sickness, showing as most post-mortems do the

⁵See *Examiner Manual for the SRA Youth Inventory*. No. 7-234. Science Research Associates, 57 W. Grand Ave., Chicago 10, Ill.

⁶With exception of an obvious neglect of truly social, or intergroup, problems in adolescent life. The inventory is individualistic in its emphasis.

importance of the first few months, the first long hard year.

FOUR ROADS, NONE EASY

We well remember a day at a Kansas high school. A farmer's truck came driving into the schoolyard, bouncing over the ruts. Painted on was a banner for all to see: "Repaired by the Industrial Arts Students of the _____ High School." In a little while, at a faculty meeting, we spoke about the truck, complimenting the school, then asking how many trucks a school should fix? A teacher said, "How many? Why, as many as need to be fixed," an answer with which the staff in general seemed to agree. Is the school a garage, a repair shop, or is it an educational institution? If the latter is the case, should as many trucks be fixed as are needed for the training of students, no more, no less?

As an educational institution, the school has, we believe, four functions. One is to teach *values*, a freedom-unity (enterprise-welfare) point of view. Another is to teach *knowledge*, to reach out into all the sciences for their findings, to keep abreast (and who can!) of our times. A third is to teach *skills*, the practical ways of doing things well;

skills in self maintenance, in human relations, community service and the like. And finally, a school must teach, or try to teach, good *judgment* in combining all its other teachings in everyday problem-solving, for otherwise little may come of anything else. It is, incidentally, on this fourth factor, good judgment, that we in teaching are pretty much whipped. Some students seem to get it, some do not, and what teacher can tell who is who, or why, or when, where or how much?

It is, therefore, as *educator*, rather than otherwise, that a school can form a lasting partnership with community agencies. Not that any teacher worth his or her salt would ignore a sick child, a hungry one, a deviant or maladjusted one, or condone bad home or street conditions. Such cases must be met, in school or outside, yet in general a teacher seems well advised to stick pretty close to educational tasks. This is, we would add, no static view. Where social lags, problems, needs, arise, where change is rampant, new services are a necessity. Someone must gather facts, get a hearing on them, start the wheels rolling. This has always been, in our opinion, the essential role of a good public school.

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