

## Making the Public School Curriculum Public Property

OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS will have to be made much more "public" than they now are if their future effectiveness is to be assured. Unwarranted and irresponsible attacks designed to destroy public confidence in and support of the public schools are on the increase in this country. These attacks cannot successfully be repulsed, much less prevented, by the teaching profession alone.

Only the lay public can make the waging of unwarranted attacks against the schools so unpleasant and so unprofitable a proposition that this dirty business will go out of existence. This the lay public can reasonably be expected to do only if and when the program of the public school—all that it is and does—is "psychologically owned" by the citizens of the community. If and when this happy day arrives an attack on the schools will be regarded by the citizens of the community as an attack on themselves—and they will react by branding its perpetrators as public enemies and treating them accordingly.

### Who "Owns" the Curriculum?

At the present moment it is only too painfully apparent that the lay citizens of the community do *not* regard an unwarranted attack on the schools of their community as an attack on themselves. Instead, they typically regard these attacks as attacks on the administrators or the teachers, and—to a lesser degree—on the board of education. This, of course, is simply dramatic proof that the program of the

school is not at present "psychologically owned" by the lay citizens of the community; that the program of these schools is not in reality "public property." Until our schools are thus converted into genuinely public institutions we members of the teaching profession can expect to see them progressively weakened—to the accompaniment of a continuing and ever-increasing stream of uncomfortably hot lead in the seat of our collective pants.

This unhappy situation is largely of our own making. With but a few exceptions, we have typically proceeded on our own to determine the purposes of our instruction, to design programs believed to be in consonance therewith, and to appraise the fruits of our labors. As our time-worn phrases of "interpreting the school to the public" and "selling the schools to the public" only too clearly reveal, we have in effect asked the public to rubber stamp a set of educational purposes, a program design and a method of evaluating which the lay citizens of the community had little or no real part (too typically the latter) in shaping up. To expect the public to feel any real ownership under such conditions is scarcely realistic.

### Action To Develop Public Ownership

Something is being done about this "public ownership" business in Illinois through a whole series of local action-research projects sponsored by the Illinois Curriculum Program (ICP), a creature of the Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruc-

tion. Parenthetically, the ICP itself is "public property" in that all its policies are recommended, and all that it does is approved, by a statewide steering committee representative of agriculture, business, industry, labor, the Illinois Congress of Parents and Teachers, the Illinois School Board Association and the organized teaching profession.

When all are completed, there will be over twenty of these local action-research projects, known collectively as the Local Area Consensus Studies. During the 1951-52 school year over eighty Illinois high schools carried on one or the other of three of these community-involvement projects; those concerned, respectively, with extra class activities, family living and guidance. At least five others (health, library services, mathematics, music and science) will be available to the schools of Illinois this fall or winter. All of the remaining subject and service areas of the curriculum will be dealt with by one or the other of the remainder of the twenty-odd studies, now in preparation.

Each of these local action-research projects is designed to facilitate the following purposes:

1. To enable representative lay citizens, representative pupils, and all teachers in the school to consider together what purposes the local school should be attempting to achieve in regard to the particular subject or service area in question.

2. To enable these patrons, pupils and teachers to consider together which of the things they think should be attempted are, and which are not, currently being achieved to a reasonably adequate degree in this subject or service area.

3. To enable this group to decide together what can and should be done

to implement those of the accepted purposes in this subject or service area which are currently being neglected.

Each of these local action-research projects is conducted with the aid of printed inventories supplied free of charge by the ICP to all interested schools in Illinois. To describe these instruments and the process in which they are employed, let us take mathematics as our example. All of the studies are identical in design, so to understand one is to understand them all.

The first inventory utilized in the local action project in mathematics is entitled *What Do You Think About Our School's Mathematics Program?* Put in question form, this inventory contains the purposes which a statewide group of experts (well trained and successfully experienced teachers of high school mathematics, a university professor of mathematics, a college of education specialist in the teaching of mathematics, a state supervisor of mathematics, a school administrator) believes an up-to-date high school should probably attempt to achieve in and through its mathematics instruction. In regard to each of these items each participant in the local study (all teachers and representative patrons and pupils) is asked to indicate anonymously whether or not he thinks the local school should be attempting to achieve the purpose in question, and to tell how adequately or inadequately he thinks the school is performing in this respect at the present time. These inventory results are then locally tabulated and laid before the local patron-teacher-pupil group as the starting point for group discussions. In these group discussions the pro's and con's of all disputed purposes are presented and weighed, and evidence bearing on the adequacy or inadequacy of the



**The NATION'S LEADING ENGLISH SERIES**

**... with a personalized approach to language study**

# THE GOOD ENGLISH SERIES

HAROLD G. SHANE • FLORENCE K. FERRIS • EDWARD E. KEENER

• *A NEW series of English texts for Grades 2-8*

• Develops power in language usage.

- A flexible program which can be adapted to children's interests and needs.
- A pupil's handbook for ready reference is included in each book.
- Organized around short self-contained learning situations.
- Exercises and activities are based on children's experiences and interests.

## LIDLAW BROTHERS

328 South Jefferson Street  
CHICAGO 6, ILL.

221 Fourth Avenue  
NEW YORK 3, N. Y.

2121 Staunton Court  
PALO ALTO, CALIF.

707 Browder Street  
DALLAS 1, TEXAS

441 W. Peachtree Street, N.E.  
ATLANTA 3, GA.

school's present performance is introduced and examined.

When it appears that these discussions are nearing the point of diminishing returns, the second inventory utilized in the project is given to the patron-teacher-pupil group. This instrument is entitled *In What Respects Should We Strengthen Our School's Mathematics Program?* It is so structured as to reveal the degree of group consensus which has been developed in regard to what the school should be doing and the particular respects in which its mathematics program should be improved.

The third step in the local action project is the formulating of a proposed plan for bringing about these desired improvements. This proposed plan is designed by those teachers in the school who feel that their work would in any way be affected if the desired improve-

ments are brought about. This planning committee is supplied with numerous aids contained in a third instrument entitled *How Should We Improve Our School's Mathematics Program?* When completed, this proposed plan is laid before the total patron-teacher-pupil group for explanation, criticism, and possible modification.

Then the plan is put to work. Since it was made, and hence is believed in, by those who carry it out, the odds are overwhelming that this plan will work. And since it has to do with purposes which the laymen and pupils understand and accept, and deals with inadequacies which they recognize and want corrected, the likelihood of patron and pupil "ownership" and support is high.—*Harold C. Hand*, professor of education, University of Illinois, Urbana.

Copyright © 1953 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.