

Uniting Forces To Improve Education

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Using Films To Interpret the School Program

"WHAT do the elementary schools teach?" "What is meant by a 'good environment for learning'?" "Why should primary classrooms be larger than those for the upper grades?" "What plant facilities and instructional materials are needed in a good school?" "What is a resource room and how is it used?" There are few superintendents, supervisors, principals and teachers who have not at some time been asked these and similar questions.

Such questions are asked by parents who want to be better informed about the schools which their children attend, by members of school boards concerned with school building programs, and by members of other lay and professional groups. The extent to which these and other questions are satisfactorily answered frequently determines the support which the communities give their schools. When parents and others gain better understanding of certain practices in the school program, their interest will be greater and the relationships between school and community will be strengthened. School people everywhere are seeking more effective ways of deepening these understandings among parents and others.

In Virginia the State Department of Education has produced a film, "The Elementary School." Its purpose is to help parents, teachers and others develop a better understanding of some of the significant features of a good elementary school. The scenes illustrate many practices and situations characteristic of good elementary schools as

they exist in various systems throughout Virginia. The pictures show 107 different classrooms from 68 schools in 27 counties and cities. The areas of a good school program which are emphasized in the film are:

- a. Buildings and facilities which contribute to effective living and learning.
- b. Relationships and understandings which provide a climate for effective learning.
- c. Provision for development of the physical and mental health of all pupils.
- d. Opportunities for developing skills needed in living a satisfying life.
- e. Experiences through which understandings of the physical world and its influence on man can be acquired.
- f. Opportunities for children to acquire information and appreciation of their community and nation, and their relationship to the world.

School superintendents, principals and supervisors have used this film with PTA groups, school boards and other lay groups. Essentially, it shows what some Virginia schools are doing, helps clarify objectives and procedures within the schools, gives visual explanation of desirable facilities for school plants, shows various kinds of instructional materials, and portrays in general some of the characteristics of a good elementary school.

In one community where plans were being drawn for new elementary school buildings, the film served a very useful purpose. It demonstrated effectively for members of the school board and

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other lay groups the facilities which are considered essential in modern school plants, why they are important and how they function in a good school program. Verbal descriptions were supplemented by the film as the school personnel explained the types of learning activities which are present in a good instructional program, and how these determine the size and arrangement of individual classrooms and the general facilities of the school.

The use of motion pictures in interpreting a good school program in Virginia has not been limited to this one film. Many other films have been widely used and have contributed much toward improving understandings of good school programs. Some films which have proved quite helpful are those showing the ways in which children grow and develop, how individual differences are provided for in classrooms, and how the curriculum may be developed around problems. Among

these films are: "Skippy and the 3 R's," "The School That Learned to Eat," "A Report in Primary Color," and "Children Learning Through Experience."

These illustrations of how school people have used films to help interpret the school to the community are only some of the ways in which films can be used. Their usefulness is limited only by the resourcefulness of those using them. School people need to be ever conscious of the importance of communication between the school and community. They must continue to explore the possibilities of different media through which understandings can be deepened and clarified. What the public knows about education and the schools is one of the most important forces affecting education and school improvement.

—ELIZABETH HENSON, supervisor of elementary education, Virginia State Board of Education, Richmond, Virginia.

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