

## How American

### Is Your ACTIVITY PROGRAM?

Student activity programs should be so designed that they will give young people firsthand experience in developing the concepts, skills, and the "enthusiasm for democratic living" so essential to full participation in our way of life.

**T**HE ACTIVITY PROGRAMS of more than five hundred secondary schools which the author has visited and studied in the past seven years reveal wide differences in purposes, practices and outcomes. It was most interesting to compare these activity programs with the stated philosophy and objectives of the schools. Interviews with administrators, teachers and pupils and a review of their printed materials expressed such common objectives—almost clichés—as that of becoming "good citizens," "useful and competent citizens," "happy and useful citizens."

Every school visited had citizenship listed as one of its major goals or objectives. The schools were almost unanimous in their classification of "citizenship" as the objective which is best suited for a democratic society. Teachers and administrators were also agreed that not only knowledge but experience is important in the training for citizenship. Some recognized that at best these experiences would of necessity be artificial and only representative of certain phases of life itself. This would be particularly true in the teaching of our judicial, executive and legislative branches of local, state and na-

tional governments. Actual participation would come with the franchise of voting at twenty-one years of age or sometime after leaving the secondary school. At the same time experience in such democratic practices as equal opportunity, freedom from discrimination, and social acceptance should be part of every pupil's program. Student councils, school republics and other forms of student government or participation were cited as examples. Almost every school visited could point to some activity which was designed to give pupils such experience.

The real implementation of the school's philosophy, social and educational, was to be found in its extra-curricular or co-curricular programs. A school may have listed among its objectives "democratic living," "the

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American way of life," "the greatest good for the greatest number," and others so widely talked about in educational social groups. The real test of the sincerity of any school in teaching these can be found in its extracurricular program. Here you will find the fundamental and essential principles at work or absent in the practices of the groups and clubs it permits or sponsors.

Frequently, administrators and teachers complain about the requirements and restrictions placed upon their programs of studies. They express a desire to do differently if given more freedom. It is therefore the extracurricular or co-curricular activities which best reveal their social and educational philosophies. Very few restrictions and considerable freedom have been given every school in the development of these activities. Tradition cannot be used as an excuse because most communities are eager for innovations which will interest and direct boys and girls into worth-while leisure-time pursuits.

Let us look briefly at what these schools were attempting to teach and then compare this with what we found in their clubs and group activities.

First we were convinced that faculties recognize the basic social needs of the adolescent and his attempts to satisfy these. Briefly, these could be listed as: (a) a sense of belonging (identification); (b) a sense of security in the group (allegiance); (c) a sense of achievement (prestige); (d) a sense of social competence (social recognition); and (e) a sense of adventure, fun, etc. (recreation).

Much time could be spent in dis-

cussing broader and remoter needs, but adolescents want to live this day *completely, happily and successfully*. Acceptance by his peers is in most cases more important than anything else. He will do many things to get it—yes, foolish, desperate, dangerous things, if necessary.

The personal interviews with more than a thousand representative students revealed that they believe in the democratic principles they have been taught, and they want to experience these in their own social activities. The greatest good for the greatest number, equal opportunity for all, freedom from fear of exclusion or discrimination, freedom from segregation for social, economic or racial reasons, and other principles which should make our American way of life most attractive are accepted as essential by the adolescents. They have heard them expounded in the classrooms, the assembly; they have read them in their textbooks, student handbooks, and written philosophy of the school. What they want most of all now is the implementation of these principles in the social activities of the school.

The activity program should therefore be designed to help them find such experiences which in turn will enable them to develop concepts and skills essential to our democracy. *Enthusiasm for democratic living will best be developed through group activities which bring satisfaction and confidence to those who participate.* Control, planning, execution and appraisal of such activities will of necessity be delegated to the students with a minimum amount of supervision. It is important, however, that all groups be re-

quired to operate within a framework of democratic principles and practices. If these are ignored, the activity program may be another means or experience by which the individual begins to doubt the very concepts in which we want him to have faith.

It is easy to quickly evaluate your activity program relative to its democratic basis of operation. A comparison of the method of gaining membership in the different groups to their basic criteria will reveal how American your program is in actual practice.

### Who May Participate?

The first question to be considered is, "Who may participate?" *The criteria for all American secondary schools should be that any qualified and interested student should have the right to join any group under the auspices or within the jurisdiction of the school.*

Opportunity to participate in or join with any school group should be on the basis of *qualification*. Each group should and must have the right to set up the qualification and standards it deems necessary. After the standards have been met by an individual, there should be no question of membership, no fear of rejection, and no fear of discrimination. The swimming club, for example, may decide that every member shall be able to swim one mile, float, dive and demonstrate other skills. The mathematics, science or archery club may require, in addition to certain skills, evidence of good citizenship, scholarship or character. After an individual meets these requirements, his membership should not be questioned. In other words, membership in any group should be determined by quali-

fications which have been clearly stated and which all are required to meet. Continuation of membership should be according to standards and practices all members are required to observe.

Some schools which failed to provide membership for all qualified individuals used as an excuse the size of the group. If limitation of numbers is necessary, selection should then be on a basis by lot, grade level, or other impartial methods. If more than one club is required for an activity, the membership in each group should be determined on a fair and equal basis for all candidates.

The American principle of fair play does not mean that anyone must have the right to join any group. It does, however, give him the right to join any group the qualifications for which he can meet and the standards of membership of which he is willing to observe.

### Full Participation by Members

A second criterion should be that any individual joining any group will not be subject to discrimination by its members. More than open membership is needed to insure that after joining the individual is not discriminated against by the group because of cliquishness which should not be tolerated. Everyone who has worked with adolescents recognizes that you cannot force friendships and associations upon secondary school pupils. You can, however, insist that groups and clubs permitted to function within the school shall not prevent any qualified student from full participation in any such club or group.

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The elimination of the home room in some of our large schools has increased possibilities for discrimination. The small home room which serves as the basis for intramural sports, school drives and guidance gave more opportunity for students to get to know each other and work as a group.

An example of what can be done to make the extracurricular program of the school an opportunity for all and of how to eliminate undesirable groups may be observed at Lakewood High School, Lakewood, Ohio. The junior and senior high schools of Ann Arbor, Michigan, have developed the home room as an integral part of the school's life and program. Santa Monica High School, California, presents an integrated activities program without home rooms. Many of the schools visited in

this study were making sincere efforts to give their clubs and activities more support, better leadership, and recognition—all of which factors are essential in developing a good program.

The size of the school is not as important as the leadership and practices observed in providing opportunity for membership and participation. A good school will have a good social and activities program. An American secondary school can only tolerate those clubs and activities which are democratic in practice. *All activities should offer opportunity for membership and participation for qualified individuals.* Until schools recognize this, it will become more and more difficult to teach American ideals and principles of government.

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