

matters of curricula and other school affairs. Lay participation should be practiced on all levels: local, state and national. It should be especially evident in each school. Administrators would develop rapport by acting as coordinators, synthesizing the ideas of laymen and their professional staff. With his knowledge and training, the educator would seek consensus in curriculum making. He would, of course, know how to separate the chaff from the grain.

Educators should foster effective public relations programs to inform the people about their schools. They should encourage the formation of lay groups which would evaluate the curricula. Laymen and educators should meet to discuss and plan adequate school programs. Techniques for two-way com-

munications with provisions for interpretation and recommendations would be devised. The public would be encouraged to question, evaluate and offer suggestions for improving the curricula or other school matters.

Through lay participation the educational administrator should expect some enlightenment from the expressed, representative, lay point of view. Citizens should be better informed and school programs better understood. Improved relationships between schools and public should ensue, manifested in stronger support. Most important of all, the efficacy of lay participation would be measured in better curricula and more effective schools for the children of America. Educational statesmen are needed to do this job.

MARGUERITE H. WIEDEN

When Lay Citizens Object

"As long as there are communities and parents and schools, there will be objections; and this is a hopeful sign. Without objections there would be fewer changes and less rapid growth of service."

I MAY AS WELL confess that in discussing the objections of lay citizens to education today, I am going to have great difficulty in staying with one viewpoint. As a parent of a father of one of today's families and a mother of another and as a former president of a state Congress of Parents and Teachers, I realize full well how parents view the schools. At the same time, as a teacher of an earlier day and again as one drawn back into service at the present time, I am equally aware of some problems of the profession and the answers of educators

to parents' objections. Hence, if I don't slip from the angle of parent to educator and back again several times, it will indeed be a miracle.

I know a president of a teachers' college who says frequently when addressing parent groups, "You are stockholders in the world's biggest business, that of educating our children. You pay the bill, and you should be concerned about how the business is run." He might well add to his comparison that, like other stockholders, parents are usually not experts in this field and that as long as those

they hire for the job are adequate, they leave matters to them. Stockholders in a successful company very wisely do not take over decision-making. This is not to say, however, that they should not keep a weather eye out and try to understand what is being done.

Let us admit that parents and educators share the same objectives and also that those objectives are best met when both work together in achieving them. The PTA has made an excellent contribution in bringing together some parents and educators and in giving each an opportunity of understanding the other and of helping in the over-all project. Where there is understanding, parents have fewer objections. Let us also admit that educators, as a rule, have one of the poorest public relations programs in existence and that in too many communities the school is a nebulous institution to which parents send their children for a good part of life without seeing the product they desire, while they themselves must foot the bill. No wonder there are objections!

Current Objections

The most advertised objection of late years, of course, is the charge that "Johnny Can't Read." This has been well answered by the statement that while Johnny may not read aloud with great fluency, he does understand and think about, to a greater degree than pupils of an earlier day, those things which he does read. I *know* Johnny *can* read! My personal "gripe" in this area is rather that Johnny *doesn't* read! As a teacher of English I am overcome with self-condemnation when I realize that many of my pupils will close their books upon completion of their formal education and thereafter will dip as infrequently as possible into anything more involved than

condensations or tabloid magazines! It salves my feelings a little perhaps to discover that many—even most—of these young people come from homes in which there is little reading material, with parents preferring TV or other pursuits to a speaking acquaintance with the public library. In spite of this fact, my real job as teacher is to make pupils *like* to read; and so far, I have had to be content with relatively little success.

Again we hear, "Johnny can't spell." On this point, I'm all parent. My son, who is otherwise a very bright lad, can't spell either; and parent that I am, in my innermost heart I still feel, "That's the school's job, and the school ought to have managed it." I don't consider that possibly he inherited a blind spot for spelling from some ancestor other than his immediate parents or that maybe, unconvinced of the value of this skill, he may have presented a stubborn streak.

Actually facts seem to indicate that a considerable number of pupils spell very well. At the time the Bangor-Brewer area in Maine seethed with parental objections over poor spelling, a local PTA and an interested newspaper produced some dramatic publicity over a program in which present-day grade children competed against a team of parents in a spelling match. The results concurred with those of many similar experiments; the boys and girls won!

Even the mathematics department comes in for its share of "knocks." From the businessmen we hear, "Not only are graduates unable to spell, but they can't figure." One superintendent answers

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this, "Some people just have a knack for figures and others do not. Too many times objectors judge the effectiveness of a course by a few individuals only."

A couple of years ago, my community offered parents an opportunity to evaluate the school program. The farmers in this great potato county were financially embarrassed; too many potatoes were being grown in these United States, and the bulk of the Aroostook product arrived at market too late. With many unable to pay taxes, a 10 percent adjustment across the board was indicated for this community; and even though the appropriation might be the same as the preceding year, in the face of rapidly rising service costs, this would constitute a cut-back. The School Committee was acquiring headaches over the situation; whatever they did, there would be a storm of protests. They finally came up with the idea of asking parents, through the five local PTA's, to suggest cuts. Never did more universal and excited participation in PTA meetings take place! Now we get to the point. What did these parents think yielded least returns for their money?

To educators, the first suggestions were quite deplorable: "Do away with the relatively new positions of Elementary Supervisor and High School Librarian. Leave out Latin and foreign languages." Obviously the majority were parents of grade children. Doubtless, also, the educators may have been at fault; perhaps they had never adequately "sold" or publicized these positions. Incidentally, after due explanation, these positions were continued.

Among other suggestions was, "Eliminate the job of Guidance Director." Here the educators writhed a bit, for they knew the importance of this program. Eventually they reluctantly

agreed, realizing that if you can't have all, you have to keep bare essentials and that if you have a good administrator and good teachers, you have a beginning of a guidance program.

Resolving Issues

Much as the Junior-Primary was valued by the School Committee, this had been their first suggestion for cutting. Here they met a veritable tornado of protest—"Anything *but* Junior-Primary!" My personal interpretation is that (a) this had been well "sold" in the first place and couldn't easily be "unsold"; (b) besides being based on solid educational theory, it answered a felt need of parents who wanted their children to start to school earlier. Anyway, Junior-Primary stayed in at that particular time. Not too long after this, however, growing enrollments and lack of facilities forced it from the picture.

All in all, this whole project of combined evaluation was functional; but it would have been better to meet it much earlier. In the rush of a deadline, remarks can be made without due consideration; and it *could* happen that confidence in the schools, of vital importance to their successful support, could be threatened. It is an exceedingly wise community indeed in which parents and educators together evaluate the program before any change is needed.

Later, a joint lay-educator Planning Committee in this same community came up with an excellent evaluation of present services. The committee also suggested, when and if money became available, the following curriculum additions: physical education for all, industrial arts, debating, separate courses in college and business English, art, more physical and social science, and remedial work. They urged considering the ad-

visibility of introducing into upper grades: home economics, industrial arts, and typing. The committee realized that such additions were contingent on taxpayers and that for small communities they would be possible only through consolidation which, as a result of recent state legislation, is increasing rapidly.

Augusta, Maine, offers a most successful example of how to resolve lay objections. Here a few years back, the School Committee, along with the high school itself, was subjected to severe lay criticism. A Citizens' Committee was formed and, with educators, decided on a scientific survey. Under the direction of resource services from Harvard University, they conducted a business-like study which spread itself over considerable time. Results were not immediate or spectacular; but with time, a growing harmony and a better informed and more tolerant citizenry resulted. In the words of the Executive Secretary of the Maine Congress of Parents and Teachers, much of whose work lay in that community, "The effectiveness of the study was amazing . . . Buildings, guidance, art, and better physical education are included in the results." That this Citizens' Committee is still functioning indicates its success.

Every year there are howls from parents of those graduates who have gone off to college, "Why don't our schools better prepare youngsters for college?" In some cases, this attitude has to be taken with a grain of salt, for we parents are but human; and it can't be our fault or that of our offspring when Junior is having a hard time. But where there is justification for such remarks, the educator can only answer again, "More money is needed. We have every parent's child here, and our first duty is to do our best by all. Give us smaller

classes, dedicated teachers, and the best of equipment!"

Methods and Discipline

Now we come to what in my mind is the core of all objections, the change in method—and to avoid controversy, we shall not term it "progressive." Rather we mean an approach by which the pupil's interest and willing participation are courted, rather than the earlier "Learn pages 74-85 for tomorrow" method. We parents brush all this business aside; what we look for is subject-mastery and A's on the rank card. For lack of another phrase we may even call it, "a good solid foundation" or the "3 R's." And when we parents can locate no other "whipping boy" for possible school inadequacy, we lay it on "these new methods." We teachers are pleased when we can achieve this priceless interest on the part of pupils, for we know that thereby they will get far more facts even than we ask and that they will retain them longer. We, too, should like pupils to master our subjects; and we, do our best, laying our hand to any method at all.

Another criticism, related to the preceding one, is "The schools have no discipline nowadays!" If by that is meant that you can't hear a pin drop, you can't. But adults don't do their work in an atmosphere of deadly quiet. Examined with understanding, today's average classroom exhibits not disorder but only the normal stir that accompanies work. So again is indicated more lay knowledge of the reasons for change in approach, and this in turn goes back to the need for a stronger public relations program.

I dislike to bring up this next point, for fear of being misunderstood, but today's pupils—most of them—are not the same

as their grandparents who may have occupied the same seats. I recall that I sat in school, not even hoping for anything interesting but assuming the whole process was a series of jobs I had to do. I asked no questions, nor did I quibble. I didn't know for what reason I learned these things, many of which I never have used; but it wouldn't have occurred to me nor would I have dared to raise a question.

The whole philosophy of rearing the young, both in and outside the home, has changed. We parents have read so many articles on bringing up children that we wonder whether we are doing anything right. We are told, "Children are people, too," and we don't want to stunt our child's personality and capabilities; and as we have begun, we must finish. We have invited his questioning, and this he does with gusto. Naturally when he gets to school, he is still questioning, in relation to subject matter, not only "Why?" but "What for?" Thus the old assignment, "Study the next 15 pages," doesn't answer any more; and thank heavens the school has been alert enough to change with the need!

Now in defense of young people: I believe with all my heart that we need not worry about them. They are real people, there in the classroom, perhaps even more so than they show themselves to be at home. They are intelligent; their responses to lessons are not limited to textbook information; they can and do think; and that is what they will need most to do in their world tomorrow. If we parents despair a little of fine manners and gracefully expressed appreciation from our young folks, we may have to wait for a bit; these will come with the "twenties," and the reward will be well worth the waiting.

As long as there are communities and parents and schools, there will be objections; and this is a hopeful sign. Without objections, there would be fewer changes and less rapid growth of service. Without objections there would be less sitting down of parents and educators to figure out objectives, less common understanding or working together to bring about aims; and without lay understanding there would never—*never*—be bigger school appropriations. Here's to more and better objections!

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