The people are arbiters of expectations for the American school, its role, its program.

THE school serves not one but several publics which do have some expectations in common about schooling. Increasingly, however, we are told that these publics have varying notions about education. This can be expected in a multigroup, as contrasted with a totalitarian, society. This we would not have otherwise, but it does not make the job of educational leadership easier.

If educational leadership is to be dependable, trustworthy, consistent, progressive, statesmanlike—in short, if it is to have integrity—leaders must be “other directed” and “organization men” and much more. They must be intellectually and professionally equipped to work confidently and creatively with numerous publics signaling in different, sometimes highly inharmonious, directions.

By education is meant a process of socialization wherein children, youth and others take on such value orientations, beliefs, social attitudes, character traits, knowledge and skills as are calculated to be important factors in perpetuating and improving upon the culture, in our case an American democratic way of life. While the phenomenon of social and cultural change is recognized, the definition holds that the individual having a part in social reconstruction will better fit into and be a greater asset in the new order. Schooling is conceived as a formalized aid in the process of socialization.

Aims of Schooling

Also the position is taken here that school leadership is morally, socially and professionally obligated to exert every reasonable effort to insure that differing and conflicting perceptions of the role and aims of schooling as held by various publics do not tear us loose knowingly from persisting democratic educational values. Among these values are: (a) an equal chance for optimum development of the individual, (b) concern for the public welfare, (c) the inquiring and

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critical mind, (d) the competencies of a free people governing themselves.

Criticism, negative or positive, may serve to bring responsible lay officials and school people to a healthful reexamination and reappraisal of educational policies and programs. Even unsolicited help is needed sometimes to build awareness that new conditions of life require changes in organization and in administrative policies. Recently Margaret Mead stated, in the NEA Journal, that present day conditions call for new concepts of elementary and secondary education. She suggested that secondary education be defined as all schooling following the primary school years devoted to fundamentals that prepare the young to live humanely in their kind of world. The definition does not imply upper schools for particular ages, for a specified range of years and purposes. Secondary education would be available when and as long as needed for all postprimary ages. This proposal, offered by a disciplined social scientist, is highly provocative and merits more than passing notice. Does it have support in both the realm of values and the realm of facts?

One important step toward reassessment is that of locating publics and seeking clues to their value orientations. How can competing and variously signaling publics be identified? If we are to use a concept of publics with which to analyze components of the school’s patronage as wellsprings of support and control and as pressure centers from which demands for preservation or change flow, there is a problem of definition.

Publics may be defined as social classes, occupational and income groups, ethnic and racial groups, regional populations, and in many other ways. For our purposes, it will be useful, after the manner of Bruce Raup as explained in his Education and Organized Interests in America, to define a public as an organized special interest group.

Using this analytical concept, we discern several types having a definite concern that schools further their particular interests. Raup places the most sanguine of these in two large categories; those concerned primarily with the control and distribution of wealth, and those concerned primarily with nationalism and internationalism.

Within these categories there are groups with much influence, organized nationally and around which others with similar purposes cluster. Examples are professional and labor organizations, entrepreneurial, taxpayers, minority ethnic and racial groups, and patriotic groups. Some proclaim cooperation in world affairs; some agitate for extremes of national sovereignty. Some would have business regulated by government; to some any regulatory measures other than the operations of a free competing market are anathema. Some would make a place for sectarian religion in schools; others would hold the line and continue the secular school. Some continue to insist upon high schools for all American youth; others prefer that policies of selectivity be followed: ad infinitum.

Special Interest Groups

The public outcrying of the organized special and restricted interest groups is commonplace. Precisely for this reason, school leaders must know these groups. Pressures from such sources need to be analyzed and assessed by all informed people but particularly is this the responsibility of educational leaders. What other group has, or should have, the so-

1 NEA Journal, October 1959.

cial understandings and insight, the professional information and techniques, the attitudes conducive to fair and equitable appraisal in the realm of education?

Sometimes pressures from special interest groups serve wonderfully as catalytic agents revealing weaknesses and points of vulnerability. In such instances, and they are many, the effect may be on the side of progress. On the other hand, these pressures often represent invalid identification of private and special good with the public good. When so assessed, such pressures should be resisted vigorously.

Results of assessment by educational leadership so often remain bottled up within the teaching profession and its publications. It seems not to flow back readily to the publics initiating the pressures and out into other groups who may become pressure targets. Educational leadership stews in its own juice while the pressure groups contend about their points of difference and woo the unwary bystander.

Many special interest groups have their own images of the kind of America to be built and served. They have their images of the ideal person. Both images reflect value orientations. The sociologist, Otto Dahlke, in his *Values in Culture and Classroom*, has synthesized, largely from the official pronouncements of well-known organized special interest groups, five social models: the religious man, the patriot, the business man, the common man, the good citizen. In Dahlke’s analysis, certain similarities exist among the five orientations. Likewise there are striking differences. Each group would like the school to adopt its own particular image as the preferred one.

School leadership cannot meet this challenge either by choosing sides, by adding up the wishes of the various publics, or by assuming an autonomous role. From the beginning of American public education, limitations were placed upon the school in order that its leadership would not be the sole determiner of American values or the singular builder of the social order. School leadership would be a partner in social reconstruction. We can assume safely that finally the kind of America to be built will be decided largely outside the school. This sounds as if school people would be justified in resting on their oars while the publics go about resolving their differences.

**Role of the School**

On the contrary, the responsibility of school leadership is inescapable and great. The responsibility is one of working with the several publics to find the common elements in their various images of America. This is a search for the common ground. It is a job of forcing conscious attention to values—to the long enduring values, to reconstructed values, to new values. This would be a way of maintaining enough unity, enough of a sense of common cause and destiny, so that all groups could be served and still leave room for pluralism.

In the past, this has been accomplished quite well but the going is rough now and promises to be so for some time to come; because of growing partisanship regarding the function of schools, what schools we should have, and the proper nature of their curricula. The publics, all in their own way, are just now actively reassessing the image or images that schools convey of America and Americanism. They are questioning the school’s proper part in the total educational process.

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At this point, we must recognize the existence of a mass of people having no important affiliations with organized special interest groups who would use the schools in restricted and partisan ways. According to Wright Mills, writing in *The Power Elite*, this mass contains a wide range of well educated professionals, small-business men, and nonunionized white collar and blue collar workers.4

Most individuals belonging to this mass public do belong to one or more religious, civic, cultural, and social service groups. Such groups are interested definitely in schools but for the general welfare. If they harbor restricted and specialized concerns at all, they are not explicitly defined. Their active concern with schools is largely private and personal over matters involving their children, their school, their teachers. They do not clamor publicly or join together to exert mass pressures upon school leadership. When dealing with this unorganized mass, school leadership is none the less obligated professionally to listen attentively for clues to defensible change or preservation. The absence of organized pressure does not eliminate the mass as an important source of educational support and authority. School leadership probably has in the mass public its chief ally in containing special interest groups making democratically invalid demands.

**Role of Communication**

Focusing again upon the latter, Mills holds that in a true public there is balance between those expressing and those receiving opinion. Communication is such that it is relatively easy for an expressed opinion to be challenged and possibly refuted. Final action is based upon resulting opinion or compromise. When using this concept, we are plagued immediately with doubts that there is much collective thinking within the rank and file of persons making up organized special interest groups. We question seriously that platforms, legislative programs, and political actions truly represent collective agreements and formulations very often. We get something of an oligarchical picture. A few in positions of delegated or assumed authority decide for the many who accept dictums through mass communication media blindly, trustingly or uncritically. In any case, pressure still gives the appearance of having back of it the weight of a numerically large group exerting effort to win the support of other groups, especially the unorganized mass, to their way of thinking.

A picture of the mass man as a special target of the organized man has been drawn for us by Cremin and Borrowman in their *Public Schools in Our Democracy*.5 He is besieged by taxpayers’ organizations for support in efforts to reduce the spending of money on schools; by entrepreneurs or labor to accept their concepts of man and society; by patriotic groups to support and defend actively their own delineation of the American way.

If our analysis is correct, we come to the conclusion that within the identifiable publics defined as special interest groups, collective thinking and action are diminishing. Group members are often manipulated by a few in the top echelons through mass communication media. The mass man is bombarded from all sides through the mass media employed by encircling organized publics. Mass advertising or propagandizing on the part of

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special interest groups replaces consensus resulting through discussion and debate within or among the publics. The receiver of opinion is prone to select from the mass media those ideas that reinforce those already held. It is not likely that the receiver will use what he hears to reconstruct his values and beliefs.

Critics

In this connection, we can view hopefully the current efforts of several critics to reach the rank and file of persons composing special interest groups without going through their official spokesmen; to reach the mass public without going through organized groups at all. Such men employ the mass media, but not as mouthpieces for restricted interests.

This is not to say that the assumptions and proposals of the free-lance writers are not to be analyzed and evaluated by school leadership just the same as pronouncements coming from or through organized groups. On the contrary, school leadership should be boldly and vigorously helping the publics, singling out the unorganized mass for special attention.

School leadership should be examining critically those points at which each public calls for important departure from the basic democratic norms. Reference here is to those basic educational policies, influenced by the Liberalism of the Enlightenment, as worked out so tediously through the colonial and immediate post-Revolutionary periods and as extended and refined since the Civil War. In the formative years, it was resolved that the American democracy could be served best by a single, ladder-type system of publicly supported and controlled schools which would be free, common, secular, vernacular, defederalized and locally administered.

These were resolutions of what were highly controversial matters. They are still controversial today. It is the task of educational leadership to insist that the school’s publics make fundamental changes only after informed intelligence is turned upon possible consequences for individuals and the nation. Educational leadership must help the people in safeguarding themselves against the plausible sounding pressures for change or maintaining the status quo that have highly partisan roots.

To discharge this professional duty, educational leadership must gain access to and use the standard means of communicating with the publics and the mass. Some of this can be done in high schools, in programs of adult education, through parent-teacher groups, and in work with lay school officials. Most of the work must be done through the popular press, the radio, the television, and pamphleteering. In other words, educational leadership must employ the same means of communicating with the publics and the mass as other makers of the American mind.

In conclusion, educational leadership must be backed by a teaching profession which espouses a body of educational policies to be thrown into the market of competing social and political ideas. This would be done in full knowledge that the people, or some powerful segment thereof, will be the ultimate arbiters. They need help and have every right to expect it if they are to be truly reasonable and value conscious as they go about reconstructing beliefs and expectations for the American school, its role, its program.

February 1960