

Role of Interest Groups

in curriculum planning

MANY groups, when asked to cooperate with the schools, have traditionally been willing to do so only if they were able to promote acceptance of their own views or products. In recent years, however, such groups have come to see clearly that we all benefit through joining with the schools in cooperative programs that result in enriched and strengthened communities.

Since there are now many interest groups outside the schools—industry, business and farm groups, government agencies, voluntary organizations, labor unions and others, local, regional and national—able and willing to offer help in various ways, there are questions that must be answered by every school system: What should be the role of these groups in curriculum planning? How can the educational values of proffered help be enjoyed without impairment to the intellectual and professional integrity of educators?

The public schools belong to the people. The over-all purposes of public education are properly set by the society it serves. To provide the best long range education possible for children it is appropriate that laymen also be invited by school boards and administrators to participate in an advisory ca-

capacity in planning the instruction in areas in which they have knowledge, training and experience, or the time and facilities to gather needed information. They may also be invited to assist in the teaching process in such areas.

Laymen representing special interest groups should participate in the same way that any other laymen do. The end objective of any lay participation is good schools—good instruction. Laymen should participate only in ways approved by school boards and administrators. The professional educators should assume the major responsibility for making decisions on teaching method and on content to fulfill the objectives set by society and by individual communities. They are qualified by professional study and experience to do so. The layman's role is advisory. The status of professional teachers and the quality of our schools can be enhanced only if professional decision making remains in the hands of those with educational knowledge and skill based on years of study and practice.

Instructional materials and services offered by special interest groups can add substantially to the practicality, timeliness and depth of learning. They can stimulate interest and initiative, provide information unavailable elsewhere, present points of view meaningfully and extend the range of direct experience.

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These materials and services are of value if they contribute to a carefully planned learning situation (the planning is best when it involves the learners). They should be employed only when they can add substance to learning. They should not be used just because they are free or inexpensive. They must bear a direct relationship to the subject under consideration, and be of a quality and content for effective learning on the part of the students who will use them. They must be more useful than other available resources for the educational purposes to be served.

The decisions on the use of sponsored materials and services should be made by teachers and principals on the basis of the types of considerations suggested above, not on the basis of pressure, convenience or the desire to please an outside group. To assist in this decision-making responsibility of the professionals, some school systems have established committees on evaluation of instructional materials and services. Lay people serve with educators on these committees in some communities.

Sponsors' Criteria

Even a cursory examination of the sponsored teaching materials and services now available nationally leaves one awe-stricken with their number and variety. Decisions by school people as to which of these are suitable for use must be based on criteria related to the learning expected of pupils. Responsible special interest groups producing materials and offering services for schools are increasingly guided also by equally sound criteria established with the help of educators.

One illustrative list of such guidelines for the production and distribution of

sponsored materials specifies that all sponsored materials for use in schools and colleges should:

Be designed to meet the needs expressed by a representative group of teachers and administrators.

Include only information of significance to teachers and pupils in their study of particular topics or problems of concern to them. They should provide the factual material desired by the schools.

Be developed on the basis of long-term planning, with each item bearing a relationship to those that have gone before and those yet to come. A sound materials production program is not built on impulsive hit-and-miss publication founded on whim or hearsay.

Be accurate in facts without significant concealment, exaggeration, or misleading statements; treat the subjects completely and accurately.

Harmonize with America's democratic ideals, moral values and constitutional provisions.

Be objective and honest in presentation, without influencing interpretations or promoting sales or acceptance of special prejudices and points of view.

Make clear distinction among facts, opinions and assumptions.

Make a significant contribution toward the attainment of educational objectives and fit into the adopted education program without destroying the pupil's perspective of the relative values of various phases of that program.

Be timely, contributing up-to-date information of value and not readily available elsewhere.

Be adapted to the needs, interests, maturity, background, experience and level of understanding of the pupils who will use them.

Be easy to use, file or store, involving a minimum of physical strain and fatigue.

Be well designed, artistic, attractive and

interest-catching, bringing the pupil something appealing, stimulating and *important*.

Be authoritative, related to the work or business of the sponsor or to a field in which the sponsor has reason to be considered competent.

Be classroom tested before they are produced in final form and announced as available.

State in an acceptable way the sponsor's relationship to the materials; keep advertising at a minimum, with no statements or materials included which are designed to establish the exclusiveness of a particular product or service. If a sponsor's product or service is included as an integral part of the material, a specific brand or trade name should not be emphasized.

Be available only upon request when, where and in the quantity necessary for most efficient use.

Similar criteria are often set and followed in the provision of other services to the schools.

Helping Achieve Objectives

The problems of our time and the complexities of modern living demand that schoolroom study be expanded and brought to life—related to the world around it.

Cooperative relationships between education and interest groups outside can provide the key to the achievement of important learning objectives. Such relationships have been set up in more ways than could possibly be described in the space available.

☐ Furnishing material aids to education in the form of many kinds of printed materials, maps, charts, filmstrips, films and other audiovisual aids constitutes the most widely adopted mode of education-industry cooperation and education cooperation as developed by other interest groups.]

These materials naturally deal with a tremendous variety of subjects:

the raw materials, processes, products, economics, careers and services of business, industry and other organizations;

health, safety, recreation and fringe benefit practices;

the advantages and methods of saving and investing;

the role of transportation and communication in American life;

the role of labor unions in American life;

the interrelationships of science, technology, economics and social progress;

the applications of school subjects in the workaday world;

the operation and function of the national economy.

These and many other subjects are treated in such way as to bring the child close to everyday living outside his school and even outside his community; create interest in the commercial world; enrich class discussion of business, labor and government; balance the points of view of various groups and sources of information; provide up-to-date information not available in textbooks; and help students learn to locate a wide variety of source materials.

Teachers also find use for many company and organization materials not specifically prepared for use in classes—annual reports, house organs, reprints of significant speeches, displays, samples and no-longer-used equipment.

Other Types of Assistance

☞ At both the national and local level industrial groups and other interest groups have taken the lead in helping to plan and finance a variety of in-service development programs for teachers and professors. Study discussions and classes have been held to give teachers informa-

tion on industry, labor unions and other groups. Teacher workshops in economics, science and class use of community resources are widely offered and attended. Seminars and conferences on a wide range of subjects useful to teachers have proven popular. Business-Industry-Education Days have gained favor all over the country. Scholarships, fellowships, research grants and endowments of professorial chairs have been established to encourage improved teaching and serious intellectual effort. A number of associations, companies and organizations also offer awards for outstanding teaching achievement.

Special interest groups also render continuing service through maintaining liaison with authors, editors and publishers of textbooks and other instructional materials and with educational societies and associations. In this way up-to-date information and illustrations are at the finger tips of those persons who take leadership roles in shaping programs of instruction.

Opportunity, and Challenge

It should indeed be encouraging to educators that more and more industrial and business groups, voluntary organizations and other special-interest groups are demonstrating real concern for helping to prepare young people for a happy, productive place in society.

The key to the effectiveness of the relationship lies in the educator's proper performance of the responsibility to choose teaching materials and methods within the policy set by the community. The schools will not be overloaded with outside materials and programs so long as they base acceptance of each upon the answer to the question, "What body of knowledge, skills and understanding

does this organization, individual, material or program offer which is significant and important for students and teachers?"

Immeasurable progress can be made when school forces are joined by those from outside to work toward common objectives. The ultimate result can be a higher calibre of citizenship, a pretty good test of any educational program.

Citizens Participate

(Continued from page 34)

dangers, as most power-laden mechanisms have, but it certainly has its uses.

Yet consultation is still only consultation and, like any advice, is no better than its source nor more definitive than its use. Committees must be chosen for their quality; advice from persons whose judgments are not backed by valid credentials of prior performance are unlikely to engender the respect of decision makers. Representativeness is not an especially valuable criterion of a committee's worth, except for polling. But the committee is a poor polling device. What is wanted from a committee is reasoned judgment such as may emerge from sustained intellectual vigor.

Good advice is, of course, likely to be persuasive to decision makers. If the relations between committee and administration are characterized by mutual understanding of function and role, if the administration is ready to use advice to inform its decisions, while still insisting on its prerogatives, if no promises requiring abdication of responsibility have been made, then the advice of the citizens curriculum committee is likely to be deeply effective. At its best, its use will add practicality to curriculum planning for achievements that go beyond the current.

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