

*How identify? How use?*

## Outside Influence

"EVERYBODY has an ax to grind!"

"If I just didn't have to spend so much time worrying with community groups who want to use school children, I could help with the improving of instruction!"

How often have we heard the busy administrator or curriculum worker make these statements. Indeed, how often have we made them ourselves! As do most issues, however, this one has two sides. The purpose of this article is to explore the positive side, to see how outside influences may, in fact, enrich rather than deter the educative process.

What are the sources of outside influences which may affect the instructional program? The influences themselves come from as many organizations as may be found in the typical community: the Chamber of Commerce, the Junior Chamber of Commerce, the civic clubs (Rotary, Kiwanis, Civitan); women's clubs (the League of Women Voters, the Association of University Women, the Junior League); the business clubs (the Sales Executives, the National Office Management Association); the professional groups (County Medi-

cal Society, Council of Engineering Societies); cultural agencies (the Symphony Society, the Arts Council, the Nature Museum); governmental bodies (public libraries, city councils, welfare, police and fire departments); religious groups; patriotic groups (American Legion, Daughters of the American Revolution); service agencies (the American Red Cross, Family and Child Service Agency); to name a few. In addition to these agencies, many individuals in the community have worthwhile ideas which they may wish to see included in the school program.

### Approach to Resource Use

Such a list of agencies is limited only by the ingenuity of the modern American joiner. The groups listed here, however, are representative of the types of organizations which may be outside influences. They exist, in varying degrees, in most communities and their influence must be faced by most school systems. The nature of these groups and the reasons for their being considered outside influences on the schools would present an interesting sociological and psychological study. Such a study, however, is beyond the scope of this article.

What procedures may be used to

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channel these influences into a vital and productive force in the curriculum? First, the professional educator must take the initiative in working with these groups. He must primarily "act" rather than "react." Only when the initiative and the active leadership come from the staff of the local school system can these influences enrich rather than impoverish the curriculum.

Once the initiative has been assumed by the professional educators in a local system, the following procedures may be utilized:

1. Plan the approach to these influences on a system-wide basis. This aids in effective control and in positive direction.

2. Appoint a committee to plan and coordinate work with community agencies. The committee should be a representative one to include key staff administrators, supervisors, subject specialists, principals and teachers.

3. Involve the members of the Board of Education so that they are aware of the purpose of the committee, the procedures used, and the resources being called upon to enrich the curriculum.

4. The committee, then, should:

- a. Conduct a study of the school curriculum to identify specific areas in which resources beyond the regular school might be helpful. Involve the total staff in the study.

- b. Evaluate the results of the survey to determine what types of resources would be most effective and most practical. In the analysis use specific criteria such as the following: is it appropriate to the curriculum, is it the best way to handle this area of study, is the use of outside resources practical, etc.

- c. Conduct a survey of the community agencies. Determine the purpose of the agency, its governing policies, its

membership and resources. Establish a list of acceptable agencies.

- d. Contact the agencies which may be used so that they are aware of the committee and understand the implications of the school study of outside resources.

- e. Study the existing community groups to determine the probable competencies of each group and the relative effectiveness of each group.

- f. Agree upon the specific resources that would enrich the curriculum and upon the agency or group most likely to render that service effectively.

- g. Approach each agency with several proposals for that agency to consider.

- h. Work closely with each agency to plan the details of the project and to assist in its implementation. (The members of the committee may divide this assignment. In addition, responsible school employees are often members of these groups. They may serve as the liaison between the school system and the agency.)

- i. Keep all teachers abreast of developments so that they know the resources available to them and how to use these resources.

- j. Plan a systematic evaluation of the entire program and be prepared to make changes as indicated by the results of such evaluations.

The number and type of resources which may be used to enrich the curriculum are as broad and varied as are our communities. The following are typical projects which have been most successful in school systems in which the writer has worked.

In one such project a Speakers Bureau was formed. In this project the Junior Chamber of Commerce served as the

sponsoring agency. Seventy-six topics were identified as areas in which teachers felt inadequate, yet about which students needed more background. These topics ranged from Grecian architecture to microbiology. The Junior Chamber of Commerce Committee identified two citizens in the community who were qualified to discuss each topic. These individuals, and their employers, were asked to give this voluntary service to the schools.

Once the speakers agreed, they participated in a workshop concerning grade levels affected, procedures of operation, and the types of possible presentations. Each person prepared his presentation and discussed it with the Chamber committee and, if questions arose, with school officials.

When the program was ready for operation, lists of speakers and topics were made available to teachers, together with forms to be used in requesting a speaker. The teacher mailed the request form to the Chamber office. The secretary in the Junior Chamber of Commerce office notified the speaker and confirmed the time and place. After the presentation was made, the teacher completed a written evaluation of the presentation. The evaluations were used as a basis for periodic reexamination of the program and the speakers, so that changes, where appropriate, could be made.

### Career Assistance

Specialized Speakers Bureaus may be set up in specific areas such as chemistry, physics or mathematics. This is especially true if the local community has, because of local industry or educational institutions, the human resources available in these areas.

In another project, a service club, working with the guidance staff, identi-

fied fifty major career fields represented in the membership of the service club. These club members agreed to make their time and the time of their employees available to individual students who were interested in finding out more about a career field and about the specific jobs included in the career field. When one of the counselors in a high school felt that a student could profit by a conference with a person who was engaged in the career field, he filled out an appointment card, notified the service club, which confirmed the appointment, and arranged for the student to make the visit to the career representative's office or factory.

This visit usually included a tour and an opportunity to talk with several people engaged in the line of work being considered. If appropriate, follow-up visits were arranged. Prior to the inauguration of the plan, a training session was held for the adults and guidelines for use in the visits were planned. A planned evaluation was conducted both by the school counselors and by the men who represented the businesses and professions.

Similar counseling projects may be undertaken which would include the giving of educational information or other counseling services if the local community has the competent human resources upon which to draw.

Still another type of project concerned the study of the operation of the stock market for students in economics. In this case, the local banking association arranged for guided tours through local brokerage houses. Following the tour, the representatives of the brokerage firm helped each class set up a project in which the class could go through the procedure of becoming an investment corporation and then follow the progress of certain stocks for a period of time. In

some classes this did not involve the actual purchase of stocks, while in other classes stocks were actually purchased. The local bankers remained as advisers throughout the study.

A coordinated approach to the use of field trips is another excellent way for schools to benefit from places of educational interest in the local community. The carefully planned use of a local nature museum or art gallery for guided tours and lectures may be incorporated in such a program.

The local symphony may teach music appreciation through the use of several instruments and the conductor in illustrated lectures. The local symphony society, as well as the other cultural agencies, will normally welcome such opportunities. This will undoubtedly enrich each young person's life if the activities are properly planned and coordinated.

Thus, the number of specific projects which may be undertaken is limited only by the community's resources and the imagination of those who are planning and carrying out the projects.

### New Plans Develop

Not all projects are necessarily planned initially nor are they necessarily conceived by the school planning committee. Once the program gets under way, new ideas may come from school groups and community groups. Thus, plans should be developed for handling new proposals as they are made. The following are some suggestions which have proved useful:

1. The school system's committee should continue to function as the clearinghouse for all new proposals.

2. The committee should encourage teachers and lay citizens to make proposals.

3. Each proposal should be made to the committee in detailed, written form.

4. The committee should evaluate each new proposal in the same way that the original proposals were evaluated.

5. The committee should guard against being forced into hasty decisions. Proposals, therefore, should be submitted well in advance of the time when the project should be carried out.

Finally, the procedures and suggestions described in this article are both obvious and relatively simple to carry out. Why, then, does the educator so often resent and resist these outside influences?

1. We sometimes hesitate to acknowledge that lay citizens and groups might have good ideas.

2. The ideas often proposed by lay groups tend to be narrow in scope and involve more "action" than "learning."

3. It takes a considerable amount of time to work with lay groups.

4. School schedules must often be adjusted if the ideas of lay groups are to be carried out.

5. If all the ideas of lay groups are used, the educator believes that too much time is taken from the real job of the schools.

6. Educators so frequently are unwilling to say "no" when a specific project seems unworthy. It is easier when this occurs to say "no" to all such influences.

Thus, the heart of the issue lies in two factors. First, there are outside influences which are a part of every community. These influences, properly understood and utilized, may be a most valuable adjunct to the traditional school curriculum. Indeed, these influences may even revolutionize the school curriculum. Second, the proper use of these influences

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We have, then, a number of pressures on us, most of which are for the production of the specialist and the scientist. We have the pressure to remodel the curriculum for the space age, to teach children to think—something we have always had—to use the structure of the discipline as the model and to make use of the mass media and newer electronic techniques in the education of youth. Most of all, we must have the pressure of our belief in the dignity of man. What we need is to examine these pressures dispassionately and rationally—to use our own ability to think and not be stampeded. Primarily we need to refocus on our ultimate aim, which is the education of a child to live an effective life in a democratic society. As Adlai Stevenson recently stated:

The enemies of freedom, whatever the magnificent ends they propose—the brotherhood of man, the kingdom of saints, “from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs”—miss just this essential point: That man is greater than the social purposes to which he can be put. He must not be kicked about even with the most high-minded objectives. He is not a means or an instrument. He is an end in himself.

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requires educators who are leaders with vision and imagination. These educators must be willing and able to make intelligent decisions and, having made them, to carry them out.

To involve community resources in the educative process is to chart a course which has many possible directions. Once set in motion, there is little likelihood of turning back. The educational good to be derived from the process is worth the dangers involved. Indeed, the modern educator will be wise to identify early and to use well the vast educational opportunities available for today's students.

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