

Pressure Is Energy

SPUTNIK'S rise inaugurated the space age and a new era in public school education in America. Each completed orbit gave surer and longer life to the rising tide of pressures and concerns bearing directly upon what our schools are doing, how well they are doing it, and what they should be doing.

Prior to Sputnik, most real changes in the instructional program had to be made by the educator himself, even though he may have sought the help and understanding of the general public. Occasionally, a small special-interest group would bring pressure for an addition to the curriculum, such as driver training, increased health services, expanded school lunch facilities, or increased transportation provisions. Beyond these occasional pressures, however, the alert professional educator was on his own—pushing, pulling, working uphill for any improvement or change. His greatest enemies were public apathy and inertia.

Today's Pressures and Concerns

Today, this same professional educator is confronted neither by inertia nor by a disinterested public, but rather by a myriad of pressures and concerns. Today, he is the one being pushed and pulled. He is not alone in wanting to

improve the instructional program. All kinds of groups and organizations have answers for him.

Some state legislatures have taken actions calculated to improve the school programs. Florida and Louisiana have passed laws which require the teaching about communism at the high school level. Some state boards of education seek to improve the program by edict, as in New Mexico, where the State School Board recently ruled that, "A total of at least eighteen weeks shall be spent on New Mexico history, geography and government in the intermediate grades."

The courts of the land settle disputes over segregation, religious instruction, and disciplinary procedures in the schools.

Some politically oriented groups seek to impose their beliefs and wills upon the schools. In many parts of the country, elements of the extreme right wing seek to tell the schools what textbooks not to use. Lay textbook study committees are formed which find sentences in books which are offensive to them; or, failing in this, they find subversion written between the lines and eagerly point this out to all who will listen. *Ad hoc*

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committees at the national level politely submit their findings and suggestions to the public schools of the nation. Often these committees are composed of such nationally distinguished members that their recommendations are accepted and inaugurated in some schools even before the recommendations are published or studied.

Sometimes teachers return from summer institutes financed by the federal government through the National Defense Education Act and thereafter speak with a new-found competence and authority on what changes should be made in certain parts of the school program. Published studies resulting from grants received from various foundations point the way to "improvements" in the schools. These studies, because of applied pressure, cause some schools to change their programs. The change, educationally, may or may not be desirable.

Educational television, with a massive boost from the 87th Congress, becomes increasingly available to more and more classrooms. Many of the televised programs are of such great worth that no school can, with clear conscience, leave them out of the instructional program. This places new pressures on the rest of the curriculum and the cries arise: "Something must give!" "We need a longer school day—a longer school year!"

Youth fitness groups, national and local, drive for more and better physical training, education and facilities in the schools. The professional anti-educationist suddenly finds himself the hero of some small group or other and, with new-found financing and anger, squeezes his sour grapes through the wringer of public opinion hoping to force the educator to apologize for being what he is—an educator.

Today, the sheer number of such pressures and concerns is the exciting thing. Over and above any value judgments which could be made about any one of the listed pressures or concerns, their very existence is leading public education to rapid changes in the instructional program, most of which are good, some bad. Many of the pressures and concerns are mutually contradictory. This, however, is understandable and to be expected in a free society such as ours.

Seven Resulting Trends

In this rising tide of pressures and concerns regarding our schools, seven trends can be identified clearly. First, there is increasing awareness on the part of the general public of the key position the schools hold in the survival of our nation. More interest, more accurate information, and more intelligent concern are being generated about one of the basic goals of public education—that of passing on our cultural heritage to the youth of our land. This trend manifests itself today in the flow of new and meritorious materials dealing with our American heritage, the many conferences and seminars being held on the subject, and the emerging nation-wide debate dealing with the question of differentiating between benevolent indoctrination and factual presentation, both in the fields of our own heritage and in the teaching about communism.

These constructive and larger undertakings far outweigh the repugnant and emotionally strident voices of the extreme left and extreme right which strive to curb free expression by using any means to an end which they define as good and desirable.

A second trend of the tide is the in-

creasing amount of subject matter being taught in the schools, and in particular, in the elementary grades. Both the explosive increase in knowledge, and the fact that we now have a better understanding of the efficiency of public education and the capabilities of many of our charges, are forcing this increase. We now know that some children are capable of learning geometric concepts in grade one. We know that many children are able to learn a foreign language in the elementary grades. We know that children can learn more science in the elementary grades. Much in mathematics can be learned sooner. We find many sixth graders being taught, tested and graded in reading, spelling, arithmetic, English, geography, history, science, penmanship, health, music, art, physical education, foreign language, and band or orchestra. Much of this has been brought about with little public debate or furore.

Yet such innovations involve questions which need consideration. Simply because children are able to learn certain things in grade schools, does it necessarily follow that these things should be taught? If we were to show that we could effectively teach grade school children to drive automobiles, would it mean that we should? Is providing all sixth grade youngsters with a small, limited vocabulary in a foreign language better, cheaper, and more judicious than guaranteeing bilingualism to all those who need this skill through a four year program in high school?

As the trend toward crowding the elementary curriculum grows, in some cases forcing aside an overall viewpoint of grades one through twelve, so too will grow the debate about these questions.

A third trend is the growing awareness and concern for the dropout student. The facts are beginning to sift through,

as can be seen in the recent "national discovery" that all youngsters do not finish high school. The public is becoming aware of the high percentage of the dropout students who become juvenile delinquents. As such, these youngsters burden the state financially much more than if somehow they had been kept in school.

It is not uncommon for 30 percent of the pupils to find the instructional programs of the public schools too difficult to master. What are we to do about this mass of our citizenry who do not complete high school? What is wrong with a program established for all citizens yet which one-third fail to master? Is it that many of them do not *want* to master it because they feel it is not worth while? Experiments, new approaches and new programs are on the rise in response to these concerns.

A fourth trend evolves from the difference in views of the educational philosophies of progressivism and perennialism concerning the purposes of education. Of course, the debate is not taking place on a high philosophical plane, but the people of America seem to have feelings in the matter. The main current of the trend is a revolt against what has been termed "education for life adjustment" in favor of "education for knowledge and skills." The argument for "knowledge and skills" is often justified on the theory that these prepare one best for facing a world of continuing rapid technological change. Any evaluation of the consistency of these positions is left to the reader.

A fifth trend is moving the allotments in the schools away from the humanities and general culture in favor of pragmatic research, more science and mathematics for a purpose. Occasionally some angry person laments the passing of the gen-

eral researcher and the rise of the researcher who is told what to discover. Much lip-service is given to the value of the humanities and much improvement is seen in their teaching. Perhaps the labor of a new birth has begun in this field, but for now—the changes in time allotments and budget allocations all favor the “skills” areas.

A sixth trend is toward deeper, stronger, more realistic evaluations and formulations of the goals of education. The objective is the emergence of an educational philosophy more acceptable to the American people in today's culture of “over-kill.” This giant seminar on the purposes of education is being held daily by the American public and through all of the communication channels.

The Inconsistent People

A final trend, perhaps a corollary of the preceding, may be listed as the increasing number of inconsistent people. All of the preceding trends are debatable, promoting much good discussion, motion and, hopefully, the emergence of a nationally acceptable educational philosophy. When contradictory pressures are brought to bear by the same individual or group, however, the issues become clouded.

In a world of constant tension, turmoil, fear and potential annihilation, many in our society feel that something has gone drastically wrong. In seeking causes and remedies, some of these people become loudly and emotionally inconsistent. They argue for a stronger, unified America—yet sow the seeds of suspicion, doubt and distrust throughout the country. They argue for more local control—then run for a national office on the platform that they will make things go right from there. They are suspicious of standard public

school statements of objectives concerning moral and spiritual values—yet they argue for a return to the McGuffey Readers because of the moral teachings these contain.

Such inconsistent persons argue for national standards in education for the survival of our country—yet they deplore any activity on the national level and sound a call to anarchy. They want the schools to confine their activities to “training of the mind”—but they want more done in physical education so our boys will no longer flunk the draft. They want the schools to be all things to *their* children—but, in general, they want education to get back to the three R's. They want their child disciplined—but not paddled, threatened or spoken to in harsh terms.

These inconsistencies have never been uncommon, but they are becoming louder and more frequently noticeable. They muddy the troubled waters of the tide and its conflicting streams.

And as a Consequence?

What does all this mean to education in America? It means that the schools must direct these rising pressures into channels which will enhance rather than impede public education. It means the educator can be grateful for the energy and concern behind the trends, and that he must provide the leadership for resolving the conflicts. This leadership must serve both as catalyst and as oil on the water, always pointing the way toward the self-discovery by the American public of an acceptable philosophy of education. Such leadership, to be successful, will require statesmanship!

Pressure is energy. We have pressure upon us today. Let us give it direction and focus. *Let us be statesmen!*

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