

Efforts To Keep Schools Out of Politics

THIS subject implies that a political scientist may look at the relation between schools and politics from a different viewpoint than does a nonpolitical scientist, and this is probably true. However, as a political scientist who has spent most of his life in the educational field, the writer approaches this subject with a great deal of sympathy for the educators' point of view.

This viewpoint rests on the assumption that education must be kept out of politics and that this can best be achieved by independently administered and financed school districts. This viewpoint is made up of a number of elements which may be summarized as follows:

1. Education is the most important function which the community performs.

2. Education is a state function which, when delegated to the local community, should be legally separate from other community functions.

3. Education should be separately financed.

4. An independent educational system will insulate the schools from politics, will enable the citizen to express his

views on educational policy uncomplicated by other community problems, and will achieve greater financial support for education.

Examining the Issues

Let us examine the first of these propositions: Education is the most important function which the community performs.

A political scientist would modify this concept and say that education is *one* of the most important functions which the community performs. Though he may himself be an educator, he finds it difficult to separate education from other vital functions which the community performs. All these functions are so interrelated, so dependent one upon another, so interactive, that unless there is coordination and integration there cannot be smooth functioning. We must give attention to every aspect of local government if we are to promote a healthy community life. In trying to educate our children we seek well rounded development. We aim to educate the whole child. We do not pick out one facet of a child's education and say, "This is the most important."

Who shall say whether it is more important to train the eyes, or the ears,

Harold A. Van Dorn is Chairman, Department of Political Science, Kent State University, Kent, Ohio.

or the body, or the mind, or the emotional life? The one is dependent upon the other. Of what avail to train the eyes to read if there is no active mind seeking knowledge? A good mind will function badly under emotional stress. And no training of the mind or the emotions is of much value if the physical body breaks down. So we say, "Educate the whole child." If this is a sound principle in education, is it not equally sound to apply it to the body politic, to the community in which we live? Are not community functions equally interrelated?

What good to have a fine school, adequately financed, if the building burns down because of an antiquated fire department, or inadequate fire prevention measures? Of what value are well-paid teachers if your child is the victim of a traffic accident because of an undermanned and underpaid police department? How much consolation can you take in your progressive school policies if an epidemic decimates your school population as the result of inadequate methods and understaffing of your city health department? All these aspects of community life are interrelated, a vital part of a functioning whole. You neglect any one at your peril.

Now let us examine the second proposition: Education is a state function which, when delegated to the local community, should be legally separate from other community functions.

Does the idea that education is a state function, which should properly be delegated to the local community, alter the picture?

In a legal sense, all local units of government are creatures of the state, and are, therefore, as agents, performing state functions. In this sense, an inde-

pendent school district created by the state is not different from a county or a municipality. All are performing state functions. It has no bearing on the question at issue to say that education is a state function and, therefore, requires some supervision by the state. Many functions performed by local units of government are subject to state supervision. City financing is usually supervised by the state. City and county health departments must operate under state regulations. Since education is only one of a number of state functions being performed by local units, it does not follow that education must function through an independent agency and be insulated from other functions.

Now let us look at the third proposition: Education should be separately financed.

There appear to be two reasons why advocates of independent school government want education to be separately financed. First of all they believe, quite correctly, that he who holds the purse strings controls policy. They want independent financing of the school district in order to bolster independence in policy making.

Second, they believe that schools will fare better under a system of independent financing. That is, they believe that the schools will receive a larger share of the total revenue disbursed for all government functions when the schools are separately financed. On the first point, there is no doubt that independent financing will strengthen independent policy making. Yet the real question is whether educational board members and administrators should be allowed to make policy irrespective of the wishes, needs and necessities of those administering other branches of local government.

On the question of whether, under separate financing, the schools would fare better than they otherwise would, there is no clear case for the separate system. One of the authorities in this field, A. J. Burke, states that, "There are no significant differences in expenditure levels between fiscally independent and dependent systems." Yet whatever the facts may reveal in this respect, it can be clearly maintained that it is illogical and irresponsible to plan one part of the community budget without knowing the proposed expenditures for other community services.

We once operated our federal government on this irrational basis, but eventually we mended our ways, and by the Budget and Accounting Act of 1921 we provided for a coordinated budget plan to include all items of income and all proposed expenditures. Proposals are submitted by the Chief Executive and approved by the Legislative Branch.

In our personal budgeting we do not plan our expenditures for rent and clothing without taking a look at our mounting food costs, and we certainly total up all the items to see if we are going to be in the red. The same principle applies to community budget making. Under coordinated planning, it is possible to properly allocate not only current expenditures but also capital outlays.

If the community is planning to build a new school in the coming year, this is not the time to build a new hospital. If the new hospital is to be built next year, the City Hall can wait until the following year. Since school expenditures are often half of the total community outlay, it is extremely hazardous to ignore such a large segment of the taxpayer's dollar in making an overall plan.

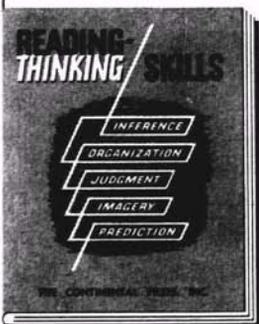
Now let us turn to the fourth proposition: An independent educational system will insulate the schools from politics, will enable the citizen to express his views on educational policy uncomplicated by other community problems, and will achieve greater financial support for education. We have already dealt with the last idea. Yet what about insulating the school from politics? To begin with, this may rest on a misconception of politics. Politics is the technique of reconciling the myriad conflicting interests in the community and effectuating the will of the majority. No community service should be immune from this process. Nor should a citizen's views on education be formed in an ivory tower from which the currents of community controversy are excluded. Community life is an indivisible whole. It should not be segmented. It should not be lived piecemeal. It should be an integrated, well-rounded totality.

Politics and Spoils

Those seeking to keep the schools out of politics may be using the word, politics, as if it were synonymous with the spoils system. It is of course essential that spoils and patronage be kept out of our schools, but it is equally essential that these elements be kept out of all branches of our government. The great progress made in filling positions in our Civil Service, federal, state, and local, on a merit basis by means of competitive examinations, is an indication of the wide recognition of the evils of the spoils system. If school boards are elected, the elections should be nonpartisan, just as should all local elections. And certainly the board should appoint the superintendent. To ask the electorate to deter-

(Continued on page 138)

Presenting . . .



Grades 1-6

All books available for liquid duplicator

Teacher's Guides free with each order

A carefully planned program for the progressive development of critical reading and thinking skills

Write for a free demonstration booklet



THE CONTINENTAL PRESS, INC.
ELIZABETHTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA

Have I asked the curriculum committee to change the courses of study to include much more of the culture of the new nations?

Have I demanded that structure of discipline and structure of knowledge be defined before I accept them as important in curriculum work? Have I stood for what I know about the individual's unique perception and structure of knowledge? Have I helped teachers to recognize that individuals organize knowledge around their purposes and values?

Have I advocated that schools accept helping the pupil clarify his values as one of its major purposes? Have I talked with teachers about my priority of values? Has my behavior manifested the priority I proclaim? Have I been honest in examining with teachers the value system of the school in which I work?

Politics—Van Dorn

(Continued from page 95)

mine the relative merits of competing professional candidates would be sheer folly.

In a truly integrated system, the mayor should appoint school board members subject to confirmation by the city council. He is in a much better position than is the average voter to pick citizens qualified for this highly important office. Terms might be overlapping to insure continuity of policy. Yet regardless of the method of selecting a school board the basic objective should be the coordination of the educational function with all the other functions of community government. Only thus, in the author's opinion, can we achieve the efficient, scientific and progressive government which is the aim of all good citizens and all dedicated officials.

DEVELOP LISTENING and SPEAKING SKILLS with MATERIALS

by **Judy**®

Judy's NEIGHBORS

families and community helpers of different races and social class levels provide opportunities for conversation, discussion.

Judy PUZZLE INLAYS

provide varied experiences to talk about.

Judy SEE-QUEES

encourage sequential approach to oral expression.

Judy STORY SETS

stimulate creative and dramatic expression.

Write today for complete catalog of Judy Materials

THE JUDY COMPANY

310 N. 2nd St., Minneapolis, Minn. 55401

Copyright © 1964 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.