

Contributor: G. H. Melvin

Comment on April Issue

Dear Editor:

As a volunteer worker in our public schools, I was most interested in your April issue, "What Schools Can and Cannot Learn from Business and Industry." Much of my 36 years with a major utility has been concerned with employee training and management development. In recent years I have worked in the schools an average of at least eight hours per week doing both motivational work with students and management training with administrators. I feel I have a fair understanding of school problems and what is being done and not being done to correct them.

The articles in the April issue ran the full gamut on business involvement in the schools, some for and some against such involvement. This is fine for it lets readers pick and choose what they like. I really was disturbed, however, when you put the label of "Editorial" ¹ on the most anti-business article of all. If this "Editorial" represents the views of top educators, our schools are in more trouble than I had thought.

Dr. Haubrich characterizes current business practices as updated time and motion studies. Nothing could be further from the actual situation. Most people in business have realized that present day employees must be motivated, not driven, to produce.

Management By Objectives (MBO) won't be a panacea for schools any more than it has been for industry. MBO is successful when the objectives are used by dedicated administrators as a means of getting the necessary support of

top management and the public. MBO is not usually successful in either setting when it is used as a whip by top management to force change.

I would be among the last to belittle "aesthetic development, artistic appreciation, and critical thinking" as worthwhile school goals. I maintain, however, that there is little chance for progress in these areas unless the pupil has been taught to read, write, and calculate.

Industry is spending millions of dollars in remedial work that should be unnecessary if schools could do a better job on the basics. Dr. Haubrich must realize that most of the present students will have to be prepared to eventually find work in industry.

With taxes fast approaching the point of diminishing returns, there may be fewer dollars available to support some of our present institutions—including our schools. If the schools can't convince the taxpayers that they are worthy of continuing support, it won't be forthcoming.

Dr. Haubrich appears not to want any objective means by which one would be able to measure the success or failure of a school or school system. Schools had better find a way to convince the voters who provide the funds that some progress is being made toward equipping our students for a productive life. Objective measurements may help schools prove their case to the public.

For the past year I have been working with 12 principals in an effort to effect some improvements in the schools they serve. We have tackled such thorny issues as declining enrollment and improving objective test scores. By using management techniques as tools rather than as masters we have found the process to be exciting and, at times, even fun! Fun is a scarce

¹ Vernon F. Haubrich. "Business, Industry, and Schools." *Educational Leadership* 32 (7): 435-36; April 1975.

ingredient in most schools today and it needn't be.

I hope your readers won't write off the expanded use of business techniques in school administration. There is room for practical MBO, behavior modification, and labor negotiations in the largest business of them all—our schools.

Where did most of the modern business theory and practices come from anyway? Mostly

from educators. There used to be some resentment on this score in the business community. I hope school people will show better judgment than to refuse those of us from industry who are willing to spend effort, time, and money for our common goal—improved schools.

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