

Summer 7-1-1961

The Influence of Pressure Groups upon Curriculum Development

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THE INFLUENCE OF PRESSURE GROUPS
UPON CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

A Research Paper
Presented to
the Graduate Faculty
Central Washington College of Education

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Education

by
Donald K. Ellis
July 1961

THIS PAPER IS APPROVED AS MEETING
THE PLAN 2 REQUIREMENT FOR THE
COMPLETION OF A RESEARCH PAPER.

M. Curtis Howd
FOR THE GRADUATE FACULTY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE PROBLEM AND DEFINITION OF TERMS USED	1
The Problem	3
Statement of the problem	3
Importance of the study	3
Definitions of Terms Used	4
Advisory committee	4
Curriculum	4
Pressure group	4
Special interest group	4
Approach to the Problem	4
II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	6
Purposes	7
Techniques Utilized by Pressure Groups	11
III. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	17
BIBLIOGRAPHY	22

CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM AND DEFINITION OF TERMS USED

Among the many forces influencing curriculum development in the American public schools, one has the capacity to decimate accepted methods of solving the complex and ever-evolving curriculum development. Many influence-wielding bodies, tangible and intangible (bodies generally accepted to be in the pupils' interests, accepted by tradition, conjoined by parental demands, set up and enforced by state and national legislation) attempt to accomplish their ends by open discussion. The advocated programs of such groups are, as a rule, stated in terms that offer no area for controversy since the democratizing tendencies shown by these groups offset and/or reinforce their interests without attempting to confuse the issues in question.

On the other hand, groups having a stated purpose overtly consistent with democratic principles yet actually antithetical to such; groups using methods and techniques on a nation-wide scale in order to accomplish their aims without respect to the local issues under consideration; and methods and techniques inconsistent with those ordinarily employed by other equally interested groups--all these need to be examined in some detail.

The aforementioned groups, variously known as pressure groups and special interest groups, are the opposite

of advisory committees commonly used to present constructive ideas and opinions in concert with the superintendency and lay board members charged with curriculum development.

Special interest and pressure groups need to be examined in the light of their unwillingness to work with educators chosen to represent community will through agencies legally engendered and empowered to deal with changing needs of a curricula that must conform to the needs of a whole society. This unwillingness to work for proclaimed objectives is, if nothing else, divisive. Because of the successes such groups have enjoyed in the past and will certainly enjoy in the future, it is mandatory that educators, be they teacher or administrator, become aware of the immense influence of such groups.

Because of the ever-increasing number of pressure and special interest groups operating within American society and because of the ever-increasing complexities of curriculum development, educators are necessarily more seriously concerned with the possible detrimental effect of these extra-legal groups on that orderly, coherent progress within the schools commensurate with the dictates of the society the schools serve.

I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. The purpose of this research was to locate and present information that would indicate (1) the purposes of pressure and special interest groups, (2) the effect or effects that such groups had on curriculum development, (3) the techniques utilized by these groups to influence the curriculum, and (4) the methods educators should use to place the interests of pressure and special interest groups in proper perspective.

Importance of the study. The need to examine the influence of pressure and special interest groups was indicated by increasing number of special organizations especially interested in the problems within the schools. Not only must schools be provided, the precise purpose schools are to serve must be defined. If fundamental purposes are not defined and adhered to, the schools become allies of the very thing they are designed to eradicate, namely, ignorance. The purposes of special interest groups are not consistent because of their very obsession with special interests. With the continual need for changing curricula to meet the needs of a whole society, such special interest must be recognized for what they are and channelled into appropriate areas insofar as schools are concerned.

II. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

Advisory committee. This is a group of lay citizens working with professional educators for purposes of curriculum development. They are usually selected or invited on a non-political, non-elective basis.

Curriculum. This is the sum total of the school's planned efforts to influence learning, whether in the classroom, on the playground, or out of school.

Pressure group. A group that attempts to create public opinion on broad issues through the expenditure of unwarrented amounts of time and money is labeled a pressure group.

Special interest group. This group differs from a pressure group through its efforts to influence curriculum changes by means other than governmental process.

III. APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM

The approach to the problem was a general review of the available literature in an effort to classify groups according to general purposes. Illustrations of specific groups by means of identification and description furthered an awareness of the general purposes of the groups.

A survey was made of the extent of influence upon curriculum development by various pressure and special interest groups. Due to the limitations of the paper, the latter was combined with information gathered on the important techniques utilized by such groups.

Finally, an investigation was made of the means of combating the forces referred to as detrimental.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In part, public interest in curriculum development has been indicated by the large membership in lay citizen committees as well as in the many other organizations, e. g., the Parent Teacher Association, which have focused their attention on problems of the public schools.

Saylor and Alexander (8:75-112) have forcefully presented the detrimental effects selfish, organized pressure groups have on curriculum planning.

Although presenting extremely personal and, unfortunately, somewhat subjective views, H.G. Rickover (6:68-69) indirectly condemns any influence that disallows a truly professional educator from exercising his best judgment. Rickover's Education and Freedom is an excellent example of a minority viewpoint constructively tendered.

David Riesman (7:120-168), although eclectic in approach, examines with thorough-going accuracy the pressures exerted upon administrator and teacher alike. Especially pertinent is his series on counter-cyclical policy in the secondary schools.

The late chairman of the Select Committee on Lobbying Activities, U.S. House of Representatives, Congressman Frank Buchanan (1:23-27), pungently and definitively sets

forth the criteria by which one may evaluate what is and what is not a pressure group.

Smith, Stanley, and Shores effectively enter into the problem of determination of the substance or composition of pressure groups. Especially pertinent is their treatment of a community's "gatekeepers," those who have much influence on curriculum planning. They point out succinctly the importance of knowing the channels of influence as well as the persons with high influence potential.

Specific examples of pressure groups and special interest groups and their attendant effect in regard to particular situations are illustrated by the now-classic Goslin case (Hurlbud's It Happened in Pasadena) and Melby's listings of incidents in his American Education Under Fire.

I. PURPOSES

Some of the areas in which pressure groups are most effective and, therefore, areas of serious concern are moral and spiritual development, health and physical education, family relations and home management, textbook selection, school spending, and teaching of fundamentals.

The furor and rancor that attend development of the above within the curriculum come about because the

schools, who do serve and were originated for serving society's goals and policies, have taken over much beyond their at one time exclusively intellectual training. They now serve in peripheral areas that are controversial. Due to the controversial nature of its duties, the school became the focus and remains the focus of groups who have their own special interests to promote.

As Smith, Stanley, and Shore (9:40) explain, officers of these groups or organizations, with few exceptions, believe themselves to be serving the public interest because their own interest happens to coincide with the public interest. More often, however, the public interest happens to coincide with the group's particular interest.

Regarding the aforesaid peripheral areas, Krug and Babcock (4:158-159) explained that due to the ideological conflict between Eastern and Western worlds, there has been a heightened interest in the goal of the schools, that is, the schools' dedication and devotion to American ideals.

In molding public opinion, pressure and special interest groups play an important part in determining what the public wants. Within this nebulous area administrators and curriculum planners face a severe challenge to their powers of judgment. That is to say, the public has either professed an interest in certain programs due to access to

information that has been objectively presented or it has been subjected to what it thinks is objective reasoning but what acutally represents the narrowed and selfish interest of a particular group attempting to serve its own ends by correlating these with those which, by dint of organized shaping, have become the public's ends.

Perhaps Krug and Babcock (4:161) best illustrate the varied role that interested groups play in helping to determine the outcome of curriculum planning. In fields as widely diversified as health and physical education, safety education, and family relations and home management, concern has been manifested not only by those sincerely interested in seeing that tax monies are spent wisely but also by those who want changes on the basis of their own specific interests. Krug and his followers (4:161) ask if lay cooperation exists other than for specific bond issues, tax levies, and districting. To take a random example from among several presented, the authors state that in regard to safety education, interest has been fostered by the high rate of accidents on our highways. Krug (4:159) states, "Here, as in other areas, powerful groups have been organized to try to bring about modifications in the school's program." According to Krug (4:162-163) and his associates, such groups are successful

in promoting their particular interests because educators have not fully utilized community-wide participation.

Pressure upon the schools by small but well-organized minority groups is minimized through community participation. If such is carried out, instances such as the Pasadena case might never come to pass. Referred to is the infamous firing of a highly-respected, nationally-recognized school superintendent, Willard Goslin, by influences that had only their own ends in mind, disregarding the local Pasadena problem except to use it to satisfy an altogether different objective, "the getting of another superintendent" (5:14).

Insofar as divisive minority groups are concerned, it is clear that their prime objective has been to foster their own ends, not in the light of public scrutiny but in the shadowy background of propaganda and slogans. This same objective--if sought through having something to say to enough people, if pursued by raising and clarifying issues--can be obtained legitimately. According to Buchanan (1:27), the purposes of pressure groups and special interest groups are not bad, but, these should be examined so that future citizens and voters will suffer no ill effects from today's propaganda techniques.

The late Frank Buchanan, in answer to a question concerning the techniques used by certain groups, also

answered most effectively the reason for thoroughly understanding the ends of groups concerned with what is going on in the schools (1:27):

If education in a free society has any fixed purpose, it is and must be to cultivate open-mindedness, to develop willingness and ability to face the facts and reason from them. The end result of propaganda within the schools, whether it takes the form of intimidating teachers or subtly indoctrinating students, is along entirely different lines. If propaganda in the schools succeeds, it will have created closed minds rather than open ones, slogans rather than reason

While we cannot assign to the purposes of pressure and special interest the total responsibility for many of the factors that tend to impede development of satisfactory curricula, we can assign to their purposes a major role in restricting orderly development of curricula. Awareness and explanation by educators of the purposes of groups seeking to further their own ends might answer the well-taken criticisms of such men as Rickover (6:143), who states that in the American comprehensive school the display of courses resembles the variegated dishes in a cafeteria. The latter results from trying desperately to satisfy the demands of each and every group, despite the merit of such demand.

II. TECHNIQUES UTILIZED BY PRESSURE GROUPS

Techniques employed by pressure groups and special interest groups are of critical interest due to the extent

that they affect curriculum. When a group attempts to get people to accept and then to act, both without sufficient information; when such groups are willing to spend exorbitant amounts of money and time in furthering selfish demands; the techniques, or methods of accomplishing their aims become important. In furthering their aims, the pressure or special interest group force educators into postures hardly commensurable with their position of public trust. For this reason alone, it would be wise to encourage stringent analysis of the concerned groups and prudent to know how they seek to gain their ends.

Saylor and Alexander (8:97-98) describe five methods by which pressure groups seek to control curriculum. The five are used separately or in conjunction with one another in almost every case of applied pressure. The pressure groups seek (1) the passage of laws compelling or restraining schools to do certain things, (2) apply pressure on the board of education to adopt certain policies that serve the group's ends, (3) make public statements and issue news releases intended to intimidate administrators and teachers so that the latter will bow to the wishes of the pressure group, (4) attempt to discredit the school in the public's eyes so that the latter will not support bond issues, special levies, or other considered measures, and (5) insist that the schools do not use textbooks or reference

books that do not conform to their point of view. All five were used in the Pasadena case (2:55-113), their success being indicated by the fact that the top educator was removed despite his deserved reputation and recognition.

With little doubt, major groups that largely affect the schools, although not directly through attack on the curriculum, are anti-tax groups. In order that educators deal astutely with these groups, it is necessary for the educators to scrutinize their own policies, plans, and proposals and see to it that all people understand the school program.

In a world of high pressure public relations and mass media, the invidious attack on public opinion by pressure groups tends to discredit the schools through derogatory attacks. The National Commission for the Defense of Democracy Through Education, a committee of the National Education Association (5:11), undertook a study of the unfair attacks on school systems. The committee sent 15,239 questionnaires to superintendents, lay advisory members, and local association members requesting information on unjustified attacks on public schools. Their aim was to get a national picture of the scope of recent unjustified attacks and to determine the characteristics of these attacks as they occurred in various communities. By "unjustified attacks," it meant the kind of

attacks that appeared to aim at nothing less than the emasculation or destruction of the American system of public education.

The study disclosed that these attacks have greatly accelerated in this period of world tension. Most interesting, it confirmed the fact that the leading attacks on the schools centered on these three charges:

1. The schools do not teach the "three R's" properly.
2. The schools cost too much money.
3. There are "too many frills and fads" in the schools.

Other charges often used in these attacks are that there is a failure to teach moral and spiritual values, insufficient emphasis on the teaching of United States History, need for more rigid discipline in the schools, that "progressive education" is being used and is, per se, evil; and that the school is usurping the functions of the home. Then, of course, there were attacks, generally worded, that the schools are subversive, communistic, and "teaching the welfare state" (5:11). As Congressman Buchanan stated, however, to give in to the techniques of groups using the above approach would be a rebuttal and negation of all that is prized in free public education:

It is no longer education when curriculums and course content are tailored to meet the special demands of whatever private groups happen to be most vocal in the community (1:27).

Direct and indirect lobbying are two of the most effective, certainly two of the costliest, methods of influencing schools. Direct lobbying involves the efforts of groups to change curriculum through obtaining passage of laws compelling or restricting schools to certain courses of action.

This is accomplished by maintaining professional organizations in the capitols of the states and in Washington, D.C., whereby legislators may be appraised of the wishes of the particular group. As described by Buchanan (1:24), indirect lobbying seeks to accomplish the same thing as direct lobbying but restricts its actions to influencing educational institutions, their personnel, the students, and the general public. A common example of the way indirect lobbying works is the payment of money to individual teachers, whether for consulting services, for writing, or in the forms of stipends or fellowships of various kinds.

Such eminently respectable organizations as the National Association of Manufacturers, The National Economic Council, and the Committee for Constitutional Government disseminate pamphlets, direct preparation of

textbooks for college courses, place prominent educators on the boards of trustees to lend respectability, and review and publish reviews of textbooks in which are located things objectionable to the organization's views. to the above three examples so many hundreds more could be added.

It is up to the professional educator to indicate who is making demands, what the demands are, and the reason for them. Additionally, they must show what the consequences of bowing to these demands would be in relation to the educational program. To do this, it is obvious that he must be aware not only of the groups involved but of the methods used by the groups, as well.

CHAPTER III

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In the preceding pages, it has been found that pressure groups serve both good and detrimental ends. That some groups distinctly contribute to acceptable curriculum development is undeniable. Such bodies as the Parent Teachers Association, for instance, are constructively oriented toward the school system. The difficulty is that this particular group is composed only of those who tend to render affirmative "ayes" to whatever the educators involved have decided to do. A "yes" group, no matter how constructive, may serve no better purpose in the long run than the destructive pressure groups who believe (and are willing to back up their beliefs with time and money) that any idea advanced by professional educators, unless it is in concert with their own ideas, is well worth opposing, no matter the cost to the general public.

The difficulty in differentiating between sincere and well-motivated citizen groups and pressure groups and special interest groups comes about due to the undemocratic, in fact, insidious means employed by the latter two groups in promoting their own ends. These means, or techniques, have been discussed, although by no means in detail. The objection to such methods lies in the abuse

of the right of free discussion. That nothing may, or should be done to discourage the latter is also undeniable. What is necessary, then, is that educators realize, be able to sort out and explain to the public the motives of opposition to school curriculum planning. They cannot do this unless they have been trained, themselves, in the fine art of propaganda and scapegoating techniques.

In sum, it may be said that pressure groups are a distinct asset to democratic society, serve a useful purpose in bringing to the fore certain beliefs of minority groups, and are a permanent feature of the democratic landscape. They cannot be abolished; therefore, they must be contended with. In order to contend with these groups, educators must be familiar with the channels through which pressures travel, leaning on tensions and fears, eventually to end up as contributing factors toward the variegated curriculum spoken of earlier.

Educators must be bellwethers of their community, willing to lead as well as be led. Even though servants of the society that originated them, the schools need to take some initiative in determining, on the basis of professional competency, the curriculum development as it most benefits society. That this is difficult to do is an understatement.

The curriculum today, as never in the past, offers topics of controversial nature, bearing within itself the seeds of its own proliferation. Service-minded as it is today, the school is prey to every high-school graduate who has married and is now sending his progeny to school. The teacher in the classroom has but to teach with candor in order to become labeled "controversial" (7:126).

In other words, the educational system is wide-open to attack on every side and must be prepared to deal adequately with those who by virtue of their non-objectivity, by their techniques of getting people to act without access to all of the facts, foster their own ends without regard to the resulting mayhem wreaked upon the curriculum. It may be worth considering that the curriculum criticisms of such eminent men as Rickover and Riesman might be laid to rest should pressure groups meet vigorous opposition from the educators via public cooperation. This public cooperation could be gained by the same means used by the pressure groups, without using their negative aspects. That is, the gatekeepers in communities, those who because of their acceptance by those around them, those who are now used by the people of status, could be engaged by the educators to work for them in objectives of worth to the entire community. By "engaged," of course, is not meant employed. There seems little objection to using these

channels to disseminate a truthful version of what educators are trying to accomplish in the development of curriculum.

Lay advisory committees are already in wide use, but as with Parent Teacher's Associations, these are apt to be composed of members constructively oriented and dedicated to the ideals traditional in a democracy. The realization that most students still come from an ill-informed and uninterested socio-economic group should lead to widespread recognition of the opportunity to combat influence-bearers via community members who have the trust and regard of these ill-informed and uninterested.

Any conclusion from as brief a paper as this would be but to realize that a problem does exist and continues to place the schools and educators in a derogatory light with most citizens of a community when anything controversial makes an appearance.

If any tentative conclusion could be reached from a survey of the motives of pressure groups and their effect upon curriculum, it would be that the wrong people are defining the purposes of the public schools. Not only are they deliberately misinterpreting the true purposes, they are succeeding, by one means or another, in convincing the lay public that educators, themselves, are of no single mind regarding a unified purpose.

The responsibility for defining the purpose of the free public school belongs to those who already understand the matters with which the school is to deal. Without dictating to the public, it is still possible for the professional educator to define what the schools should do and what they must never consent to do. No matter the pressure put upon it by those seeking unjustified ends, the educator must not permit the diffusion and confusion of purposes in the institution he is charged with defending.

The above calls for educational statesmanship, the use of channels available to bring to the public what the public does not know it wants. The use of channels means control of the curriculum. Thus far, the available channels have been used to greatest advantage, not by educators but by pressure groups. This leads to control by those who are ignorant of or actively opposed to what is best designated by those prepared to direct the schools.

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