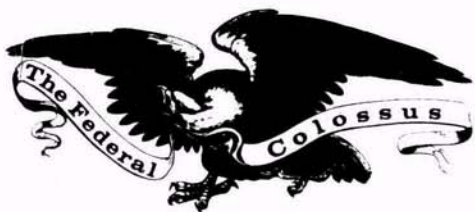


THE FEDERAL COLOSSUS IN EDUCATION— CURRICULUM PLANNING



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THE general effect of the massive entry by the federal government into the field of education is to make available to the curriculum worker a vastly increased number and variety of tools, resources and strategies for improving the quality and equality of educational opportunity for the young people and adults of America.

While I believe that general aid to schools is a more desirable form of help, categorical aid does not offend my sensitivities. There is little doubt in my mind that in time the categories will become so increased and extended as to constitute general aid in fact. If the people of America prefer to support "programs for children" rather than "money for schools" then let it be so.

Those of us in local school districts are pressed for funds to continue upgrading our school programs and increasing our school plants. In many states, such as New Jersey, the situation for improving schools is particularly tight. Since we in New Jersey have neither a state income tax nor sales tax, we are almost completely dependent on local property taxes for support of education. The addition of federal funds provides one means of alleviating our present problems.

How *can* federal resources best be utilized by curriculum workers? Curriculum workers would include all persons who have a responsibility for children and young people within the schools. Teachers, principals, curriculum specialists, guidance personnel, psychologists and superintendents are all curriculum workers.

Many readers have already made use of NDEA funds for improving curriculum in science, foreign languages and for improving guidance services, which funds have been available since 1958. This act was amended, expanded and extended through the enactment of the National Education Improvement Act of 1963, but the procedures for utilizing these resources in special areas were retained pretty much as before.

What about the newer legislation, which has more far-reaching and even revolutionary implications for public school systems, the Economic Opportunity Act, and the new Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965? Both of these acts call for new approaches within the school and in relation to the community. Both are looking to local community leadership to have the imagination, creativity and commitment to be serious about improving and equalizing educational opportunity. The money will be available but not until educators are willing to provide the leadership. Here, I believe, is the real challenge to curriculum workers. If we are not equipped to accept this challenge, someone else will do our job for us.

Economic Opportunity Act

It is obvious that the first step in utilizing any federal resource is to become knowledgeable about what is available. This is especially important in these two bills, for the procedures and information on which programs are based differ from those of the earlier categorical programs.

In some programs, the conditions in the community are one of the bases on which funds are granted. One must know the indicators of poverty for the Economic Opportunity Act as well as Title I of the new education bill. Accumulation of the necessary data on the community, characteristics of children, understanding of the legislation, its rules and regulations, plus talent and skill in writing proposals are prerequisites to tapping these funds.

Each school system will need to designate some office or person to be in

charge of state and federal affairs, to keep abreast of new legislation and to develop proposals based on local needs.

To take advantage of the educational aspects of the anti-poverty bill, one must keep in mind that it requires a kind of community involvement which schools have not always assumed. Educators should welcome this approach, for schools ought to assume initiative and leadership in finding solutions to broad community problems. A closer relationship with other agencies and groups in the community provides a greater possibility that more effective and lasting solutions will be found. Further, by being involved with a total community approach, educators can retain jurisdiction over educational programs while maintaining contact with the agencies that are administering social welfare programs. An additional benefit which comes through inter-agency cooperation is often a better understanding of the school's problems and limitations.

After an assessment of local needs, the real work begins. The educational aspects of the anti-poverty bill and certain titles of the elementary-secondary education bill call for new answers to old problems. We have complained many years that if only we had more money, how much more we could do. Now the money is here, but are the imagination and personnel also here in order to utilize this resource?

Project Head Start

Let me cite Project Head Start as an example. For the first time, to the best of my knowledge, sizeable sums of money have been made available for preschool programs. The problem

is to find the personnel who have had sufficient experience to set up the kind of program which would give children a head start. With Head Start programs operating throughout the country there will be an impact on school systems. Some have been set up outside the public schools—in some areas this might be desirable. But what effect will this have on the schools when these children enter kindergarten?

Will the experiences of this past summer point the way for communities to institute preschool programs as part of the public school system? Will the teacher education institutions enlarge their programs to prepare more teachers for early childhood education? In Englewood, we have found that public school can begin with children at four years of age and that when it does, we are required to reexamine our entire preprimary and primary program.

There are other implications for curriculum workers in this program. A more revolutionary concept is the child development center which is the basis of the Head Start program. Medical and social services are an integral part of the daily program. The separation between educational programs and health and social services is being erased. Those communities which hope for a continuation of this approach during the regular school year will have to give attention to this child development concept. Can we provide the environment, the materials and, most important, the kind of staff to shape a program which will foster the development of the whole child—social, emotional, physical, and intellectual—his rational and intuitive powers as well as meet the individual needs of per-

sonality growth? We often say this is what we are doing at all levels. But school systems and communities which sponsor Head Start programs will be put to a more severe test. Ultimately, this thinking will have an impact upon all communities because of the nationwide publicity given this past summer's program.

Another area where we will have to do more thinking is evaluation of preschool programs. How can we be sure that what we do with children at age 4 or 5 really makes a difference? Here again all educators must work together to devise new and better ways of measuring what we are doing and of searching out the right questions to ask. The prekindergarten program can become the point of leverage by which we may effectively jack up the quality of the entire program of the primary and middle schools. Unless curriculum workers are prepared to reexamine thoughtfully and candidly the curriculum of early childhood, then Head Start and prekindergarten programs may become the biggest educational boondoggle of the decade.

Neighborhood Youth Corps

The Neighborhood Youth Corps is another program under the Economic Opportunity Act with which we have had some experience. It too has far-reaching educational implications for curriculum as well as approaches to guidance and counseling. Can we revise our thinking, prodded by a new federal resource, to find ways to help high school youth for whom schools generally have had little or no relevance? If we encourage them to return to school, will school be any different? What

kinds of programs—what kind of curriculum are we willing to establish in order that education can have meaning for these youth? Can we begin to guide them toward a more productive and satisfying life? Or, if they do return to school will they find the same dull unrelated bits and pieces of information which forced them out of school in the first place?

One problem we have encountered with the Neighborhood Youth Corps, which is not peculiar to Englewood, I am sure, is recruitment. For so long the schools have sat back and said, in effect, "Here we are. Come to us." This approach does not work with the groups we need to reach. Somehow a method of extending the school into the community must be found. Neighborhood workers, school-community agents may be one answer. Where these kinds of workers have been used, communities have been more successful. If these federally supported programs are to be sponsored by public school systems (and I feel strongly that they should be if they have an educational component), the schools must develop the flexibility to meet the demands of the programs.

Adult education is another aspect which must challenge our imagination. Reading, writing, high school equivalency are now accepted courses for adults. Yet courses and a variety of programs in home management, family life education can also be aided by federal funds. We need to find more ways to reach adults if we ever hope to make education meaningful for all.

These two examples from the Economic Opportunity Act, which is a new kind of federal resource and in fact a

new approach to our age-old social problems, illustrate some challenges for schools and curriculum workers. The mere fact that these educational programs are not required to go through public school systems should cause us to take stock of our own house.

The new Elementary-Secondary Education Act does contain the proviso that public schools must be the initiator of all programs and that control remains in their hands. But the local school system must take this initiative. While the Economic Opportunity Act implies and in some instances requires cooperation with other social agencies and community groups, the new education bill makes possible cooperative arrangements with private and parochial schools. This too will raise new and different problems for public schools.

Federal Control?

In the preceding article, Dr. Saylor has stated the belief and hope that the federal government would refrain from imposing specific requirements or making demands on the schools beyond carrying out the general intent of the law in both general and categorical grants. With this I wholeheartedly agree.

In this regard I should state that in our direct contacts with the federal government in securing grants for the Neighborhood Youth Corps and Project Head Start, we have experienced imaginative thinking and a willingness to avoid meaningless detail. The dotting of "i's" and crossing of "t's" did not seem more important than the content of the program.

However, access to federal funds can be handicapped by the red tape imposed

either at the federal or at the state level. When requirements become too picayune on the local community, it is often easier to give up. It is essential that we have assistance and encouragement from state education departments for local school systems to fashion their own programs in relation to local needs. Compliance with the intent of the federal bills should be the prime concern of state officials as well as federal. Certain kinds of state requirements can become barriers to utilizing some federal resources. Certification bans on non-professional assistance in schools are one illustration.

Evaluating Quality

The point which Dr. Saylor emphasizes in his article with which I do not agree in-toto is his concern that the federal government should not hold states and local school districts accountable in any way for quality control. It is my own belief that for too long we have relied solely upon expenditures per pupil as a measurement of quality, and feel strongly that other indicators of quality education need to be devised. If professional educators do not get on the ball pretty soon, and devise some reasonable means of evaluating the quality of education, then we are open to having others begin to do this for us.

Now a word about business and industry and their involvement with education. True, the federal colossus is becoming a dominant force in education with money its main attraction. The business world has money too and a great deal of talent. I welcome its interest and feel confident that the net effect will be to muster greatly in-

creased resources which will benefit children and young people.

This concern and involvement of the federal government and business can be of great benefit to public schools. However, as professional educators, we need to ask ourselves constantly whether or not we have the imagination, adaptability, flexibility and responsiveness to capitalize on the opportunities which are ours. If not, someone else will do the job. We, the "educators," no longer have a monopoly on education.

I believe it is significant that responsibility for establishment of Job Corps centers has been assigned mainly to business and industrial firms—centers whose functions are largely educational in nature.

It is also significant that in some cities which have launched community-action programs, activities that are essentially educational, such as tutorial programs, study and remedial centers, have been undertaken by agencies outside the school systems. These developments constitute a serious indictment of the capacity of some of our formal educational institutions to respond appropriately to the educational needs and challenges of the nation.

Creative and imaginative leadership is required at every level among curriculum workers. These qualities are most essential, I believe, at the administrative and policy-making levels where programs can be facilitated or effectively blocked. We must have as principals, superintendents and boards of education, people who are progressive and innovative rather than ones who are limited in view and committed to the status quo.

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