BUSINESS-EDUCATION INTERACTION FOR MUTUAL GROWTH

JAMES P. McCORMICK*

A joint project of the Detroit Edison Company and the Port Huron, Michigan, schools takes mutual advantage of the expertise of company-oriented educators and the in-service staff of the public schools.

THE SCHOOLS have a number of interdependent teaching systems and so do the larger business corporations. At the young employee level, business may be more computer and hardware oriented to fit limited training objectives. At the management level, however, educational activities within a company are quite similar to those of in-service teachers, including work toward advanced degrees. How can there be an interaction between the two educational systems so that they understand and support one another?

The place where this interaction starts is at the financial base of the schools. Since successful businessmen produce money, and since successful educators need money, this is the best place to begin to strengthen understanding. Over the past 50 years, however, the two educational systems have developed independently, so the current separation between the business and school worlds has an adverse effect on both.

The separation starts with the tax structure. As citizens and parents, business people pay the school tax and vote in local millage elections. As employers they also pay the school tax but the corporation does not vote. Once the money is paid their knowledge of how it is used in what may easily be a multimillion dollar budget, for which they have some feeling, drops rapidly. They keep up with curriculum development through the children's homework and in occasional interviews with individual teachers. But the last time they participated in a classroom was probably the day they graduated. The gap between the two systems has created a depersonalization that is unfortunate and tends to produce a consumer movement. As costs go up and enrollments drop the millages may be defeated because this is the ultimate

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response to this form of involuntary financing.

Seed Money for Growth

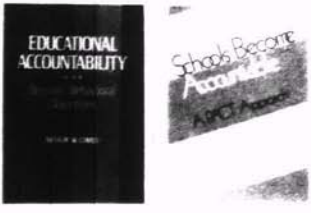
A fast way to close the gap is to create a joint project. Both Chrysler and the Michigan Bell Telephone Company have enriched the vocational education of two Detroit high schools for several years. On a smaller scale the Detroit Edison Company provided seed money to help the Port Huron (Michigan) School District introduce change in teaching the social sciences.

Herbert S. Moyer, Curriculum Development Director of the Port Huron Schools, asked the Detroit Edison Company to help the teachers develop some new ideas and fresh approaches. As a public utility, Detroit Edison is oriented toward science and engineering and has contributed to programs that strengthen these subjects. The company is also aware that we live in a technological society and that the machines which have produced our affluence have some negative social impacts. Although the company was surprised at the request, it decided to participate because of the strong interest of both teachers and the administration.

Many profit making corporations today have accepted voluntary giving to private higher education as part of their social responsibility and, to the extent they also believe it to be sound business practice, they are beginning to extend additional support beyond taxes to public colleges and universities.

Detroit Edison had just completed with the Greek city planner, Doxiadis, a five-year study of Southeastern Michigan with projections to the year 2000. This was the largest regional study that had been put together in

A SEARCHING LOOK AT ACCOUNTABILITY



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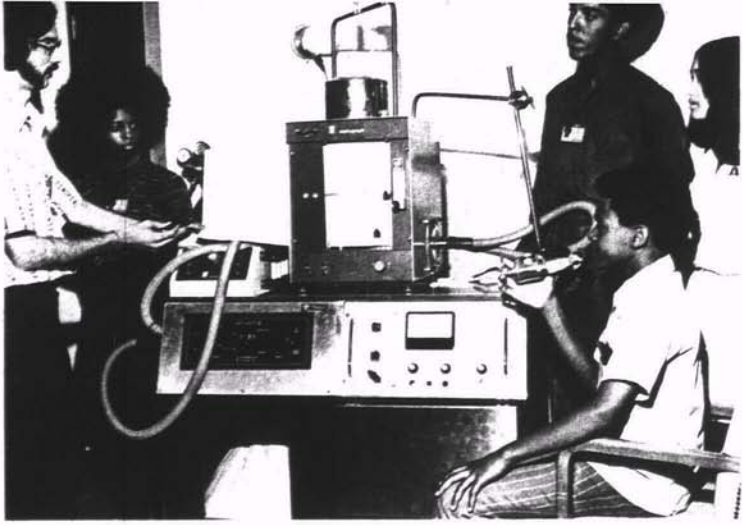
Fred Gaulzetti, general employment supervisor for Michigan Bell Telephone, tells seniors at Detroit's Northern High School what companies look for in future employees and how students should present themselves on job interviews.

the United States, and Port Huron played an important role in the concepts that were advanced. The curriculum team started with elements of this work to generate teaching modules.

In the first year 30 teachers and administrators attended a six hour credit course developed by the School District and Wayne State University. The Company paid the tuition and incidentals, the District contributed released time, and the teachers invested the rest. Since the course was directed at pollution, especially the wasteful uses of land, Detroit Edison supplied a number of planning studies. Systems engineers discussed the elements of planning and helped involve private and public planning groups at the city, county, and regional levels. A number of resource units and teaching modules were produced for both the elementary and secondary grades.

In the second year the course was repeated and about 15 people from the community also participated. Almost all had children in school and a number were given released time from their jobs. The Chamber of Commerce and luncheon clubs became interested and the *Port Huron Times Herald* financed a two-day symposium for teachers in the surrounding districts. The course turned increasingly to the study of the future of Port Huron and produced a series of "futuristic encounters" and simulation games. Teachers reported they became more aware of total life situations, and both students and community participants played realistic roles.

The following year a futuristic class was started in the high school. The students worked on both real and theoretical problems of land use, interviewing city planners, residents, and business people. A master plan, including zoning for future commerce, housing, and recreation along with sewage and transportation systems, was developed and presented by the students to the City Council. By this time hundreds of people were involved and the interaction was well started. One member of the Board of Education who had not been in a classroom situation since graduation wanted to take the course.



A pulmonary function recorder at Mt. Carmel Mercy Hospital in Detroit is tested by a Northwestern High School student as a registered inhalation therapist (left) explains its operation.

The Program Expands

What began as a limited venture proved eye opening as it involved many parts of the community. Voluntary contributions of time and money came to augment the programs that were usually supported impersonally through the tax assessment.

Many profit making corporations today have accepted voluntary giving to private higher education as part of their social responsibility and, to the extent they also believe it to be sound business practice, they are beginning to extend additional support beyond taxes to public colleges and universities. Most of the firms are unaccustomed to giving additional money to the public schools, however, and will not know how to evaluate a request if they receive one. The Council for Financial Aid to Education has been very successful over the past 20 years in increasing corporate support, and educators will find it worthwhile to examine their publications.[1]

In the system of voluntary aid by corporations, contributions represent a large element. A gift of money, equipment, or material is an allowable income tax deduction. In small companies the president or treasurer usually decides on contributions to health, education, and welfare agencies. In large firms a request is frequently referred to a contributions committee or a corporate foundation at the beginning of the calendar year. Any such approach should be made by the superintendent of schools.

Another element is the co-op program. This is an old one and, after a period of decline, it now appears to be attracting increasing numbers. As "career education," it brings school people directly in touch with the personnel departments that have charge of in-company educational programs. The professional educators of business talk with other professionals of the schools to their mutual advantage.

The final large element is a united or consortium approach, and, because it brings the largest number of people together from both systems, it has great promise. Programs like career days, science conferences, or engineering fairs usually involve several companies and school districts. They bring a wide variety of people from their jobs to talk and work directly with students and teachers. The joint project between Detroit Edison and the Port Huron Schools is a variation of this approach.

The best way for school people to begin to understand the educational systems of corporations is to know business people and what they believe they can contribute. Money is important, and both the tax and voluntary dollars are elements in bridging the gap between the systems. But corporations employ many people who are professionally committed to education, and this is where the schools will find strong allies. □

[1] Council for Financial Aid to Education, 680 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10019.

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