

## CONTINUOUS SCHOOL PUBLICITY

MODERN astute students of the related science of psychology and publicity have been giving attention to the relatively large amount of publicity given to the meetings and activities of city councils and municipal officers as compared with the small amount of newspaper space devoted to the activities of boards of education and school administrative officers. So far as the writer knows, no careful measurements of such publicity have ever been made, but some day an enterprising candidate for a doctor's degree in some great university will undertake such an investigation and make it the subject of his dissertation. Then the matter will be settled for all time.

In the meantime, one may hazard a guess that the explanation lies in the basic fact that politicians are good psychologists. The average politician would probably endeavor to deny such an allegation, and he might even consider it an indictment, but his common sense tells him that publicity, either good or bad, favorable or unfavorable, is the breath of life to him. He knows that the direst calamity which can overtake him is to have the community newspapers ignore him, so he cultivates publicity. He is friendly with reporters; gets acquainted with city editors; and he fraternizes with the publishers. He writes, or he has his friends write, letters for publication in "The Editor's Mail Box." He has an intuitive sense of news values and such news gems as he may discover, whether they are of the purest ray serene or otherwise, are never permitted to remain in the dark, unfathomed caves of the ocean, and the news flowerets that bloom in his garden or on his street never are permitted to waste their sweetness on the desert air.

On the other hand school officials have long insisted and always prided themselves that they are "not in politics." In order to prove their contention to a public who never doubted it and never wanted it proved, they have eschewed all political practices, including the cultivation of publicity. For the most part newspaper men have respected their

reticence, with the result that in innumerable communities the information about public schools, educational philosophy, and modern pedagogical practice is limited to the fragmentary and half true news items which are carried home by the school children.

In the past, the typical school board and school officers have sought publicity only when help was needed in "putting over" a bond issue or an extra tax levy. The phrase may be slang but it expresses the idea regarding school publicity held by the majority of people. When it has been necessary to secure a favorable vote on a bond issue or tax levy, there has been a frantic scurrying around to get stuff ready for the newspapers. Frantic hours have been spent by the school superintendent writing editorials, and principals have told teachers to tell the children to tell their parents to vote for the proposition or dire calamities would follow.

Be it said to the eternal honor and glory of newspapers that usually they are on the right side of issues affecting the public schools, but when editors and reporters are suddenly called upon to "boost" a proposition for educational extension concerning which they have had no background of knowledge or experience, they can hardly be blamed for giving the project only half-hearted support. And when school officers submit editorials written in composition-book style, editors cannot be blamed for not giving them first page space. Most school men, in the past, never heard of "newspaper English" and if they had they would have denounced it. Their editorials on school issues may have been models of composition but many of them were unconvincing and unreadable, just as thousands of "Superintendents' Annual Reports" still are. When the editors refused to give prominent space to these prosy essays, they were accused of being unfriendly to the schools, and the educational authorities, despairing of "getting their message across" in the public prints, would proceed to get out a pamphlet of great expense telling about the bond issue or the tax levy, and this was distributed among the school children, and if read at all was unconvincing. The election was carried or lost by a small majority and no one was satisfied.

In some communities still, educational officers are not supposed to maintain mem-

bership in chambers of commerce, service clubs, or fraternal organizations, and if a superintendent or principal ever speaks in public it is upon some literary or religious topic. The use of such organizations, and women's clubs, church societies, and parent-teacher associations in carrying on a program of educational publicity has never occurred to the old-fashioned school officer.

A happy change for the better in such attitudes has come about in the last few years. Some county school systems have already gone so far as to have a director of publicity on the staff of the superintendent. Some great teachers' colleges have professors of educational publicity on their faculties. Hundreds of school administrative officers have learned how to carry on continuous school publicity with marvelous results.

The old time spasmodic school publicity was very costly. The printing of pamphlets is expensive and the loss of, or the lack of, public confidence caused by the absence of school news in the local papers is but little short of a calamity. It has cost many school systems new or additional buildings which should have been built but were not built because bond issues were defeated. It has cost many teachers well-earned increases in salary because extra tax levies were voted down.

Continuous school publicity is very economical. It costs nothing in money. When used with intelligence and tact it practically assures the building of new and modern school buildings without the publication of expensive pamphlets. It insures adequate teachers' salaries, for when any community is properly informed on the subject it will vote tax levies to the limit of the law for school purposes. Publicity secures the co-operation of parents and citizens in carrying on the school program; keeps children in school longer, sends them to college when they graduate from high school, and makes them intelligent citizens when they settle down in the community. It takes away the feeling which is prevalent in many communities that school officials need watching lest they "put something over" on the community.

Continuous school publicity is a measure of justice to the public. The schools belong

to the citizens and the citizens have a right to know what is going on in an institution which is supported at public expense. Society as organized at present recognizes newspapers as the accepted and proper means of diffusing public information. This is shown by the fact that in every state there are laws on the statute books requiring publication of advertisements in newspapers before bonds can be sold, public contracts let, or other public action taken. Every one today instinctively looks to the newspapers as the proper source of information regarding current affairs. School authorities, therefore, owe it to the public to take the newspapers into their confidence and to keep them informed as to what is going on in the system.

The *modus operandi* of the practice of continuous school publicity is simple. It requires only a little knowledge of newspaper practice, considerable intelligence and all the common sense that one possesses.

Most newspaper reporters now work on "beats." Usually a request to the city editor that the school headquarters office be placed on the "beat" of some reporter will be granted. It is well to get acquainted with city editors, weekly newspaper editors, editorial writers, and to treat all newspaper men with respect and confidence.

When a reporter calls, he should be given any information he may request. If it is desirable to withhold from publication any particular item or story, the reporter may be asked to hold it until released. There is a code of ethics in the newspaper profession that is as rigid as the ethics of the medical, legal, or clerical professions and no reporter who deserves the name would ever violate a confidence. But the reporter has a right to know facts and it is better for him to get a story from authoritative sources than for him to get it through gossip with no request for him to refrain from publishing it.

Since the activities of boards of education in public meetings are public property according to law, full information regarding such meetings should be given to newspapers. Reporters should be encouraged to attend such board meetings and information concerning legislation which they do not understand should be freely and fully given.

Newspapers are always on the lookout for human interest stories. Stories about children who have not been absent or tardy in any certain number of years, children who have won prizes, teachers who have literary recognition, school officers who have been elected to office in professional organizations, athletic prowess—these are always eagerly sought by reporters and the reflex influence of such news items on the school program is great. New or proposed school buildings, growth in school population, enumeration results, enrollment figures, comparative cost statistics—if properly written up all have news value.

When the time comes to have bond issues voted or extra tax levies approved by the people, the needs should be made clear to the newspapers but they should be allowed to tell the story in their own way. Even if an editorial is written by a very scholarly school superintendent, no offense should be taken if it should be revised and done into "newspaper English" by the editor. He knows the style of composition peculiar to his paper and has a right to enforce his individuality on his publication if he so desires. Such issues may also be presented with profit to women's clubs, chambers of commerce, church organizations, and the like in person. They may also with propriety be requested to pass favoring resolutions relative to the issue that is being voted on and such a resolution by a chamber of commerce, service club, or woman's club has prime news value to a newspaper, and creates an interest among all the members of the organization.

The school officer who fails to join some of the organizations mentioned misses some of the finest contacts open to him. Activity in such organizations enables him to get acquainted widely in his community, to explain his philosophy of education, and his school program to his fellow citizens in a personal way as he sits with them at lunch or serves with them on committees. Such contacts enable him to inspire confidence in the schools and the school officers among the most influential members of the community.

The proof of the pudding is in the eating and the proof of the theory is in the practice. The methods of continuous school publicity

outlined in this paper have been practiced for the past five years in the home town of the writer, a city of about fifty thousand inhabitants. During that time four bond issues for new school buildings aggregating more than two and one-half million dollars have been approved by the voters, in addition to \$180,000 for library purposes. Two extra three-mill levies for school purposes have been voted, school bonds have been exempted from tax limitations, and within the last few brought about an upward revaluation of taxable property sufficient to offset the loss of one of the three-mill levies which is not subject to renewal. During this period no proposal made by school authorities has been rejected at the polls.

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### A PROPOSED COURSE OF STUDY FOR LITERATURE IN THE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

THE junior high school idea is a comparatively new one and has not as yet been fully developed; certainly it has not been standardized. In some places the term is used to include the seventh, eighth, and ninth grades; in others only the seventh and eighth grades; in still others, as few as one or as many as four grades. Perhaps the ideal plan is the "three-three" basis; that is, having three years of junior high school work (grades seven, eight, and nine) and three years of senior high school work (grades ten, eleven, and twelve). In Virginia, since there are, generally speaking, only seven elementary grades, the seventh grade and first year of high school in most places comprise the junior high school. However, since the school with which the writer is most familiar has as its junior high school the seventh and eighth grades, for the purpose of this paper the term shall be considered to include only those two grades. Nevertheless, practically the same principles would apply were one grade more or less included. Broadly speaking, the junior high school covers the adolescent period of the child's life—usually from the twelfth to the fifteenth year.

The junior high school has some special