

Relations of Schools and Social Agencies to Immigrant Education

The Pennsylvania Plan of Immigrant Education as Applied in Pittsburgh Furnishes an Interesting Study of Coöperation in Practice Between the Public School and Social Agencies

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IN CONSIDERING primary education of any type, I believe it to be sound doctrine that there is but one agency qualified to carry on the educational function of preparation for citizenship. I believe further that the only logical reason for the American system of general public education lies in the preparation for citizenship given by and through the schools. I believe it to be axiomatic that the basis for our form of government is universal education and that the only practical and efficient agency for universal education is the public school.

Accepting this promise then, as I feel that it should be accepted, the relation between schools and other social agencies in the field of immigrant education must be on a basis of cordial co-operation, the schools undertaking to perform the educational function which is their duty and all other social agencies undertaking to work to and through the schools toward a better and broader realization of constructive participation on the part of the immigrant in the privileges and duties of American citizenship.

The field of co-operative effort therefore in which social agencies other than the schools, which I shall hereafter call outside agencies, may best find their niche in any program of immigrant education can be roughly divided into the following general divisions, each of which will later be discussed in detail: financial assistance where the school board does not have sufficient funds for effective operation, recruiting, advertising, organization, follow-up work, citizenship exercise, home visiting and home neighborhood class organization, furnishing information and service facilities for immigrants, liaison between the schools and industrial or mercantile plants employing foreign born, and finally in developing and directing favorable public opinion toward a program of immigrant education.

In considering each of these divisions it must be understood that no exhaustive survey is intended in this review but rather merely a suggestion on which more intensive discussion may be based.

In financial co-operation the function of the outside social agency is to step in only when and where needed to secure necessary funds with which the public school may defray the expense incident to a comprehensive program of immigrant education. The funds so raised should be dispensed through the local board of education in order to continue direct supervision and control of the teaching activities within the public school. The funds can be solicited from any interested sources and should be turned over to the board of education with the stipulation that they be expended only for the maintenance of classes

for foreign born. Stress must also be laid on the absolute necessity for well equipped teaching staffs if efficient service is to be rendered in bringing the foreign born resident to the standard of American citizenship. Frequently lack of funds prevents local school authorities from inaugurating courses for the training of teachers and workers in Americanization and, unless some outside agency secures the necessary funds with which to carry on, untrained teachers must be employed. This invariably militates against efficient work as there is a distinct pedagogy and psychology which is essential to successful teaching of adult aliens. Except in very rare instances this specialized training is available only through courses of instruction established for the purpose. It seems to be equally rare to find a school board which will admit having sufficient funds at its disposal to conduct these teacher training courses. The opportunity exists therefore for some outside agency to step in and fill the gap by raising the funds and permitting the school authorities to utilize them.

In suggesting that outside agencies recruit for classes conducted by the public schools I have in mind that the schools are fulfilling their entire function when they announce their readiness to furnish facilities and instruction to those who come to them. The schools cannot properly be expected to recruit. This part of the work must be done by some other interested agency and can be carried on in a number of ways. For your consideration, I shall merely mention a few of our activities in Pittsburgh, through which we succeeded in raising the number enrolled in our evening school Americanization or immigrant education classes over fifty per cent, in a period of less than four months. The Americanization Bureau of the Chamber of Commerce of Pittsburgh carried on and directed this activity. The entire city was divided into six zones or districts, picked because of the large number of foreign born residing in them. A trained attendance-worker was placed in charge of each zone. This worker was assigned to two or three schools within the zone and complete accord and co-operation was established between the attendance worker and the principle of each school. Volunteer workers were also secured from the women's clubs of the city and assigned to zones in closest proximity to their homes. These volunteers were placed under the supervision and direction of the zone worker for training. All foreign born families were then visited at regular intervals during the school year and the members of the families were invited to utilize the facilities furnished by the schools.

May I interpolate here, however, that

the workers were instructed to do no more than extend a most cordial invitation to join the classes, at the same time explaining the advantages to be gained by the foreign born through a knowledge of the language of American. We believe that those who must be forced to make an effort to learn our language or to become citizens of our country are not of the caliber we desire to help. These attendance workers in the course of their rounds also found many instances where assistance was needed in matters other than education and in such cases help was always freely given if possible as a means toward gaining the confidence of the people with whom we were working because, without their confidence, our efforts would have been futile. This activity of recruiting into the classes conducted by the public schools is an integral and important part of every activity carried on by any outside agency in Pittsburgh and should be included in connection with those other fields of our work which will be described in the balance of this review.

When the problem of advertising school Americanization classes is considered it must be remembered that the best advertising agency available is the satisfied and progressive member of the class. Other means of advertising may be utilized, however, with most beneficial results. Here again the schools cannot properly be expected to function and the burden devolves upon interested and co-operative outside social agencies. We found the foreign language press the best medium for reaching the foreign born in Pittsburgh to bring to them news concerning the classes operated by the public schools and, I am happy to say, they responded most heartily to every request for co-operation. Many of them carried set advertisements in every issue advising their readers to take advantage of the facilities for acquiring a knowledge of our language and customs and listing the schools where such instruction was to be had. This was done by the papers without any compensation whatever. Organizations and societies composed of foreign born themselves also proved very effective in spreading information concerning the schools. The Americanization Bureau of the Chamber of Commerce printed and distributed through the mills, mines, factories and other industrial establishments over two thousand posters and forty thousand envelope stuffers, printed in eight languages, giving reasons for attendance at school and the time and places of meeting of the school classes. In addition every social worker whose field of activity lay with the foreign born became a walking and enthusiastic oral advertisement of the schools.

In organizing what is known as "the vestibule class" the outside agency in