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PREVIEW

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THE EDUCATIONAL PUBLIC RELATIONS ASPECTS
OF
SELECTED STATE-LEVEL ORGANIZATIONS

By

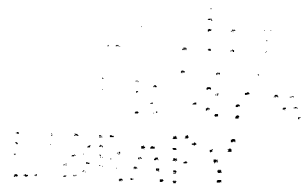
Floyd Alva Miller

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College of the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of School Administration

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F. A. M.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The situation which occasions a study of educational public relations at the state level is a combination of a number of factors, at least two of which are important. First of all, there is relatively little in the professional literature dealing with state-level public relations. Authorities in the field of school finance are in agreement in regard to the three levels of school support--local, state, and federal. Likewise, the leading writers in public relations hold to the common concept of partnership between the people and the public schools. They are in agreement also that education is not only a state function but a state obligation as well. They further agree that the responsibility for creating a state-wide understanding in regard to the educational program should be shared by the legitimate state educational agencies, particularly the state departments of education, the state education associations, and the state universities. However, at about this point, the writers, almost as if they had reached a physical barrier, stop the consideration of public relations at the state level and continue their attempts to broaden the treatment of the field of local public relations.

The second contributing factor concerns the current educational need in the State of Nebraska. The three major educational problems in Nebraska involve (1) administrative reorganization of school districts, (2) reorganization of the structure and method of school support, and (3) improvement of qualifications for elementary teachers. A state-wide intelligence--a general understanding of the need and of the promise of the proposed changes--seems necessary to reach these goals. At the moment

that understanding does not exist to an extent sufficient to produce the required legislation. Progress has not been able to penetrate effectively the barriers of tradition, inertia, and sentiment. The machinery or organization for developing the necessary understanding is inadequate, and the "know-how" of state-level public relations is insufficient. State organizations are not being used to the fullest advantage. In spite of the fine work which is now being done at the state level, there is need for greater coordination and for greater utilization of available resources.

Another evidence of the need for this study is found in the fact that one of several significant problems being studied currently by the National Council of Chief State School Officers concerns the "Responsibility of State Educational Authorities for Improving Educational Public Relations." It is of interest also to note that the February, 1948, issue of The Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary-School Principals was entirely devoted to secondary-school public relations.

Statement of the Problem

The general problem with which this study is concerned is: Can an educational public relations program at the state level be carried out more effectively through a greater utilization of state-level organizations? This general problem has the following specific parts: (1) What is the nature of the legitimate relations, if any, of state-level organizations to public education? (2) What factors, if any, are present in state organizations which are of significance in connection with a state educational public relations program? (3) To what extent are state-level organizations being used, and to what degree might they be used to further public education?

A major purpose of this study will be to draw up a general plan

for improving the procedures for carrying on a public relations program at the state level, and particularly in Nebraska. Proposed ways and means of setting up a working relationship between state educational agencies and the various state-level organizations will be set forth.

A second purpose will be to see if some direction can be given to the setting up of a unified and comprehensive approach to educational legislation so that a planned program may result rather than the "piece-meal" type of thing which has so long characterized school legislation in the various states throughout the nation.

Finally, this study will serve the purpose of focusing sharper attention upon this somewhat neglected area of public relations and stimulate further investigation into several areas related to the present problem.

Procedures to Be Followed in the Study

A list of Nebraska organizations which are state-wide in scope and non-profit, non-sectarian, and non-fraternal in character will be developed. The major source of preliminary information will be the records of incorporation in the office of the Secretary of State at the State Capitol in Lincoln. The membership rolls of organizations such as the Nebraska Safety Council will be used as supplementary aids in developing the list.

This list will be checked by individuals who, because of their acquaintance with Nebraska and with organized activity groups in Nebraska, will be able to suggest additions or changes.

A report form for Nebraska organizations will be developed. This will be filled out in part with information available in the records of the Secretary of State. The partially completed report will then be

mailed to the executive secretary or secretary of each individual organization for completion. The report will include statistical information relative to membership, annual meetings, and publications, statements of purpose, recent topics of discussion at the meetings of the given organizations, and will also call for suggestions relating to ways and means of improving the educational program in Nebraska through an extension of the functions of the particular organization.

The information obtained from the above investigation will be analyzed and interpreted so that it gives a comprehensive picture of the state organizations in Nebraska and indicates the current and potential activities of these organizations in the area of public education.

Further consideration will be given to ways and means of enlisting these organizations into a more active partnership in the state educational program.

Conclusions will then be drawn as seem justified and recommendations made which may be useful in developing a more effective public relations program at the state level, and particularly in Nebraska.

Sources of Materials and Data

While there are many research studies in the general area of public-school public relations, there are apparently no major studies in the specific area of state-level public relations. The same situation prevails to a great degree in regard to a treatment of the same topic in the professional literature. The writer has been able to find specific contributions in only four references, and these contributions have been limited. The four references are as follows: School Publicity, Belmont Farley; Public Understanding of What Good Schools Can Do; Robert S. Fisk; Social Interpretation, Arthur B. Moehlman; and An Introduction to Public-School Relations, Ward G. Reeder.

In addition to the above, a tentative report of the National Council of Chief State School Officers entitled, "Responsibility of State Educational Authorities for Improving Educational Public Relations," has been useful. The National Education Association Research Bulletin, Volume 18, Number 5, November, 1940; the Educational Policies Commission's Source Book on Federal-State Relations in Education, June, 1945; The Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary-School Principals, Volume 32, February, 1948; and Education, Volume 55, February, 1935, have had small contributions to make in this respect.

Other sources of data have been the files of the Secretary of State, State Capitol, Lincoln, Nebraska, the records of selected state organizations, and newspaper clippings.

Some attention has also been given to recent doctoral studies at the University of Nebraska by Ray J. Bryan¹ and Edward L. Novotny² and to a very recent publication by another Nebraskan, Gunnar Horn.³ While these three references are pointed very directly at the local level of public relations, nevertheless, they are useful in the development of background. Numerous other studies of the local level serve the same purpose.

¹Ray James Bryan, "The Unique Areas for Public Relations Activities in Small Agricultural Communities" (Unpublished Doctor's dissertation, University of Nebraska, 1940).

²Edward Lewis Novotny, "The Determination of Basic Principles by Means of Which Effective Coordination of Lay, School, and Other Institutional Leadership May Be Achieved in Improving the Teaching-Learning Situation in the Community" (Unpublished Doctor's dissertation, University of Nebraska, 1941).

³Gunnar Horn, Public School Publicity, New York: Inor Publishing Company, 1948.

Organization of the Study by Chapters

The study will be organized into four chapters.

Chapter I will be the introductory chapter, and it will describe the situation which gave rise to the problem and will include an account of the chapter organization. Also the procedures to be followed will be described, the sources of material and data listed, terms defined, the limits of the study set up, and the literature reviewed.

Chapter II is the first of two chapters on state-level organizations in Nebraska. This chapter will describe the development of the list of selected organizations and the questionnaire used in the study. Information about home offices, annual meetings, publications, memberships, and geographic distribution of members will be included.

Chapter III will be a continuation of the study of state organizations. Attention will be given to the educational provisions in the constitution and by-laws, educational topics discussed recently, and special programs and activities. An attempt will be made to analyze the degree of interest shown in public education and to show the relationship between the constitutional provisions and the program. The chapter will close with a consideration of ways and means of developing closer coordination between state organizations and state educational agencies.

The conclusions made from the study and the ensuing recommendations will make up Chapter IV.

Definitions

For the purposes of this study, the following definitions are adopted:

Public relations refers to those activities of the school by which the home, school, and community are kept mutually aware of the

needs, conditions, contributions, and purposes of each other as far as the education of children and youth is concerned. Arthur B. Moehlman, a leading writer in this area, uses the phrase "social interpretation" instead of "public relations" to describe such activities. Moehlman's concept of public relations is, in a sense, an evolutionary product with such special-interest philosophies as propaganda and publicity being earlier steps and therefore preliminary to it. One of the best characterizations of the new concept of public relations is found in the following statement by Leslie L. Chisholm:

The school people in every community should carry on a public relations program which will give the people in the community a down-to-earth, honest, straightforward understanding of (a) what American education at its best should and could be, (b) the nature of the educational program now being carried on in the community and the state, the good and bad features impartially presented, (c) what the problems are that stand in the way of better schools, and (d) how these problems may be solved.¹

"Social interpretation" is distinctly American in the same sense that locally controlled public education is the unique contribution of American democracy to the history of education. Those nations having centralized educational systems--and this is generally true outside the United States--do not have, in any comparable sense, the problem of building "mutual awareness" which is so important in public relations as the term is used in this study.

State-level public relations is a term used to embrace the public-school interpretative activities carried on by persons or agencies who directly or indirectly represent the entire state as opposed to similar activities on the local level which center in particular school districts

¹Leslie L. Chisholm, "The Challenge of Public Relations in Programs for Better Schools," California Journal of Secondary Education, January, 1949, p. 22.

within the state.

The phrase, partnership concept, describes the relationship between home and school in a democratic society, with the school living and working within the limits of the social pattern of the adult world. The home and state cooperate in the essential program of child training, and the people exercise control over public education.

A state educational agency is an agency having legal or professional status which operates at the state level and is concerned with the total program of public education in the state. In this study, the term is used to include departments of education, state education associations, and state universities.

The state educational authority is the constitutional or statutory agency which is responsible for the overall program of public education within the state. The expressions "Department of Education," "Department of Public Instruction," and "State Boards of Education" are used synonymously in referring to this authority.

The annual report is a formal accounting to the public of the activities of the state educational authority in carrying out its required functions. This report is made at two-year intervals in some states and, consequently, is called a biennial report.

A lay educational advisory commission is a representative group of citizens organized to act as a cooperating agency working with the state educational authority in the formulating of state educational plans.

The degree of interest is a term used to indicate the estimated relative degree of interest, activity, and influence shown by state organizations in the area of public education.

Group membership refers to an affiliation based on the membership

of organizations in a larger coordinating organization as opposed to an individual membership.

Delimiting the Study

This study will confine itself to a consideration of the educational public relations aspect of state-level organizations. Any reference to local or national levels will be in general terms and in relation to the common ground which exists between the three levels.

The public relations activities of the state educational agencies will be limited to a consideration of state organizations as intermediaries between the agencies and the electorate in the carrying out of the partnership concept of social interpretation.

Those organizations included in the study will be state-wide in scope and non-profit, non-sectarian, and non-fraternal in character. Such important service clubs as Kiwanis or Rotary will not be included because they are organized on district rather than state lines.

The recommendations resulting from the study will apply specifically to the State of Nebraska. However, it is to be expected that there will be some significant implications for all of the states.

Points of View from the Literature

There is unanimity of both lay and professional opinion that an educated electorate is the keystone of a democratic society. This point of view is expressed very pungently by Ward G. Reeder when he says that, "Education justifies itself in a democracy by preventing a tyranny of ignorance."¹

¹Ward G. Reeder, An Introduction to Public-School Relations, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1937, p. 1.

In a democracy, the scope and character of the educational program are determined by the people. As Robert S. Fisk points out, "Education arose out of the public mind, and its future advances will in large part derive from the same source."¹ It follows, therefore, that in our form of governmental organization the people must be kept informed. Reeder holds that, "All the people are the stockholders in the school enterprise and they have the same right to be kept informed concerning their investment as have stockholders in private business."² This author further states that, "In a democracy the people are sovereign, and their big desires are expressed through the ballot. Manifestly their ballots cannot be intelligently cast without adequate and accurate information."³

The necessity of more adequate information is becoming more and more significant, Reeder believes, because, "During recent years, changes in the purposes, the procedures, the size, and the cost of the school have unquestionably outstripped the people's knowledge of the school."⁴

From a somewhat different viewpoint, J. Harry Adams points out that, "The trends of school growth, diversity of school population, and increasing urbanization which have occurred during the past few decades have moved the educator and his public ever increasing distances apart."⁵

¹Robert S. Fisk, Public Understanding of What Good Schools Can Do, New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1944, p. 69.

²Reeder, op. cit., p. 4.

³Ibid., p. 5.

⁴Ibid., p. 7.

⁵J. Harry Adams, "Keeping Faith With the People," The Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary-School Principals, Volume 32, February, 1948, p. 36.

Out of the circumstances of our present cold war with Communism, Belmont Farley finds a patriotic motive for stepping up the tempo of educational public relations:

A compelling and immediate circumstance of great significance demands public reappraisal of the school. We are engaged in a war of ideology The American way cannot be saved except through an intelligent home defense of a vigorously American citizenship for which the basis is laid in the public schools. There is, therefore, every reason why the American people should know their schools, and contribute more generously to their financial support.¹

A Committee of the National Council of Chief State School Officers (Roger M. Thompson of Connecticut, Chairman) states that, "The educational public relations program should employ appropriate media and channels to reach all groups of the public. Its contents should be accurate, unbiased, continuing, comprehensive, dynamic, timely, and understandable by all groups of citizens."² Reeder further defines the phrase "all groups" by saying that:

The groups to be reached are the schoolboard members, school employees, pupils, parents, and that large and motley group usually called the 'general public.' Represented in these various groups are innumerable vocations from common labor to the learned professions; likewise, various intelligence levels, from idiocy to genius, are represented; similarly the various levels of schooling from zero to postgraduate courses in universities are found.³

The same author underlines the characteristic of being "continuing" by insisting that, "A program of public-school relations is therefore necessary at all times. It is necessary when the 'goose hangs high' as well

¹Belmont Farley, Director, Press and Public Relations, National Education Association, Washington, D. C., (Foreword) Horn, op. cit., p. vi.

²Responsibility of State Educational Authorities for Improving Educational Public Relations, (Tentative report issued in mimeographed form, October 9, 1947, by a committee headed by Roger McThompson of Connecticut, and including T. J. Berning, Minnesota, G. B. Nordrum, North Dakota, and R. Lee Thomas, Tennessee), p. 3.

³Reeder, op. cit., p. 8.

as when 'it hangs low.'¹

Because of the "motley" character of the general public, it is important that information about schools should be so presented as to be read and understood by the maximum number of citizens. Reeder is of the opinion that, "Information which is not humanized is like so much 'water on a duck's back,' and unfortunately, much information about the schools is of that character."² With this idea in mind, Farley specifically indicts the annual reports of state departments of education.

In the 1830's and 1840's Horace Mann set a high mark of excellence for the annual report of a state school system. The history of practice during the three-quarters of a century that followed his time does not make a bright picture. The state laws making such reports obligatory were more honored in the breach than in the observance.

For many years reports were archival in nature, a characteristic that was accentuated first by the legal necessity of reporting school finances and later by the expanding activities of bureaus and research. They served a useful purpose in making a permanent record of facts and figures needed for future reference but were in little demand as reading material by the public.³

Arthur B. Moehlman agrees that, "It (the annual report) generally has much of the mustiness and literary deadliness that tradition and bureaucratic personnel have built into it."⁴ However, he believes that the report could be modernized in such a way as to become much more

¹Reeder, op. cit., p. 5.

²Ibid., p. 11.

³Belmont Farley, School Publicity, Stanford University, California: Stanford University Press, 1934, p. 4.

⁴Arthur B. Moehlman, Social Interpretation, New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1938, p. 275.

effective as an interpretative agency. "Much of the archival statistics should be either boiled down to reasonableness or prepared in separate form in a limited number of volumes for the state record."¹ Moehlman further suggests the writing of a summarized introduction containing the "significant high and low spots in the educational plan" which would appeal to the general popular interest and which could be printed separately for wide circulation.

Again, reference is made to Reeder for a statement which includes the concept of different levels in the area of public relations: "Its (public relations) scope is local, state, or national depending upon the prevailing administrative organization of the schools."²

Because this study is to be confined to public relations at the state level, the contributions of Fisk and Moehlman seem to be significant in considering the need for state-wide understanding and the responsibilities of the state educational agencies in developing that understanding.

But as long as education is considered to be a state function and a state obligation, there will be need for state-wide intelligence regarding educational progress.

Inherently, the state legislature and the state department of education have great powers over education, but as representatives of the people of all the state, their powers are what the people choose to have them assume. In other words, they cannot be thought of as beyond the control of the citizen of the state or as gods in a far-off place. Rather they must be considered as instruments of the people, and there must be inculcated in the people that interest which will bolster their demands for maximum educational progress in whatever manner the state can be of help.³

¹Moehlman, op. cit., p. 275.

²Reeder, op. cit., p. 1.

³Fisk, op. cit., p. 26.

Similar views are held by Moehlman as is shown by the following series of specific quotations:

The exercise of state authority has for its general purpose the maintenance and improvement of the total educational activity.

The theory underlying state educational organization is that this central authority is responsible for the leadership in the discovery, promulgation, and discussion of educational problems both to the teaching profession and to the people of the state.

The state educational authority has . . . the moral obligation to make additional reporting to the people themselves to increase understanding and appreciation of need.

The state educational authority in cooperating with other state planning agencies is responsible for the development of longtime plans for improvement and enlargement of the educational function. Popular education to establish a general understanding of the need for these periodic changes and extension in the legal structure is a primary state interpretative obligation.

These projections into the future evolve from interpretation of changing social needs and current institutional levels of functioning.¹

David D. Henry points out that state educational agencies must be as concerned with reliable interpretation as with research if a general understanding is to be developed.

The first need in any public relations program is for complete, reliable, and up-to-date information from an objective, legally established agency.

There must be reliable interpretation of the facts gathered. Understanding and appreciation of the meaning of statistical information are as important as the original research which produced the basic data.²

Not only is it necessary that the people in our democracy be informed but it also follows that they must have an "opportunity to

¹Moehlman, op. cit., pp. 262-4.

²David D. Henry, "The State Department As an Agent in Educational Public Relations," Education, Volume 55, February, 1935, p. 331.

participate in defining the purposes, formulating the policies, and in evaluating and improving the program of public education."¹ In order to get beyond the paying of lip service to this concept, Moehlman believes that specific machinery should be set up to make it possible for the public to participate in educational planning.

The organization of a lay educational advisory commission composed of representatives of the various interests within the state has strong possibilities as a cooperating agency in the formation of legislative plans. It represents also the partnership concept of the people carried into the state educational plan, furnishes means whereby the state can secure a typical cross-section of popular opinion, and offers ample opportunity for the education of the lay members to educational need.²

There is an ever-growing appreciation of the place of the public as a partner and of the need of having the public serve as an active partner. Fisk states that:

What the public wants and expects, however, will always be the major factor in what it gets, at least as long as we live in a democratic society. The schools of this country today are not appreciably beyond or behind what their communities have sought.³

John M. Hickey concurs in this opinion and believes that:

There must be strong, positive approaches to uniting the people and their schools . . . or the people will be absent and off with some other institution which calls for support and encouragement. The laymen must be truly partners with those inside the educational profession on a common task to make education ever more effective in the United States.⁴

¹Responsibility of State Educational Authorities in Improving Educational Public Relations, op. cit., p. 1.

²Moehlman, op. cit., p. 17.

³Fisk, op. cit., p. 2.

⁴John M. Hickey, "Organizing Effective Public Relations," The Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary-School Principals, Volume 32, February, 1948, p. 59.