

HOW VALUABLE ARE BUSINESS-SPONSORED MATERIALS FOR SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES, AND FOR ADULT EDUCATION GROUPS?

A symposium of four articles addressed to this question. The authorship is shown at the beginning of each presentation.

First Speaker: Edna P. Amidon, Director, Home Economics Education Branch, Office of Education, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Washington, D. C.

How valuable are business-sponsored consumer materials for schools and colleges, and for adult education groups? It all depends. And it depends on many things--the first of which is pretty obvious, and it is basic, i.e., educational goals.

Educational Goals

To be valuable all "materials used for educational purposes should contribute toward commonly accepted educational goals." This is one of four basic assumptions stated by Mrs. Augusta Franchs, homemaking teacher in Trinidad, Colorado, in a study¹ she is making as a part of her work toward a master's degree at Colorado State University. I will draw later on material from her study because it shows the concern of many teachers about the materials we are discussing this morning.

What are some of the educational goals business-sponsored materials can help teachers and students attain?

In partial answer to this question I have selected some general education behavioral outcomes for high school students from a study recently completed by Will French and others.² The first group has to do with the goal--To become sensitive to, and competent in, the use of logical thinking and problem-solving processes.

He (the student) "Seeks pertinent information and organizes and evaluates data." In doing this he:

"Seeks facts, collects and evaluates information, and gathers evidence on all sides of problems which he must solve.*"

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1. "Use of Commercial Teaching Materials," by Augusta Franchs
 2. French, Will, and Associates, Behavioral Goals of General Education in High School. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1957, p. 101. The Survey Study of Behavioral Outcomes of General Education in High School was organized to describe for educators, curriculum planners, testmakers, and interested citizens the objectives of general education in American secondary schools. The report represents the work of a committee of consultants, a committee of advisers, and a committee of reviewers directed by representatives of six national educational agencies. This report is not a prescription for what any high school should teach or accomplish. It is simply an organized consensus of the expectations that citizens and educators hold for the American high school.

* The asterisk identified those outcomes which were evaluated by 90% of the reviewers as of "high" importance. Statements not so identified were indicated as of "high" or of "some" importance by 75% of the reviewers.

"Shows skill in collecting data from a variety of sources and in organizing those needed to solve his problems.*"

"Evaluates evidence or authority. Recognizes stereotypes and cliches.*"

"Recognizes bias and emotional factors in a presentation and in his own thinking."

He also "Recognizes logical and illogical thinking in his efforts to reach reasonable conclusions." To do this he:

"Recognizes the unsoundness of drawing generalizations from insufficient evidence.*"

.....

"Recognizes that both defensible and indefensible techniques are used in attempts to influence thought and behavior: propaganda, rumors, stereotypes, emotional appeals, etc.*"

"Recognizes that accuracy and integrity are essential to critical thinking, and holds himself to the highest standards in both respects."

The second group of behavioral outcomes³ which I have selected are illustrative of some of the expectations home economics teachers have for their students.

He (the student) "Recognizes importance of considering quality, price, and actual need when buying, and knows how to get reliable information." He:

"Knows where to obtain accurate information about the products he wishes to buy and is persistent and skillful in using this information when making many of his purchases."

"Makes intelligent and discriminating use of advertisements in selecting consumer products."

"Consults labels, makes use of brand names, and reads what standardizing agencies say about competing goods before making important purchases."

To be more specific, students are helped through home economics teaching to select and take proper care of equipment, fabrics, clothing, food, and other products used in the home. Behavioral outcomes of such teaching include, for the student:

"Uses proper methods of laundering, dry cleaning, and ironing garments made of different kinds of material."

* The asterisk identifies those outcomes which were evaluated by 90% of the reviewers as of "high" importance. Statements not so identified were indicated as of "high" or of "some" importance by 75% of the reviewers.

3. Ibid. p. 128, 129.

"Finds out what is known about the merits of various kinds of soaps, detergents, lubricants, abrasives, etc. for cleaning and protecting household goods and equipment.

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"Employs (if a girl) the proper methods of preparing foods to preserve nutritional value and to avoid shrinkage and other forms of waste.

"Uses proper methods of refrigeration and food storage to eliminate food spoilage. *

.....

"Knows the significance of government grading of meats, dairy products, and other foods; and buys with reference to grading."

In helping students grow toward these outcomes teachers provide many types of experiences in finding facts, determining their authenticity, distinguishing between facts and opinion, recognizing bias and emotional factors in their presentation.

This requires opportunities for students to use and evaluate numerous sources of information. To grow in some of the understandings and appreciations suggested by this list students need to know the "why" back of performance, to see and feel the beauty in man-made products as well as in nature, to look at the workmanship and design of products, to get a "feel" for it as well as to analyze the elements in it that make for a high quality of workmanship and design. As a basis for learning what are "proper methods" students need facts about specific processes and products. Furthermore, to achieve the purposes suggested the students need opportunities to experiment with products determining their usefulness under different conditions. Business concerns are in a position to produce some of the materials required by teachers in producing such opportunities as these.

Some written materials, of course, can be used and are used by discriminating teachers to illustrate "unsoundness of drawing generalizations from insufficient evidence" and "attempts to influence thought and behavior by propaganda, rumors, stereotypes, emotional appeals, etc." However, it would not seem necessary to prepare materials especially for schools to achieve this outcome, since they are so widely available in all media of advertising.

This is a mere sketch of some educational goals and some kinds of experiences for students, which in turn call for many kinds of teaching materials.

Reasons Given by Teachers for Their Use of Business-Sponsored Teaching Aids

In the master's study referred to earlier, a questionnaire is being sent to homemaking teachers throughout the State of Colorado. In one part of it the teacher is asked to check her reasons for using commercially-sponsored teaching materials:

- A. There are insufficient funds available for other teaching aids.
- B. They reduce the amount of preparation.
- C. They are more up-to-date than the textbooks.

___ D. They are interesting and attractive.

___ E. They provide a more thorough coverage of certain topics.

Teachers are asked also to state other reasons. The check list was made up from reasons supplied by a sampling of teachers preliminary to developing the questionnaire.

In an unpublished study of the effectiveness of business-sponsored teaching aids carried on by one producer of teaching aids, the following kinds of comments quite generally made further suggest the reasons teachers have for using them.

"They give new and up-to-date information not always available otherwise.

"Students learn better through the use of visual aids.

"With so many technological advances, materials from companies as to description and use of product is necessary to intelligent use of them.

"We operate on a rather limited budget and I appreciate very much the material.

"Research articles. keep me up-to-date."

These all seem justifiable reasons. It will be interesting to see which of the reasons are checked most often by Colorado teachers. These reasons also suggest some criteria to consider in their preparation. Some companies prepare their materials with these needs of teachers in mind. Many still do not follow such criteria.

Selection and Use

Two other assumptions which Mrs. Franchs states in her study pertain to the selection of teaching materials:

--Practices in the selection and use of supplementary educational materials should be ethical and intelligent.

--The responsibility for the acceptance or rejection of commercial materials lies largely with the teacher.

Mrs. Franchs describes what the teacher is up against in the following paragraph:

"Commercial companies are bombarding homemaking departments with free or inexpensive teaching materials designed for the dual purpose of facilitating instruction and influencing students to buy products or accept ideas or services offered for sale. Some of this material reaches the departments through no effort of the teachers, some is provided through an easy-to-use coupon service provided by the professional magazines, and some is furnished from other sources."

This brings us to a very important part of "it all depends", namely, the kind of evaluation the teacher is equipped to make. A number of factors enter

in here: Her own educational background, including her preparation as a teacher, and her teaching load, are two of the most important.

In a leaflet prepared by the Home Economics Education Branch of the Office of Education⁴ the following questions were emphasized as valuable for the teacher to ask in evaluating business-sponsored teaching materials:

Will it help pupils to think, to evaluate, and to develop judgment--or does it suggest only memorization of facts?

Is sufficient material on the topic already available in books and illustrative material in the department?

Will this material make learning easier? More interesting?

We also pointed out that:

"Only a discriminating teacher can turn materials designed primarily for advertising a product into 'teaching aids.' Used with imagination and resourcefulness, such materials can make homemaking classes more interesting and more effective. Using them indiscriminately, however, wastes valuable class time, and may contribute little or nothing to the over-all goals of the homemaking program."

However, it takes time for the careful study necessary to be a "discriminating teacher" and there should be some way to reduce the amount of material that reaches a teacher's desk. Mrs. Franch, in her study, directs these questions to the teachers of the state:

"Is there any planned effort within your school to evaluate commercial materials? If so, who does the evaluating?"

1. Teacher
2. Superintendent and administrator
3. Cooperatively with teacher and administrators
4. Other agencies. Please List.....

I hope she will uncover some cooperative and successful ways individual schools are working to help out with this task.

To help in the evaluation Mrs. Franch has drawn up a series of questions to serve as criteria. With her permission I am including them here. I have organized them around three areas: (1) Accuracy, (2) relation to advertising, and (3) relation to standard and emphasis. These are her questions:

1. In relation to accuracy--

- a. "Does the material distinguish among facts, assumptions, and opinions?"
- b. "Does the material avoid making boastful or exaggerated claims?"

 4. More Effective Use of Business-Sponsored Home Economics Teaching Aids, Office of Education Misc. 3485; Washington, D. C.: U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. June, 1955. 4pp.

- c. "Does the material stress more than one side of a question which obviously has more than one point of view?"
- d. "Is the subject matter information valid?"
- e. "Does the argument appeal to the rational rather than the irrational?"
- f. "Does the material cite a specific competent authority rather than a vague or incompetent authority?"

2. In relation to advertising--

- a. "Does the material avoid any effort to establish the exclusiveness of a particular product or service?"
- b. "Does the material avoid direct promotion of sales?"
- c. "Is the advertising subordinate to the educational content?"

3. In relation to standard--

- a. "Does the material refrain from setting up an artificial standard or level?"

One other question seems important to me: Would using this aid give an undue amount of emphasis to a topic, in relation to the needs of the class?

Summary

In today's schools teachers are being challenged as never before to provide programs in which:

--Students learn to think clearly

--Students learn where to find valid information

--The education is built around the basic needs of students as individuals and as participating and responsible citizens in our democratic society.

--Students acquire information and develop understandings, attitudes, appreciations, and abilities necessary in meeting the important problems of living in today's world.

This calls for the kind of teaching that takes continuous preparation. If business or commercial concerns can contribute materials that help schools provide such programs, they are doing an important job. Otherwise they are wasting their money, wasting teachers' time, and cluttering up storage closets--or worse still, making out of the school a propaganda channel instead of an educational institution.

Briefly, then, any teaching materials are valuable to the extent that they:

1. Help students in achieving basic educational goals.
2. Supplement other types of materials available for school use.

3. Are selected by a discriminating teacher (with time in her schedule for careful preparation for teaching) so that all materials used are in reference to the outcomes toward which she is helping the students grow, and used in ways to enhance the learning.

The leaflet ⁵ prepared by the Home Economics Education Branch of the Office of Education with the aid of home economists in business and in education, which contains characteristics of good teaching materials, suggestions for preparing them, and a list of some areas where there is a need for such materials, has been found useful by many business concerns. There are evidences that more good materials are being made available each year. But there is still too much that is produced for "educational purposes" that detracts rather than adds to the teaching job.

Second Speaker: Richard L. D. Morse, Professor and Head, Department of Family Economics, Kansas State College, Manhattan, Kansas

No materials are of value in the classroom unless they meet the needs of the teacher-student enterprise toward achieving a better understanding and appreciation for the subject or topic. As I shall indicate some materials are well suited for classroom use while others are so narrow in their approach and coverage they have only very specialized use and so biased as to make a negative contribution. Blanket approval or disapproval of the use of such materials would be in error.

Ideally the teacher should be qualified to evaluate the net contribution of such materials. In some cases administrators, fearful of improper judgment or of repercussions of complaints from neglected economic interests, have circumscribed the freedom of teachers to exercise choice. And sometimes objective rules are needed to protect the teacher and the school system from local commercial pressures to use inferior materials.

Many of the commercially-sponsored materials are so much more attractive than other teaching aids available to the teacher that there is temptation to use them even though they have dubious educational values. One school system I know of has a very restrictive policy regarding the use of commercial materials. They have, however, a school library of over 10,000 volumes, supplementary books available to classrooms of over 6,000 volumes, a film library of 130 16-mm. films, 300 film strips and many slides, catalogued and annotated by subject and by grade. Unfortunately most schools do not have such resources. A restrictive policy for a school system that does not provide adequate aids may be denying the teacher and students some very valuable materials.

Too frequently the classification of business-sponsored materials brings to mind brand-name promotionals. These are obviously "objectionable." Others, however, may be more subtle in their approach and more difficult to evaluate. I have classified my comments under 3 F's: Forms of commercially sponsored materials; From what sources; and For what purposes.

The forms are quite varied, ranging from visuals, such as films, film strips, posters, maps, to leaflets, pamphlets, reprints of research and scientific papers. We are not concerned with the effectiveness of the various kinds of materials, but this illustrates the variety of forms available.

5. Cited in footnote No. 4.

From whom are they available? In general from either individual firms or from industry groups. Usually, materials produced by an industry are likely to have a broader approach for they cannot afford to play up the product or service of one member of the industry without offending another. Some retain educators to establish criteria and evaluate materials for classroom use.

For what purpose? It would be naive to assume that the materials are not intended to increase the profits of the sponsors. But profits are not ugly, and efforts to create consumer situations which enhance profits may also enhance the consumers' welfare.

Profits may be increased by reducing costs. Specifically, two companies that have consistently over many years taken a long-range view are Metropolitan Life Insurance Company and Household Finance Corporation. If Metropolitan can improve the health of policyholders, death losses are reduced, and if HFC can help families to improve in their money management, credit losses are reduced. Both, have an established approach which commands respect.

Profits may also be enhanced by increased sales. This effort may coincide with the teacher's interest, or it may not. Here I should like to set forth three levels of appeals to sales promotion:

First, is that of "demand creation"--that of creating a want, or developing more intense appreciation for a better understanding of the satisfactions to be derived from different modes of consumption. For example, I clearly recall the posters a steamship company provided my high school German teacher depicting scenes that made me as a student want to travel and see the country whose native tongue I was studying. They were commercially sponsored materials of tremendous educational value. I think if I were teaching nutrition many of the milk and citrus materials would help me to impress upon the students the value of these essentials for good nutrition, but I would resist soft-drink and liquor sponsored materials. The question here is whether the "demand-creation" aspect of the materials contributes to the school's educational program.

A second stage or level of directing consumption is to demonstrate the effectiveness of selected means for accomplishing the desired ends. For example, the public may be unaware of the attributes of new products or services, such as plastics, synthetic fibers, transportation methods, frozen and dried processes, packaging, etc. Commercial and industrial interests are best informed and able to tell their story of these innovations. If these are "good" the consumer educator can help to reduce the time-lag between invention and adoption. Some products or services which are "commonly-known" are often not fully understood. For example, the attributes of wool and cotton may tend to be "forgotten" with the enthusiasm for "new" products, or the effectiveness of gas and electricity for heating or cooking needs to be told. Facts about the effectiveness of new and old products should be made known. The questions for the teacher here are: (1) Are the facts correct? (2) Are they presented so the students will be misled? Electricity is economical, but so is gas. How can the teacher use commercially sponsored materials published by one industry without prejudicing the students against the products of other industries? Classroom time is limited; the aids are often not of comparable effectiveness. How can the teacher preserve a proper balance?

A third stage involves actual product identification, usually by brand names. For example, if the teacher wished to stimulate students to the need for improved nutrition, and specifically the importance of Vitamin C in the

dietary, or more specifically the efficiency of orange juice in supplying Vitamin C, she may find that film supplied by X Brand does all this very well. But the brand name also suggests that it is the brand to select, when in fact other brands may be equally effective. Should she use the film? This problem arises frequently. In some cases the materials merely credit the name of the sponsor, which certainly is justifiable while others flagrantly display the brand. Here the question the teacher faces is whether the effort required to offset the advertising features warrants use of the materials for their good features.

Many forms of "good will" advertising may be valuable or at least innocuous especially if the materials are unrelated to the specific product of the sponsor. An excellent example are the bird cards which Arm and Hammer brand of baking soda so generously provided for nature study. In modern marketing terminology such forms of advertising are intended to create a favorable product or firm image in the minds of consumers. The better the educational job done, the more valuable the aids and the greater the reward to the sponsor. Everyone wins in these situations.

In closing I want to emphasize the consistent bias in commercial materials. They invariably involve persuasion to meet the needs of people in ways which involve spending of money. There are other means of relaxation than by drinking soft drinks, for example. A clean mouth is desirable but need not involve the purchase of antiseptic mouthwashes, as the commercially-sponsored materials imply. The American Dental Association suggests rinses with salt and water. The teacher must "stand against the winds" of commercialized education. Millions of dollars are spent in advertising to "educate" the public how to meet needs in ways which involve the spending of money for the products of industry. If the students are to achieve a balance of information, the teacher should err in the direction of using materials that emphasize non-commercial means of meeting human needs. On the other hand, stalwart refusal to use many of the excellent commercially-sponsored materials which industry has made available to the classroom teacher would deny teachers and students from making maximum use of the resources available.

Third Speaker: Wilmoth C. Price, Registrar
Evangel College, Springfield, Missouri

A very important objective in the education of the consumer is familiarity with different sources of information and the development of skills in using them most effectively. That is what our subject deals with today.

I think we, as consumers, should appreciate the efforts of businessmen to prepare consumer materials. There has been a trend in recent years, I believe, for business to make a greater effort to find out what the consumer wants and needs--what he prefers--what he would like in a new automobile and what he would not like. We should not always take a negative approach saying "this is bad" or "that is not good." We can do something toward building up better products and services by recognition of the good work of those who really make a contribution to improved consumer welfare.

Nevertheless, we have a right to be critical--to constructively criticize these materials business and industry has provided for use in consumer education. Here's why:

1. We help to pay for them. They are added to the cost of doing business the same as many other things. Businessmen would not voluntarily produce these

things if they did not feel the activity would make a contribution to the profits of the firm either directly or indirectly.

2. The classroom teacher is the best authority on what is suitable for meeting educational objectives.

3. We and our students are the ones who will suffer if the information is not accurate and we accept it and act upon it; and we are the ones who will benefit if the reverse is true. So, we have a right to evaluate things carefully and critically in the light of our personal reactions and past experiences, even if it comes from the most impartial and unbiased sources.

There are several reasons why we should not overlook these sources of consumer education materials:

1. It makes the problem similar to that which the individual must face in his everyday experiences. If you took out advertising and all consumer materials that show in the least way the influence of anyone who has "an axe to grind," it would certainly be an artificial type of problem--not one which is true to life. The value of logical thinking and critical evaluation of what one reads and hears--these things should be habitual with the educated person. The examination and evaluation of commercial consumer materials can furnish some fine experiences in that type of mental activity. Students could profitably be assigned a task of writing a critique on some of these materials from the standpoint of their value to the individual consumer.

2. We often deplore the fact that our consumer organizations and independent testing agencies do not have enough financial support to maintain testing bureaus and other facilities so that we may obtain for ourselves or our groups more scientific test results on products. The businessman, in numerous instances, has funds which he is willing to use for that purpose--on a regular and systematic basis. He will hire full-time employees, etc. (We will pay for it indirectly but he will provide it.) He spends a great deal of money on his product research, market research, and his consumer service department. Why should not we, as consumers, get as much benefit from that as anyone by encouraging the businessman to use those facilities more for our purposes?

3. These materials may contain valuable consumer aids which are not generally available elsewhere. This is reasonable to assume since the businessman is a technical expert in regard to his product. He is the best authority on a lot of factual information about his product. Of course he must use a certain amount of discretion in the dissemination of that material, considering trade secrets and other things. We find that all products have some weaknesses or there are ways in which another product is superior or newer, etc. Good selling practices would not emphasize the weaknesses of our product in telling about it but to tell about the weaknesses of other similar products. We all have skeletons in the closet but we don't have to bring them out and put them into a parade.

4. We need to reflect different points of view in our educational materials but not too much emphasis on any one of them. What if the businessman does have a dual purpose in providing these materials? Do not other agencies have dual purposes as well? Consider certain agencies of the Federal Government, for example. They provide some excellent services to the consumer--but these departments were created to protect businessmen from

unfair methods of competition from other businessmen, or unfair advertising, or to assist the Federal government in its purchasing. Indirectly the businessman wants to promote the sale of his goods or create goodwill or make better employees by giving them more financial security or basic economic information.

Is the producer normally qualified to give an objective, unbiased report from the point of view of the consumer? In general, I would say, "No." He is too close to the forest to see the trees. He is too much tied up with the welfare of the product---he eats and sleeps with it---lives with it twenty-four hours a day. He is economically, emotionally and socially involved with his product. He's got to be biased and prejudiced. As a good businessman, that is to be expected. But we can discount that bias a little bit and still make valuable use of the scientific facts he may be able to give us.

Materials must be modified. Anyone who has taught very much will know that materials must be modified to some extent. Certain things are used to a greater or lesser degree, according to the way each individual teaches, and according to the needs, interests and maturity levels of students. Adult groups can oftentimes find their own way of examining and evaluating materials and products.

I believe in drawing from all types of materials which are available. However, when possible, I prefer to use those which give a most adequate treatment of the subject and cover several points of view. I think it is in keeping with our ideals of Democracy. The individual is entitled to receive the facts and then be permitted to make up his own mind--which type he wants or what action to take. We don't like the attempts to put words into the consumer's mouth--telling him what he wants and why he wants it. Consumers are the ones who should logically be preparing these materials--they should rightfully be prepared from their standpoint.

Fourth Speaker: Florine M. Vatter, Supervisor of Home Economics,
Cincinnati Public Schools, Cincinnati, Ohio

In the absence of a manuscript I have summarized some of the ideas that I brought out in my talk.

Some of the values of business-sponsored teaching materials:

1. Much of the business-sponsored materials made available to the schools provide excellent teaching material which is not available from any other source.
2. These materials are a great help in keeping information current, particularly as it applies in fields of interest to the homemaker.
3. The teachers and pupils appreciate having good materials which help in making instruction more interesting, meaningful, and stimulating.
4. These materials provide opportunities for learning about new products and making comparison of the values of different products so essential for effective homemaking today.

5. Business-sponsored teaching materials bring the community into the schools, encouraging teachers and pupils to do active research which may contribute to improvement in homemaking practices.

Some of the limitations of these materials:

1. Materials often carry too much advertising which rules out their use in the classroom.
2. The language used is often beyond the comprehension of the reader and may even be too technical even for teachers, thus limiting the practical value.
3. Too much money is often invested in elaborate illustrations which add nothing to their educational value.
4. The information may be inadequate or slanted toward special emphasis on a specific brand or product.
5. Frequently, these materials are prepared without knowledge of the needs of the pupils, teachers, or homemakers and without the benefit of counsel of persons trained in education or experienced in homemaking.

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