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December 5, 1966

To: Mr. Ross A Wagner

From: Katherine Blunt

Re: Flexible Scheduling Materials

Mr. Taras has asked me to answer Dr. Smith's December 1 communication to you regarding materials used in Flexible Scheduling. Although this answer should come to you from the Team Leader, I think, I am undertaking it because the speakers mentioned in Dr. Smith's note were our guests during the 1965/66 school year.

It is difficult to be as precise as I would like to be about the "no God" issue since I do not have, nor have I seen the particular materials that provoked the questions and criticisms. Hence I am working somewhat in the dark and at fourth remove. Indeed, the first reaction of the entire team and of the librarians at the first report on this matter that Mr. Taras gave us a week or two ago was that we have the opportunity to talk directly with the individuals after they have had the opportunity to present in writing their specific objections to the contents of the readings or lectures, both of which are available to them, in accordance with recognized and recommended procedures of the American Library Association and the National Council of Teachers of English. These procedures have worked successfully elsewhere and we recommend them to the Board to adopt as part of their book policy.

Certainly, however, the Superintendent of Schools should know what is being taught and why. What follows, therefore, is an explanation to Dr. Smith. It is not a defense because we are convinced that the materials and speakers were appropriate choices in the light of our approved goals and objectives.

Dr. Smith's own opinion that the "...extreme position has had the greatest emphasis. For instance, there appears to be plenty of material on the position that there is no God, but I don't see the other side of the position stated in any positive terms..." puzzles me. I'm not sure whether he refers to last year or this year but let me begin with last year.

As you know, our goals included a humanistic approach to the curriculum. As such, our study centered on man at particular times in his history and with constant relevance to the present, and in different relationships with his society and institutions. We hoped each student would identify with man. I think you could sum up our view as the hope that each student would take seriously Socrates' assertion that the unexamined life is not worth living. We wanted students to be aware that there are always several points of view, to get in the habit of suspending judgment about divergent views, and to be willing to give other views a hearing before committing themselves. I do not know that we hoped to be able to present more than one view or all views on every subject because this would not always be possible or practical, but we aimed at a variety of views in the long run. Student laments that we would not tell them "the answer" suggests our success. The concept of "frame of reference" that Mr. Taras ably presented last year from the materials on Methods of Inquiry in History

Mr. Cavanary, art teacher, and the EBF films on Chartres Cathedral presented the Gothic church as an engineering marvel that achieved in its handling of space and light the sense of mystery of God and the spiritual striving of man. At the same time, students read Chaucer's detached, objective comments on good and corrupt men in society as a whole, including the Church. We regretted that that Duns Scotus declined Mr. Taras's invitation to sing at Xmas.

As the attention of man shifted in the Renaissance from God to himself, yet students found that much of the art and music was sacred, that secular art and architecture emerged from sacred art. At the end of the study of the Renaissance, Mr. Cameron presented lectures on the Protestant Reformation and Martin Luther and clarified the major ideas of Calvin and Calvinism. He also presented both the Tawney (RELIGION AND THE RISE OF CAPITALISM), and the Weber thesis that modern capitalism is unique in its ethos which he defines as a ^{weber} sense of obligation in money-making. He traces this sense of obligation back to Luther's concept of "calling" and Calvin's idea of the general good of the many. Mr. Cameron presented each as controversial views and indicated negative arguments.

In the close study of Descartes' "Discourse on Method" which Dr. Potter recommended students make before her lecture, students thought through with Descartes his arguments to prove the existence of God.

The commitment of more than half the seniors to economics or sociology the second semester of last year and the decision to attempt to satisfy their choices took away from the team the freedom and control it had over the curriculum the first semester. We were suddenly confronted by the need to organize our curriculum around the sociological and economic theory and practice in modern times, primarily in the 20th century. Thus the lectures and materials (books, graphic and audio art, tapes and films) focused on man's relation to modern economic and social forces. Students saw society from many angles -- as a force for good and evil; as a structure which man creates, adjusts to, is crushed by, or rebels from; as material, mechanical, and impersonal. They began to see the impact of modern society on values, patterns of work and play, and on man, whether he be conformist or the opposite, passive or aggressive, non-hero and alienated or committed and idealistic.

The reading requirement from March to June was six books from a list of about 200 titles that you have (history, economics, political science, sociology, philosophy, social science, drama, poetry, fiction, etc.) Students made their individual choices of reading and received credit by attending seminars (a pretest determined whether they had read the book), writing papers, and testing. Students read these books in many ways, but particularly as comments on modern society--that is, society since Darwin, Freud, ~~two~~ world wars, the technological explosion.

The Time article provided students/ with background for much of the questioning anxiety of modern man so frequently expressed in the literature.

On the other hand, students also saw (and wrote a theme interpreting) the PARABLE, a short film in color which has been shown in many churches and which students generally interpreted as symbolic of Christ or the

Good Samaritan alive and effective in the world today.

On one controversial subject, Communism, in addition to the study of Chinese communism and of Marx's Communist Manifesto of the classroom teachers, Dr. Hucker, and the film THE FACE OF RED CHINA, we had the Communist speaker, Mr. Lakos, at the request of the Administration. Mr. Lakos, the exchange teacher from Yugoslavia, received my letter requesting that he lecture in response to certain questions we raised about Communism. He disregarded the letter and talked about education. Students asked him the same questions the letter raised. But this representative of one type of dictatorship and Communism evaded every question put to him about Communism with the nimble deftness of a boxer. It was not difficult to see the conclusions students were drawing--not flattering to Communism--and all were aware that he was talking from a frame of reference that was not theirs. Another speaker on Communist Russia, an American lecturer named John D. Shiraef, II, addressed all Seaholm students through the social studies classes; he clarified some of the ways in which Russia is taking up capitalistic practices.

On another controversial subject--labor-management relations--we did not have lecturers from outside on both points of view, unfortunately. We had only management's side represented. After I had spent two futile and frustrating week-ends on the telephone trying to reach Malcolm Lovell, former Board member, and to try to secure representative speakers from both sides, I heard from my brother-in-law, W.W. Blunt that he would be visiting from New York. He had just retired as vice-president of National Distillers and Chemicals Corporation. Before becoming vice-president in charge of production and before appointment of a labor negotiations director, he had handled the first labor negotiations for the corporation for several years. He agreed to speak, prepared a talk--one on management's view of labor relations and the second, after lunch, on procedures in labor negotiations. The outline of the second talk is attached. Don Cameron, at another time, undertook to present a fair view of labor's side in a mock press interview in which he played the role of Mike Quill.

As for the three clergymen who spoke, Mr. Marshall, Rabbi Wine, and Pastor Stine, we did not invite them because of the church^s they each represented or because they were liberal or conservative, but for quite different reasons. For instance, the correspondence with Mr. Marshall, attached here, and the outline he sent in advance of his lecture, indicate our reasons for inviting him--he appeared to be a person who represented the idea of personal involvement and commitment in a current issue, and at the same time to be a person who commanded a knowledge of history, especially of Greece to set the stage for students to see the importance of past to present, and to see themselves as central and responsible human beings in both. Before inviting Mr. Marshall, however, I sought the advice of Peter and Kathryn Loomis whose judgment I respect. Both recommended him particularly for his scholarly command of Greek history and philosophy. Kathryn Loomis introduced him at my request. As it turned out, Mr. Marshall devoted most of his lecture to a masterly and sweeping survey of the history of Western man's ideas from the beginning to the present. He made disappointingly brief reference to his own commitment to the Civil Rights movement, dramatized in his joining the march to Selma. In short, Mr. Marshall gave a brilliant history lecture which made the point that an understanding of the history of man and his ideas is relevant to understanding how we got to where we are today and is a necessary prelude to present action.

present action.

We invited Rabbi Wine because one of our Flex students had asked us to do so from September on. This was Bill Mirbach who, if you recall, was having problems; his father spent much time with you and Mrs. Schlain, I believe, and suggested that you be a pal to the boy and take him to a baseball game. As much in hope of directing Bill's attention and energies to more constructive ends than for any other reason, we did invite Rabbi Wine. Again, however, before telephoning him, I asked the opinion of several counselors who had heard him speak or for whose sociology classes he had spoken in the past. They recommended him as an effective and interesting speaker. Of several subjects we suggested, he chose Existentialism. Since this philosophy is represented in much modern literature, it seemed important for our students to have some understanding of it. As it turned out, although Rabbi Wine did identify Nietzsche as the first who said "God is dead," he devoted his lecture for the most part to a history of religious Existentialism, particularly to that of Soren Kierkegaard, Danish theologian, rather than to the atheist Sartre. I think the main idea the students carried away was the concept of the individual's responsibility for the choices he makes.

The third clergyman, the Lutheran Pastor Stine, came at the recommendation of our assistant principal, Howard Clayton. He had heard Pastor Stine give four sermons, all of which he thought would be relevant to our course, appropriate, and important for Flex students to hear. Pastor Stine gave two lectures, one before and after lunch. The first was on Revolution in Industry; the second on Revolution in Sex. The subject matter of the second paralleled the material of the sociology teacher, Mr. Sergent and of the School Nurse, Mrs. D. Nichols in their lectures and small group discussions on human and sexual relations in society.

In the first lecture on industry, Pastor Stine posed the problem of public vs. private morality and suggested that in a choice between alternatives neither all good or bad we must teach how to make responsible compromises; he posed the problem and responsibility of industry toward individuals replaced by machines; he posed the problems of labor in a future with much leisure time of redefining the coming leisure in a meaningful way-- a real problem, he said, in a society whose ethical system conceives as work as good, and measures an individual's worth by his capacity to produce; finally, he raised the question of whether labor organizations had become a conservative middle class force in American society.

In the second lecture, Pastor Stine scored the new sex images of a consumer society, those of "Miss America" and of a cool, unruffled, James Bond type of playboy as the production of TV, & magazines like Playboy. He said they divorced love from sex. He called for responsible, spiritual relationships, total involvement, and declared sex was a holy quality and should be so treated.

The total list of lectures or of taped plays to which students listened or film sound tracks is attached.

As for this year, the theme as a whole generally agreed upon was Reality and Illusion. As applied to the materials of English, the focus is largely upon the concept of the Adamic myth and the American Dream, both developing out of the Puritan community and ethic and their Biblical sources. The materials are not revolutionary; for the most part, both selections and concepts are common to the schools. Again our approach is one of discovery. It is up to the student to see connections and parallels. If he sees the connection between some of the readings and the "Adamic myth" or sees each generation or type of society come up with its own type of American Dream, expressed in a characteristic way in the literature, good; if not, he will doubtless have arrived instead at his own point of view, "hear a different drummer" from the traditional one. In many ways, the course consists of the student's own effort to define for himself the American Dream (his American Dream) from what he pieces together it has been, in actuality or in the ideal. Assigned readings and the reasons for their selection follow.

In looking back at last year's lectures and materials, and ahead at this year's, it seems to me that the pendulum of views in the content swings back and forth or, better, describes a circle touching on many attitudes.

Katherine Blunt