BEWARE—the Delphi Technique
Trained Facilitators in public meetings
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How Communities Are Manipulated

The individual who gets involved will soon encounter the way educators, civic leaders, businessmen, the clergy and parents are manipulated using the Delphi Technique. Delphi is a method for obtaining a predetermined "consensus" among a diverse group of individuals who may or may not be knowledgeable about a field of endeavor or problem.

The Delphi Technique was developed by the RAND Corporation, a liberal think tank, in the 1960s. It was developed originally as a way of using repeated surveying of a group of people to bring them to agreement or "consensus."

The original survey technique has been adapted for use in controlling and manipulating meetings or study groups called to get public input for issues in education, police community relations, state control of child care, etc.

The survey approach, when used, is supposedly anonymous. It is done with a group of people who may never come face to face. A knowledgeable person has little opportunity to get exposure of his or her views or ideas to the entire group. It is a technique used by the educational establishment (often financed by the U.S. Department of Education) for reaching a supposed consensus on curriculum goals, content or instructional methods. Widely used as a technique for developing programs "to meet the needs of an individual state or community" the results often turn out to be almost identical, even in wording, to those adopted in other communities or states.

How Delphi Works

Using a series of surveys to develop a "consensus" was the original technique. A 100 page report using a Delphi technique survey done in 1989 is typical. The study was titled, Teacher Perceptions of the Effects of Implementation of Outcome-Based education. It was financed and distributed by ERIC (Educational Resources Information Center) of the U.S. Department of Education. The report described the method used. It said: A random sample of 60 teachers was selected from 600 teachers in an Iowa school district. The 60 teachers were given a "survey" which included 39 "statements" concerning educational goals and implementation of OBE. Those surveyed were given a choice of six responses from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. Space was provided for writing any comments or reactions to each statement.

When the surveys were returned, those conducting them tallied the results and analyzed the comments. An effort was made to determine the degree to which at least 75% of those responding would accept each of the statements. On the first "try" 75% or more of those responding agreed to (or would go along with) twenty of the original thirty-nine statements or premises. Those twenty statements became a part of the "consensus."

Try, Try And Try Again

A month later the sixty participants were surveyed again. They were asked to rethink their positions and then were again given the nineteen statements on which there had been no "consensus." When these tabulations were done, there was a consensus on twelve of the nineteen. Thirty days later, a third survey was done on the last seven points. By the time the third round was completed and the written comments were tabulated, it was found that a consensus was achieved and at least 75% of the participants were "in agreement" on the pre-determined package of statements. When the Delphi "consensus" is achieved, a lengthy and comprehensive report can be prepared and released using the "consensus" to support the goals and techniques of OBE or a tax increase or some other new project. When experienced teachers, or citizens, or business leaders, etc. have come to a "consensus" anyone disagreeing, must obviously be uninformed or out of step and may be an odd ball. The technique avoids the possibility of informed people with conflicting views influencing others.

Ultimately, depending on how big the project is, the "consensus" may be packaged beautifully (expensively) for dissemination to parents, teachers, legislators, and media.

Technique Used To Control Meetings

Delphi has been adapted for use in meetings where participants are present. Panels, groups and community meetings are manipulated to develop a community "consensus" which is then sold to the public. Here's how it works:

A group of interested citizens, community leaders, pastors, labor and business leaders, etc. are invited with the announced goal of "getting input" to develop a community "consensus on the problem of XYZ." The session starts with a general assembly addressed by an "expert" from Washington, a college, etc. He or she sets forth the "problem," the "opportunity" and general goals all can agree upon. There may be 50, 75, 100 or 250 in attendance in the general session.

When the general session ends, attendees may be instructed to check the package of materials they received when they registered to find a numbered or colored card—red, blue, green, orange, etc. This determines the breakout session they will attend with 10 to 40 others. There will be a "facilitator" running each breakout session. There may be a panel of lesser experts to help in the discussion. When the time comes for input (comments and suggestions from the group), a call may be issued for a volunteer to serve as the "recorder" or "secretary." Normally one has already been chosen to "volunteer." This person may work at a chalkboard. As suggestions and proposals are made, the "recorder" will say, "I think we can simplify that to say" Or "I think what you are saying is…" Or "Can we say it this way…" An unwelcome comment or question can be disregarded by the recorder who says "That's outside the scope of what we are dealing with today."

They will usually get five to eight such suggestions, at which time there is a break before going back to the general session. The "recorders" from each group get together and construct a joint "consensus" of the ideas and agreements from their sessions. A list of "agreed upon" goals, etc. is presented to the entire group. There will not usually be opportunities given for additional comments or disagreements in the general

session when the "consensus" is presented.

Through the entire process, of course, care is taken to isolate the informed, opinionated individual who could sway the entire group if given an opportunity to speak. If there are half a dozen such people in attendance, the odds are they will be in different breakout sessions so they cannot support one another. In the final report on "consensus," a conservative or traditional answer may be thrown in. However, it will be presented in a way which indicates it was probably a joke. Everyone will laugh at how impossible that approach would be. This will serve to further intimidate other right thinking people. Many in attendance may be uneasy with the "consensus" but they don't want to appear stupid or out of step so they go along with the group's "consensus."

Selling the "Consensus"

In due time the community or state is flooded with a fancy, pretty "tool kit" selling the tax increase or promoting OBE, School-to-Work or a new approach to meeting the health "needs" of the community. The "consensus" may be joined or supported by the American Association of University Women, the state or local affiliate of the National Education Association, the local ministerial association, or the state or local Catholic Conference, the Chamber of Commerce, the Labor Council, etc.

The steamroller gets media support. When concerned citizens form a group for "Excellence in Education" or "Taxpayers for Fiscal Responsibility," they will be ignored or pictured as enemies of public education or "progress." Goal of the entire process is the changing of beliefs and attitudes. That isn't difficult today. After 50 years of progressive education and the liberalization of most mainline churches and religious denominations, many people aren't sure about what they believe. Even if they have a "gut" reaction that something is wrong, they have no solid foundational beliefs on which to base opposition or from which to offer creative constitutional solutions if there is a real problem.

Don't Put Hopes In The Courts

Concerned citizens frequently think they can look to the courts for justice. It doesn't usually happen on major issues. The 1925 decision of the U.S. Supreme Court in Pierce v. Society of Sisters was an exception. It held that parents have the basic right to educate their children. Another is Wisconsin v. Yoder which in 1972 upheld the right of the Amish to educate their children in accordance with their religious beliefs and culture. Otherwise, Christian conservatives haven't had much success in court on fundamental issues, and it costs a fortune. There are, however, a growing list of Christian law firms which handle some cases.

In the early 1980s, Alabama parents sued in federal court to have 44 textbooks banned because they promoted the religion of secular humanism. The National School Board Association's Council of School Attorneys' Annual Law Seminar in 1988 told what happened ultimately after U.S. District Judge Brevard Hand in his ruling said...

If this court is compelled to purge "God is great, God is good, we thank Him for our daily food" from the classroom, this court must also purge from the classroom those things that serve to teach that salvation is through oneself rather than through a deity.

That was good reasoning and Judge Hand banned the 44 textbooks which promoted secular humanism. He wrote:

1. The systematic exclusion of references to religion from the 44 textbooks in question, in fact, establishes or supports the religion of secular humanism.

2. Inclusion in those books of information which is antitheistic, hedonistic, antiparent, or which supports subjective value judgment, establishes or supports the religion of secular humanism.

3. John Dewey was the founder of the public education system as we know it today. In 1933 he, along with 33 other individuals, signed the Humanist Manifesto. It is his philosophy which permeates our schools of education.

4. Our system of public education is doing a poor job of educating our young.

Judge Hand supported the parents and banned 44 state-adopted textbooks used in home economics, history and social studies classes. It could have been a real turning point in the cultural war. However, the Court of Appeals in a unanimous opinion, overruled Judge Hand.

What Can Be Done When Faced With Delphi?

Recognizing the technique and how to combat it is important. It may be possible to disrupt the process or enable a knowledgeable individual to locate others in the meeting who are uneasy but do not realize how they are being manipulated. Here are six simple steps:

1. Know what you believe. Go to such meetings prepared.

2. If possible ask in the first general session, "Will we have an opportunity here to discuss or question any consensus brought in from the breakout sessions?"

3. If a group of concerned friends attend, don't all sit together. Then, if when one person speaks, those in other parts of the room can rise in support.

4. When speaking or disputing, face and speak to the audience and not the "facilitator" or panel. Have friends who will speak up and agree or say, "We want to hear more from...:'

5. If necessary, afterwards issue a "Dissenting (not a minority) Report." In the big meeting, if the announced consensus is out of line, try to get the floor to ask anyone who disagrees and wishes to participate in a dissenting report to contact you. Get names, addresses and phone numbers.

6. Enlist supporters in Service Clubs, Veterans Groups, Senior Citizens Groups, labor unions, etc. to question the announced consensus and distribute any dissenting report.