Possible Points of Discussion and Class Activities

The book covers numerous issues that could serve as points of discussion. Here are a few suggestions:

*Part One: Essential Considerations*

1. Compare the differences between a school district with a structured public relations program and one that has no program. Discuss how a legitimate school public relations program is honest, systematic, two-way and continuous.

2. Discuss the importance of public relations to a school district. Why are boards reluctant to spend money and provide resources for a structured public relations program?

3. Discuss the differences between a court of law and the court of public opinion. What variables affect public opinion toward the school district?

4. Have the students discuss the importance of schools tapping into and knowing the power structure of the community. How can this benefit the schools?

5. Divide the class into two groups. Have one defend the value of public opinion polls and the other group criticize their validity.

6. Have students obtain a copy of a school district communication policy and discuss the similarities and differences among the various policies obtained.

7. Have each student develop a goal, with objectives, and strategies to get an understanding of how planning takes place.

8. Discuss why school community relations/public relations are every employee’s responsibility. What happens when employees criticize the school in public?

9. Have a student interview a member of the National School Public Relations Associations (www.nspra.org) and explain the group’s mission and services.

*Part Two: Relations With Special Publics*

1. Ask the students to identify the impact of Lionberger’s five stages of persuasion (awareness, interest, evaluation, trial, and adoption) on a school public relations program.

2. Discuss the importance of two-way communications in the persuasion process. Show how the media play a major role in one-way communication. Here you might ask one student to describe a detailed diagram to class members as each attempts to draw it. Class members cannot ask the student presenter any clarifying questions, nor can he/she use any gestures to describe the diagram. Once the activity is completed, the student describing the diagram would show it to the class. Each class member would compare it with what he or she has drawn. In the second half of this activity, the student describing the first diagram would describe a different detailed diagram and class members would attempt to draw it. This time there is two-way communications with questions from class members and clarification from the student describing the diagram. At the end, the resulting drawings are compared to the original. (Most of the time with two-way communications, the drawings will be closer to the original than they were in one-way
communications.)

3. Discuss the impact of Herzberg’s Motivational-Hygiene theory on internal communications. Why is internal communication important?

4. Using Table 7.1 ask students to identify what’s most important to them to get the job done where they work. Then have them place these “wants” under one of Herzberg’s categories on motivational needs or hygienic needs. Most will probably be placed under motivational needs.

5. Have students identify examples of good internal communications at their work places.

6. Break the class into small groups of three or four. Give each group a role to play. teachers, guidance counselors, office workers, cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, etc. Have each group list things they can do to make students feel important (For example, a nurse whispers a girl’s weight into her ear instead of announcing it for all in the room to hear. The student feels someone cares about her). Then, a member of each group reads the group’s list to the class. A discussion of the ideas can show the importance of communicating with students.

7. Ask three or four parents of students in school to visit the class and to tell what they want to know about the school and their child’s progress. Also, ask them to tell how they would like to be informed.

8. Have each student write a letter to a parents of students in a local school system and have the class critique the letter in class.

9. Discuss how the key communicator program can squelch rumors and give a school informal feedback on the community’s thinking.

10. Ask the class members to relate their experiences with critics and criticism.

11. Discuss special programs for older people that class members may have in their schools or place of work.

Part Three: Communication Tools

1. Have students bring to class a straight news story and a feature story, discuss them, and show the difference.

2. Ask students to identify possible news stories at their schools and write a straight or feature story about one.

3. Have students debate whether or not it’s ever prudent to go “off-the-record” with a reporter.

4. Break the class into two groups one from a free society and one from a closed society. Have each group defend its position on the press freedom of the press in a free society; controlled press in a closed society.

5. Have class members list what activities they would need to do before, during, and after a news conference.
6. Compare and contrast the benefits and limitations of communicating via the press, radio, and television.

7. Have the class write 10- 20- and 30-second public service spot announcements for radio and television.

8. Show what school activities newspapers would cover and what television stations would not. Discuss what news stories appeal to television stations.

9. Ask students to bring a school publication to class and critique it according to the guidelines given in Chapter 14 Preparing Published Materials.

10. Have class members mock up a possible school publication.

11. Break students into small groups of three or four. If online PC’s are available, have them visit five or six school building and school district web sites. While reviewing the sites, have them debate whether digital media can best be used by schools to supplement or supplant more traditional communication tools. Ask them to list what particular challenges school administrators might have to confront as they move communication tactics away from traditional print media and toward newer, digital media.

12. Ask students to debate the pros and cons of using online communication tactics and discuss ways in which schools might deal with reaching those in the community who lack online access or the expertise to use online communications.

13. Break the class into three or four groups and have them develop a timetable for a campaign to pass a school budget. Let the class critique each group’s results.

14. Ask each class member to list at least five things they would do to market their public school, if the voucher system were enacted. Have the class as a whole identify the best suggestions.

_**Part Four Evaluation**_

1. Discuss what variables need to be evaluated in a school public relations program. Explain the various methods by which a communication program might be measured and evaluated.