

COMMUNITY EDUCATION: AN AMALGAM OF MANY VIEWS

The views converge because, with a community base, people are better equipped to attack social problems.

Short years ago few educators knew what "community education" meant. Suddenly the concept has national visibility, surprising even its avid promoters. Since 1964 the idea has spread from identification with a handful of school districts to acceptance by several hundred. There are community education programs in districts of all sizes, from very large to very small. Over 900 students have finished community education degree programs; an additional 2,000 persons have been trained in short-term programs. Several states have passed supportive legislation and have granted financial assistance to community education programs. There are 25 centers for community education at institutions of higher education across the country, providing consultant and supportive services to districts.

In 1971 there were 1,920 community schools. These schools involve 1,733,972 people in programs yearly (a weekly average of 645,462 persons). They spent \$32,189,473 on community education.

Add to this the recent development of the National Community School Education Association, the institution of two state organizations for community education, and the interest of several foundations in promotion of the concept and the immense size of this movement becomes apparent.

Why the Sudden Interest?

Why this sudden interest in a concept which had languished for years? Why the phenomenal rate of growth?

For one thing, there have been major demographic and sociological changes.

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Quaint old towns and villages are disappearing, replaced by megalopolis and urban sprawl. People live in areas defined by artificial boundary lines, controlled by bureaucracies which spew out rules and regulations. The cities are of such magnitude that few citizens are able to participate actively in their governance. The average person moves 14 times in his lifetime. There is no community; a man loses his identity in the crowd. The human components of this noncommunity have been frustrated in their attempts at involvement and identification. Poverty, crime, delinquency, drugs, and unemployment have increased at a frightening pace.

Despite the public concern for these problems and the various attempts to provide solutions, success in dealing with them has been minimal.

To those who have been exposed to community education, however, there is the feeling that this concept could make an impact on solving the problems outlined here. First of all, they see the concept as a means of breaking large cities into smaller units and fostering interaction among the people who live there. In such small communities it is possible to involve people in problem solving and to create an atmosphere of community. It is possible to promote personal identity and a community spirit. With a community base, people are better equipped to attack their social problems.

Another reason for interest in community education is dissatisfaction with the public schools as they currently operate. For one thing, they seem riddled with hypocrisy. They speak of community involvement, yet involvement is usually superficial at best. They state their desire to educate for life, yet their curriculum does little to prepare for living in a community. They pay lip service to the ideal of dealing with the

whole child, yet operate as though a child's total education is accomplished while under their direction. They believe that education is a lifetime endeavor, yet perform as though education is terminated with their programs.

In addition, there is evidence to suggest that schools are capable of accomplishing much more than they do. Why, with highly educated staffs, huge public support, and unique and extensive facilities, are schools falling short of what might be expected?

The Nature of the Challenge

The challenge can be divided into three parts. First, schools need to discharge their presently accepted responsibilities more effectively. Second, they must extend their traditional services to all members of the community, not only the traditional student population. Third, the school must expand its activities into an area heretofore regarded as alien.

"It is clear that school officials are in a new ball game. If they are to play effectively, they will have to develop new skills, new capacities, new understandings," writes Lavern Cunningham.¹

This third part of the challenge requires schools to be the catalyst in developing community esprit de corps. It asks schools to identify local problems and influence the decisions made to resolve these problems. Through community education schools can take on a new and more expansive role. They can offer their facilities, services, and professional expertise and reach out to their constituents in new and significant ways.

This new and expanded role makes economic, educational, and social sense. Greater use of public buildings which, despite their enormous cost, sit idle for

long periods of time is certainly logical. Providing for the educational needs of community members, other than the typical school-age child, finds a great deal of support from other members of the community. Coordinating the activities of the many social and governmental resources within the community is a task which many of us feel is long overdue.

Some Examples

There is evidence that many communities are coming to this same conclusion, sometimes without calling their new expectations and directions community education. For example, in Rockford, Illinois, at the Washington Junior High, an ombudsman with field assistants has been selected to act as liaison and mediator in the community. His specific responsibilities were to: 1) talk with community members, 2) become aware of community problems, 3) bring social and welfare agencies into the local setting, 4) air community grievances, and 5) improve the teacher's knowledge of the community.

Similar endeavors have been undertaken by the Woodlawn Community Board in Chicago; the Southeastern Educational Projects in San Francisco; the Urban Coalition in Columbus, Ohio; Project Redesign in the State of New York; and the Association of Huntsville Area Companies in Alabama.

In addition, the following recommendations have been made by the National Urban Coalition: 1) New forms of citizen participation should be encouraged to promote educational accountability to the public. 2) Communities must find new approaches to leadership development. 3) School systems must establish and refine new links to other sources of strength within their communities—business, industry, other institutions, other agencies. 4) The existing structure for citizen participation must be strengthened.

It would appear that many people in communities all over the country see a logic in the school as a device for extending educational opportunities and assisting with the solution of social problems. The demands of our communities call out for some institution to assume a new leadership and service function in our social structure, and the schools seem to offer the most parsimonious solution to our dilemma. These demands include a call for greater use of public school facilities; adoption of some form of educational account-

ability; the right of adults to learn to read and write and obtain a high school diploma; attention to social problems; provisions for higher education, recreation, vocational training, avocational interests, and social activities; attention to the needs of senior citizens; better communications; and community involvement in the educational decision-making process.

Schools have not been especially alert to these increasing demands. Cunningham describes the school's failure to comprehend the situation:

Part of the problem stems from a basic fallacy in the school system approaches to school public relations. The preparation programs developed by colleges and universities for administrators in training have been urged to tell people about the schools, bring parents into the schools, sell the schools to the people. Very few efforts of a continuing type have been mounted which allow parents and students opportunities to share their feelings about the schools with school officials. Information flow has been primarily one way. Legitimate outlets have not been provided for protest or discontent. PTAs and similar organizations have often ruled discussions of local school weaknesses out of bounds in order to perpetuate a peaceful, tranquil, and all-is-well atmosphere.²

Schools are not the only units of government which have failed to involve community members in the decision-making process in a meaningful way. Our entire political operation has abandoned full and personal participation. We presume that we are a democratic society, but democracy presupposes involvement of all concerned in the governance process. Without insidious intent or planned manipulation, we have moved from democracy to oligarchy. The trend seems to have come about through disorganization and apathy. The assumption being made here is that return to a more democratic society is what community members desire.

"The community as a symbol of direct social relationships and grass-roots government has been highly romanticized in recent years by both popular and scholarly writers. People were never so interested in it as they have become now that they feel they have lost it," says Charles Adrian.³

The fact is that democracy does not work automatically. It is the most diffi-

cult and time-consuming social system to achieve. Among requirements are an appropriate size for interaction and organization, and constant stimuli. In essence, those who believe in community education believe that it provides a technique for returning to true participatory democracy.

Defining Community Education

The definition of community education has passed through an interesting evolution. It is probably accurate to say that early definitions were comparatively limited in their potential impact as compared with more recent conceptualizations. Community education in its earlier stages tended to define limited programs such as recreation or extra programs for adults and children; as such, they tended to deal with programs tacked on to the existing curriculum. In fact, the rationale for the existence of community education was based on the improvement of the regular school program; even strong supporters of community education tended to view it as an extra.

There were those who saw something greater in the concept, but change in the definition did not come easily. As more and more persons became interested, there were added definitional efforts. And because there had been no formal attempt to develop a disciplined base, the definitions went in many directions, with each group seeing in community education what they wanted to see. As a result, many differing ideas and programs were flying under the community education flag. Community education became synonymous with such things as adult education, public relations, extended activities for students, or a use of buildings policy. To the higher education institution, community education meant continuing education; to the community college it meant credit and noncredit classes of the type they offered. To the segregationists it meant "neighborhood schools" and to the militants it meant community control. To the vocational people it was job training and retraining, while to others it was promotion of the fine arts. It came to mean social work to some districts, poverty and disadvantaged programs to others—cooperative extension to some and recreation to others. To some school districts it was preschool programs and compensatory education, while for others it merely meant adding the word "community" to their school signs and buses.

What Is It Today?

At first glance it would appear that community education is indeed a conglomeration, meaning whatever a person or a community wants it to mean. On closer scrutiny, however, commonalities can be established and the definition can be refined. Misuse of the term usually is the result of mistaking a part for the whole. The common thread which runs through the previous listing of interpretations of community education is that, in general, they are all subparts of the concept.

Community education is an educational philosophy which permeates basic beliefs. It enlarges and enhances the role of the public school so that it is quite different from before. The school becomes responsible for all aspects of education as it relates to its community. To further enlarge the conceptual base, education is no longer interpreted to mean formal types of classes but any experience leading to the more successful handling of experience. Thus the public schools have some kind of responsibility for almost all activities that take place within the community. The school, however, does not become all things to all people. It attempts to recognize the needs of the community and to act as the coordinator, facilitator, or initiator to see that these needs are met. The school plays a catalytic role, serving an organizing function.

It is probably appropriate at this juncture to point out the relationship between "community school" and community education. Community education is the educational concept; community school is the vehicle by which many services of community education are delivered. The community school becomes the device through which community needs are matched with community facilities and programs developed either by the schools or by other agencies and groups within the community. The responsibility for coordinating this function of relating needs to programs becomes that of the schools.

Programs/Process

To look more closely at community education we must examine the two prime ingredients of the concept: *programs* and *process*. The program aspect deals with the more overt activities of a community. Previously listed misnomers are usually activities which belong in the program part of community education. Communities have particular needs and the programs are designed to assist in

meeting those needs. Therefore if there is a need for recreation, vocational retraining, or high school completion, the community education *program* provides the means of meeting it.

The second aspect of community education is process. This is the attempt to organize and activate each community so that it more nearly reaches its potential for democratic involvement and development. Earlier, we discussed the fact that communities have frequently become so large that community involvement and interaction have disappeared. It is a premise of community education that after communities reach a certain size, the numbers of people and the complexity of the structure make it impossible for people to be involved in community activities. Over a period of time people at the grass-roots level become frustrated by the lack of opportunity to participate and soon adopt a "you can't fight city hall" attitude, withdrawing more and more from their civic responsibilities. They do not, however, cease to be dissatisfied. Instead, they tend to vent their frustrations in negative votes at election time. In some situations the frustrations appear in overt hostility, threats, and violence. If participatory democracy is to return to our communities, it will have to come at a level where the size of the community is such that actual community involvement is possible.

The recommended size for the process aspect of community education is the community surrounding an elementary school building. This community is usually small enough to allow for community participation. There are other factors at work which encourage community interaction, of course. The school is a public facility located in the center of the community and is often the least threatening of institutions. It has an appropriate entrée into the community through children. There will also be a degree of homogeneity which will allow this group to function more effectively.

Because of the size of the community, it will be possible to obtain actual community representation. By using techniques such as block club organizations or sociograms to identify community leadership, it is possible to develop community organization which is not only representative of the community, but has the capability of establishing two-way communication. Messages should not only flow out, but attitudes and feelings from the community should be communicated back, provid-

ing an impact on the decision-making group which is supposed to provide service to the community.

This type of organizational structure provides each elementary school area with a representative council that offers several advantages. First of all, the group is much more viable than the traditional group selected by the schools to be representative. The very nature of its selection offers an ingredient of representation not found in councils consisting of a few parents or groups selected from the status positions in the community.

Second, the two-way communication nature of the council makes involvement of the community much more possible. By using council members who have been selected by their neighbors in a representative fashion, it is possible to solicit advice and feelings from the community to help the council in their activities and to report back to the community on events which have taken place.

Third, there is a kind of "community control" that develops which is vested in community power but is devoid of the anarchy which has developed from some kinds of community control. In a democratic society, all control is in the community as long as communities exercise their political power. It is only when people allow the democratic process to dissipate that the decision makers feel free to disregard the concerns and needs of the community in deference to either selfish or uninformed actions. When the local community structure is genuinely strong, the avenue for developing a similar meaningful structure encompassing a larger area is possible by building on representation from the elementary units. The strength of the larger unit is dependent upon the strength and communications of the local community. Thus, by the pyramiding of power, the local units become strong and by exercising their powers of voting, of petitioning, and of recall, community members can soon make the decision makers aware of the need to involve local communities in the process prior to making decisions.

Fourth, there is a problem-solving technique for communities which, if properly exercised, can contribute greatly to the positive growth of communities. The technique is merely one of using the scientific method to solve problems at the local level. Representatives of the community decide what problems need attention, arrange them in terms of priority, and seek appropri-

ate solutions. By analyzing possible solutions, deciding on what action to take, carrying out the action, and evaluating the degree of success, the council goes through a kind of catharsis and problem-solving experience. It not only brings about solutions to problems but develops interest and pride in the community and a community feeling which can only come from sharing significant experiences with one's neighbors. As people work together through this process, they realize that good decisions come from the involvement of many people and that communities realize great potential through the combined efforts of their citizens.

The Potential of Community Education

Community education is not a combination of disjointed programs or an "add on" to the existing educational structure. It is an educational philosophy which has concern for all aspects of community life. It advocates greater use of all facilities in the community, especially school buildings which ordinarily lie idle so much of the time. It has concern for the traditional school program, seeking to expand all types of activities for school-age children to additional hours of the day, week, and year. It also seeks to make the educational program more relevant by bringing the community into the classroom and taking the classroom into the community. It includes equal educational opportunities for adults in all areas of education: academic, recreational, vocational, avocational, and social. It is the identification of community resources and the coordination of these resources to attack community problems. And finally, it is the organization of communities on a local level so that representative groups can establish two-way communication, work on community problems, develop community power, and work toward developing that community into the best it is capable of becoming.

There are those who would describe community education in evangelistic terms and make exaggerated claims about its potency. Whether the concept is capable of all its proponents have promised remains to be seen. Certain facts are evident, however. Even the practice of community education which is primarily program oriented results in benefits to the community. Certainly there are advantages to providing for the educational or recreational needs of a community, even if all the problems of the community are not solved.

The real promise of community education, however, comes in that aspect called process. For unlike most current endeavors of social engineering which attack the symptoms of our problems, community education provides a system for involvement of people in the identification and solution of their problems. Whether such an effort will make real change is difficult to determine at this point, but certainly an approach which allows for the coordination of resources through people offers greater promise

than any other endeavor on the horizon. And even if the final result is less than desired, a technique for returning participatory democracy to our communities may be merit enough to warrant fostering the community education concept.

1. Luvern Cunningham, *Governing Schools: New Approaches to Old Issues* (Columbus, O.: Charles Merrill, 1971), p. 179.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 176.

3. Charles R. Adrian, *Social Science and Community Action* (East Lansing, Mich.: Michigan State University, 1960), p. 3. □

Concurrence Comments

➤ The following paragraphs are excerpted from letters written to guest editor Fred Totten in response to his request for concurrence by national leaders in a statement of the community education philosophy. (See page 147.)

I wish to commend Phi Delta Kappa for devoting a full issue of its official publication to a review of the community education movement. Without question, greater involvement of the total community in the operation of the public schools will lead to much-needed reform in public education.

During the past three fiscal years I have placed in my Executive Department budget \$2,750,000 for the state's School-Community Centers Program. My purpose in encouraging this program is to open facilities in the public schools to a variety of after-hours programs that would benefit all ages and groups in the community. The general public should have more access to such facilities as libraries, gymnasiums, home economics facilities, and other special instructional areas. This program has been very successful. For example, a project under way this year in Baltimore involves 57 schools which are open from 3 to 10 p.m. on weekdays and from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. on specific Saturdays and Sundays. This year the project received \$158,500.

I hope your November publication encourages other states to initiate programs similar to the one I am proud of in Maryland. *Maryland*, governor of Maryland.

➤ [I] strongly urge local chambers of commerce and businessmen to explore the community education approach as a means of maximizing the use of educational services and facilities in their communities.

Arch N. Booth, executive vice president, Chamber of Commerce of the United States.

The National Urban League dur-

ing its 60 years of operation has been deeply involved in the community learning concept. We believe that an informed and active citizenry is necessary to a democratic society; therefore we have historically operated programs addressed to this goal. — *Ermon O. Hogan*, director of education, National Urban League.

There is much in the statement with which I agree, particularly in regard to the desirability of expanding the use of school facilities, which I interpret to mean keeping the school doors open into the evening and during the summer months for adult education classes and for community activities. I agree with you that the investment in our educational plant is not now being used as efficiently as it could and should be. I would like to see neighborhood schools become, during nonclassroom hours, true community centers. *Edith Green*, Representative from Oregon, U.S. Congress.

I have shared the proposed statement concerning community education with our educational services staff, who join me in support of the concept. — *Cecily C. Selby*, national executive director, Girl Scouts of the United States of America.

We admire your efforts to advance an educational movement which you believe will be to the benefit of both students and the community. And we feel that your program has obvious merit in that it will help to remove some of the barriers which have tended to isolate educational institutions from the active business and social community. — *John M. Fisher*, president, American Security Council.