

The community school concept sees the entire community as an educational institution. Likewise living in a community is a full-time educational experience. Community education is the program which brings school and community together.

community education: is it possible?

by Everette E. Nance



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"Never look down to test the ground before taking your next step; only he who keeps his eye fixed on the far horizon will find his right road." Dag Hammarskjold

The Power of Education

A persistent theme running through educational literature is the charge that our educational system is not meeting the needs of an ever changing and complex society. At the same time, educators at all levels have been indicted for the failure of our schools. While educators must and should accept a portion of the blame if indeed the accusation is true, the community must also bear part of the blame and accept the responsibility for upgrading our system of education. The intention here is not to suggest that citizens have not been concerned with the problems but that they have been apathetic toward helping to solve them.

This apathy has expressed itself in many ways. It is frequently manifested at the polls. The failure of many school districts to pass tax levies attests to this fact. Whether this and other negative actions reflect discontent with our educational system or a confused citizenry is a question we must answer.

The question is difficult to answer because the issues are cloudy and other variables must be considered which have an important impact upon the educational scene. I am speaking of the general mistrust which exists in the United States towards most of our established institutions. Coupled with this mistrust are the mistakes we have made and continue to make in dealing with societal problems in general.

Some might say that some action is better than no action at all. I say that action without direction is pure folly and most often fruitless. I believe that in order to clarify the issues and remove the nuisance variables we must adopt a new type of educational process — a process which considers not only problems which relate to the school but to the total community. By considering the whole we can then isolate its parts. We can clarify each variable acting upon the educational scene and begin to work on the problems related to each situation.

This cannot be achieved if educators continue to work in isolation from the community. I believe in the power of education but I also believe in the power of involvement. Educators must involve themselves in the community and citizens must involve themselves in school affairs. The entire community must become the educational community and all resources at our disposal must be used to deal with our

problems. The educational process which is capable of achieving this end is community education. The delivery system is the community school.

Education's New Direction

More and more public schools are becoming the focal point for community action—and well they should. Schools represent the largest local capital investment, and citizens are demanding that this investment be used to its maximum potential. The new and rapidly growing concept, community schools, attempts to make these demands a reality.

Before getting into a discussion of community schools, community education should be defined. It might be defined as a process through which people are involved in determining their wants, needs and interests and then initiating programs to meet those wants, needs, and interests utilizing all of the physical, financial and human resources at their disposal. The community school, on the other hand, might be defined as one of the agencies in which the process of community education is facilitated.

The Community School

In a community school the basic effort is to bring the school closer to the community and the citizens closer to the school. Human resources accompanied by flexible facilities make the school the logical coordinator of activities for its immediate constituency. It has the ability to help create and direct partnerships between children, youth, and adults. Such unions should lead to the mutual analyzing and exploring of particular community needs and problems, to the formulation of possible solutions, and to the generation of direct action aimed at improving total community life.

The community school must be flexible in its structure. Such flexibility is appealing because it allows each community to work independently to solve its own self-identified problems. However, there are ideally four components involved in any community school: academics, recreation, social services, and civic involvement. Each component is developed by local citizens to meet local needs.

Academic services should provide for pre-schoolers and senior citizens, school drop-outs, and the handicapped, with "after hours" providing for basic adult education, homemaking, vocational training, business education, job retraining, and other programs adapted to the local need. The provision of late-hour sessions for the general citizenry broadens community involvement. Day pupils are encouraged to participate in other than academic programs of the system. With a stimulated demand for learning opportunities, personnel resources can be fully exploited by drawing technicians from industry, business and volunteer associations within the community for part-time teaching in the classroom. Ideally, such activity will stimulate a more relevant day school curriculum.

Community activities should be conducted in cooperation with local recreation departments and other appropriate groups. Citizens of all ages will be encouraged to take part in informal activities, arts and crafts, drama, music, dance, and other cultural pursuits, as well as the more traditional sports, physical fitness, and swimming programs. Because the school cannot be contained within a building but is ideally the

community itself, the resources of both public and private agencies would be integrated within the educational process.

Community services should include programs in health, safety, counseling, employment, law enforcement, mental health, legal aid, and other similar services.

As centers for civic affairs, the community school's citizens participate in solving local problems in cooperation with the officers of the municipality. In addition to this, school facilities would be used for meetings of city-wide groups, clubs, and special interest groups. Here also the citizens have the opportunity to become acquainted with local civic processes, learn how to use and modify them, and to share in the responsibility for successful operations.

The term community must be examined in its many aspects. A school community embraces all persons who live in a particular attendance area. There are also the larger communities composed of the city, the county, the state, the nation, and finally, the total world community. Skills developed through the community school should lead to better decision-making at all levels, personal and group security, and hopefully, better interpersonal relationships through understanding.

The full implication of the community school concept points to two basic ideas. First the concept is a process designed to induce change, and second it assumes the change is toward valued goals or conditions which represent a stage in development better than that occupied by the person or community before the change takes place.

Thus we hope to dispel the notion that education is exclusively the task of the schools and that it is a limited activity occurring between the hours of eight in the morning and four in the afternoon. It is also more than a class or an activity that is time bound in any particular scope.

The entire community, therefore, should be conceived as an educational institution. The goals of this broadened educational institution would be problem solving, conflict resolution, the representation of the under-represented and the community-wide use of the educative process. Such a posture would place the function of the school in proper perspective and give all relevant persons and agencies a responsibility and opportunity to educate for the common good.

The Community School versus Traditional School

The focal point of the Community Education process is the community school. There are vast differences between community school and traditional school philosophies as they relate to the child, the school, and the community. Listed on the next page are a few of the differences as viewed by Brookover in his book, *A Sociology of Education*.

Certainly, it is not the intent here to degrade the traditional school program. Rather, community education must be viewed as a complement to (completes or makes perfect) the traditional school program. It gives meaning to the traditional program by using the community and its resources as a laboratory. Further, community education serves all people, including adults.

The problems of society are certainly not the total responsibility of education. Yet educators are increasingly called upon to suggest ways to alleviate problems arising

AMERICAN SCHOOL ORIENTATION

	Traditional School	Community School
Major Orientation	Book Centered	Life Centered
Concept of Child	All children much the same; concept of average child	Individual differences relate to most effective community participation
Concept of Human Nature	Children naturally bad	Children neither good nor bad; environmental conditioning
Major Child Motivations	Discipline	Group achievement
Teacher's Role	Assign lessons and hear recitation	Direct learning process for most effective group participation
Methods	Memorization Cover subject matter	Group responsibility
	Mastery of facts and skills	Group planning geared to community concern
	Development of abstract intelligence	Working on solutions to community problems
Curriculum	Rigid; discipline subjects	Development of responsible community participation
Relation to Social Action	No interest in social action; authoritative approach	Flexible; based on social process and community needs
Relation to Life Activities	Unimportant	Training and experience in community action programs
Relation to Local Community	Ignored completely or largely	Major emphasis mainly in community activities
Belief about Social Order	Fit child to existing social order; teach to maintain status quo	Given major emphasis
Measurement of Outcome and Achievement	Standard tests of learning based on subject matter mastery	Education for a more democratic social order starting in local communities
		Subject matter and personality values plus achievement in community information and participation

from many situations concerning not only educational matters but conditions which exist in the broader community. The community education concept has emerged to become one of the most efficient models of community problem solving to date because it allows for cooperative community planning.

The full impact of the educational process upon community development and upon the solution to social problems will not be realized until the schoolhouse lights go on all over America. For too many years we have neglected to use our school facilities as centers of service to assist people to fulfill their unmet educational, recreational, and social needs. We have neglected to provide professional leadership sufficient to enable school and the education process to bring about the degree of community unity and development necessary to the solution of community and social problems.

The community school, then, is that school which becomes a center of service to all people in the community regardless of their age, race, creed, or socio-economic circumstance. As a social instrument, it offers its greatest service when its facilities and staff are available to all people of the community for assistance in fulfilling their basic needs.

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"When Rebecca lived in her village and needed to get water for the household, she went to the well. At the well she met the other women of the village; she heard the gossip; she met her fiance there, as a matter of fact. And then what happened? With the progress of democracy and technology, running water was introduced; and Rebecca stayed in the kitchenette of her eighth-floor apartment. She turned the faucet on and got the water out of the faucet; she didn't have to go to the well any more. She had only the telephone to help her collect gossip and she would have to find other ways to meet her fiance. This is a parable of the problem of centralizing sources of everything."

Daniel J. Boorstin

**Democracy and its Discontents:
Reflections on Everyday America**

Random House, New York, 1974, p. 113.