Community education programs are highly effective in generating community spirit, in mobilizing scarce resources, and in encouraging learning as a lifelong vocation. For rural areas, community education serves a vital role in linking communities with resources and individuals with broader educational resources.

The Community Education Model: Learning Opportunities for Rural Adults

by Dawn Ramsey

"You don't need to worry about opening the school. Why, everybody out here has a key or knows where to get one."[1]

What better compliment to a school, its principal, its district, its people! The school has become a true community school – open around the clock for people who live near it.

Peaks Mill School is one such rural school. Built in 1939 as a part of the Works Progress Administration, this strong imposing structure originally housed grades 1-12. Situated in the rural northeast portion of Franklin County, Kentucky, this school is looked to by area residents not only as a place to educate their young (in 1959 Peaks Mill became a 1-6 program) but also as a meeting place for the community.

Lee Troutwine, resident of Peaks Mill and chairman of the Franklin County Community Education Board expressed the school's centrality to the community when he said, "People who live in Peaks Mill feel like it is the 'chosen land' and our school is the nucleus of the community along with the local country store and local churches."[2]

A community school highlights the effectiveness and appropriateness of implementing the community education model as a vehicle for bringing educational resources and learning opportunities to the rural adult.

Community Education – the words themselves are so common and so general – is not a new phenomenon in rural

Dawn Ramsey in the director of Franklin County Community Education Program in Frankfort, Kentucky.

areas. Bits and pieces of the community education model have been a part of rural America for years.

"There's no point in goin' to town for that. 'Sakes, Bessie Jones sews the tightest quilts in this state. She'd be pleased to show you. Just go visitin' and ask her. She'd relish the company."[3]

In addition to people passing their skills on to friends and relatives, rural folk have joined together for community barn dances, house raising and in support of local families in emergencies. "The concept of community education and community schools has historically been an integral part of life in rural/hispanic communities. The school has served as a focal point of life in rural communities for many years, serving as the center for community functions. Some of these functions included dances, political meetings, and weddings, and included all members of the hispanic family."[4]

Things are not so very different today. These informal bits of community education are in evidence in rural communities across this country and even around the world.

In a more formal way, the community education model can be adapted to any local area. It provides a framework for addressing the learning needs of rural adults by combining educational resources with existing activities and new ideas. As a result, community education can provide a comprehensive plan for maximum resource utilization for that community's people.

The Community Education Model

"My belief (is) that the vast majority of people are essentially the same, that we desire most of all to improve ourselves through learning, books, and contacts with others, that we strive in youth and throughout our lives for continued personal improvement."[5]

Jesse Stuart was a writer – he wrote about life. He was an educator – he challenged his readers to think differently about life. He was a Kentuckian - he shared his belief in Kentucky's people with the world. In his eloquent way the belief he expressed serves as a preface to, almost a backdrop for, the community education model.

"Community education is a concept that stresses an expanded role for public education and provides a dynamic approach to individual and community improvement. Community education encourages the development of a comprehensive and coordinated delivery system for providing educational, recreational, social and cultural services for all people in a community. Although communities vary greatly with some being richer than others, all have tremendous human and physical resources that can be identified and mobilized to obtain workable solutions to problems. Inherent in the community education philosophy is the belief that each community education program should reflect the needs of its particular community. The philosophy advocates a process which produces essential modifications as times and problems change."[6]

Community education is not simply a list of classes or even a set of programs. It is a process whereby communities of people work together to create a combination of classes, programs, activities, and discussions unique to their needs. Even the definition of community education will vary from location to location. In Franklin County, community education is defined as: "a planned system of educational and community service programs designed to meet the needs of the children, youth, and adults in the Franklin County Community."[7] Other people have said it more simply –

everyone teaches – everyone learns

or

people helping people

or

something for everyone

Wherever it is implemented, the community education model has generally accepted commonalities. Identified in the federal Community Education Acts of 1978 these eight elements are[6]:

1. **ROLE OF THE SCHOOL.** The program must provide for the direct and substantial involvement of a public elementary or secondary school in the administration and operation of the program.
2. **COMMUNITY SERVED.** The program must serve an identified community which is at least coextensive with the school attendance area for the regular instructional program of the school.
3. **COMMUNITY CENTER FACILITIES.** Program services to the community must be sufficiently concentrated and comprehensive in a specific public facility, such as a public elementary or secondary school, a public community or junior college, or a community recreation or park center, in terms of scope and nature of program services, to serve as a community center.
4. **SCOPE OF ACTIVITIES AND SERVICES.** The program must extend the program activities and services offered by, and uses made of, the public facility in terms of the scope and nature of program services, the target population served, and the hours of service.
5. **COMMUNITY NEEDS.** The program must include systematic and effective procedures for identifying and documenting on a continuing basis the needs, interests and concerns of the community served with respect to community education activities and services; and for responding to such needs, interests and concerns.
6. **COMMUNITY RESOURCES AND INTERAGENCY COOPERATIVE ARRANGEMENTS.** The program must provide for the identification and utilization to the fullest extent possible of educational, cultural, recreational, and other existing and planned resources located outside of the school; and it must encourage and use cooperative methods and agreements among public and private agencies.
7. **PROGRAM CLIENTS.** The program must be designed to serve all age groups in the community as well as groups with special needs.
8. **COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION.** The program must provide for the active and continuous involvement, on an advisory basis, of institutions, groups, and individuals in the planning and carrying out of the program, including involvements in the assessment of community needs and resources and in program evaluation.

No two community education programs will be alike because the community education model is molded community by community to reflect the needs of that particular area. The implementation of the eight elements as a part of the model provides learning opportunities for rural adults both through the outcome of the process as well as in the process itself. Unique local orchestrations of the model occur at anyone of six steps:

1. initial conversations and informal interest polling.
2. formation of a citizen council and formal structure
3. community needs assessments
4. community problem solving
5. program implementation
6. ongoing discussions and redirections.

1. Initial Conversations and Informal Interest Polling

The people who want to develop a community education program in their community informally talk to their neighbors to identify others who are also interested. Formal educational resources become involved as this small group seeks information and/or materials from the local school district or a regional university. Contact is made with a staff person who can assist with model implementation and, as the process develops, can assist the community in securing educational services from both the LEA and higher education.

2. Formation of a Citizen Council and Formal Structure

This step features the formalization of community education for the community. A group of citizens take on an advisory role in planning a systematic approach to community education. Usually a series of regular meetings are announced and office space and telephone arrangements are made. At this point a coordinator (possibly part-time) is hired or a volunteer is appointed to direct activities. Again, a consultant from an educational institution may be able to assist in the hiring and/or training of the coordinator and council. Shared resources and interagency cooperation may develop as arrangements for office space and phone require a pooling of local resources.

3. Community Needs Assessment

After a structure for implementing community education is in place, the Citizens' Council usually undertakes a community needs assessment. This can be done either formally or informally with a written questionnaire, phone tree, community meeting, etc. The goal is to identify the needs in the community. While a part of this process might be to ascertain what classes people would like to take, or who would be willing to teach; another and at least equally important task is to list what residents see as the important issues and problems that need to be considered. These issues and/or problems may or may not result in class offerings.

4. Community Problem Solving

The core of the community education model is the process by which neighbors work together to solve common problems and meet common needs. In this step, resource sharing and interagency cooperation is critical. With the results of the needs assessment as a point of departure, the community council members and other residents begin the process of working out ways of solving identified problems, of creating programs and activities to meet identified needs and/or exploring the new problems and needs that are identified in the process of problem solving. For example, in one community a need to provide opportunities for isolated senior citizens to meet together for activities and classes may be identified. In the process of planning for this need, transportation problems might emerge. This new problem may be solved through interagency cooperative agreements whereby the local school district agrees to transport senior citizens, the local church donates space,

the Cooperative Extension agent agrees to provide programs and activities, and the local country store donates needed supplies. To round out the day, a woman's club may volunteer to prepare sack lunches. Through cooperative planning, many of the identified problems and needs can be addressed.

5. Program Implementation

This step is the most easily identified part of any community education program. As programs, classes, and activities are planned in Step 4, they are advertised, organized and begun in Step 5. Each community's approach in Step 4 provides a unique set of programs for Step 5. The coordinator and council members must now let everyone in the community know what is available. Whether the advertising is by fliers, posters, or word of mouth, it is important that the word be spread. In previous steps, council members have learned to work together toward common goals and common solutions. In this step their efforts meet public scrutiny. Opportunities for individual growth include learning promotion and advertising techniques, communication skills, organizational and management skills.

6. Ongoing Discussions and Redirections

Critical to the continued success of any community education structure is the process of continued evaluation and adjustments. Needs change as communities change. The beauty of the community education model is its flexibility. Community councils meet regularly to evaluate current programs and activities, to make necessary changes, and to respond to new issues that affect their community. Communities constantly cycle through Steps 3,4,5, and 6.

The Possibilities

Everyone Teaches - Everyone Learns leads to the development of human potential. Community education offers opportunities for rural adults to learn—to grow in every activity in which they become involved. Some down-play the importance of macrame' or old-time movies in the church basement. But in reality, these simple low-cost educational efforts play a highly effective role in generating community spirit and uncovering the talents of community members. These efforts also can act as a springboard for community services such as daycare centers, community dinner theaters, handicapped recreational programs, literacy efforts, and other services which benefit individuals and communities.

In Montgomery County, Kentucky, Community Education sponsors a homebound adult basic education and literacy program. Instructors get to people who cannot get to classes – older people, young mothers, etc. and teach them at home. They offer classes in rural centers in subjects such as gardening, canning, and animal breeding. The Community Education program established a senior citizen center in a rural area. Senior citizens are transported to the local agencies with which they must deal. In the summer, school buses bring rural residents to town one day a week to swim. A health program was established for rural women and young children. These are just a few of the many activities sponsored by the Montgomery County Community Education Program. According to Don Patrick, the former director, "Through their guitar classes, Montgomery County turns out more pickers than anybody in the world."[9]

Russellville, Kentucky, has a new Community Education program and already boasts of classes on Civil War relics, puppet making, Black history, appetizers and hors d'oeuvres, and birdwatching. Russellville has an interesting approach to parent involvement by offering a voluntary pre-

school program on Saturday that involves both parents and children. Clarence Gamble, assistant superintendent, points out: "Our pre-school program is paid for by local funds and prepares both the parents and their children for active involvement with the schools. The community classes provide participants with a sense of belonging to the community and the schools. Many of these participants do not have children in our schools."[10]

Some of the outcomes a community and its residents can enjoy from an active community education program include:

increased community spirit	fuller use of public spaces
solutions to community problems	structures for bringing in credit classes
cultural activities	elimination of duplicated services
recreational activities	
increased public awareness	evaluation of community needs
organized volunteers	
increased intergenerational contacts	unified efforts
	reduced vandalism and crime
forums for discussion	

Community education benefits the individual as well as the community. Participation in community education activities can enable people to:

use their talents	train for job skills
develop self-confidence	develop better communication skills
make friends	
gain experience in public speaking	develop better leadership skills
develop organizational skills	develop skills in resource analysis
become involved in community life	develop skills in information gathering
develop decision making abilities	develop skills in public relations
enroll in credit classes	strengthen their sense of belonging to the community
develop self-initiative	

Conclusion

"Community education reflects the belief that learning is lifelong, and that self-help efforts foster human dignity, compassion, and individual pride. Community Education is a philosophy, a way of looking at public education. Community education programs work precisely because they are designed by local residents to meet local needs."[11]

Peaks Mill is a unique community. Its uniqueness lies in what it shares with hundreds of thousands of other unique communities across the U.S.A. In Peaks Mill, community education is a "Frontier Days" celebration, classes, a parade complete with a police car, a fire engine and assorted bicycles, a ball tournament sponsored by the Ruritan Club. Farmers in Peaks Mill, as a result of a community education class entitled "Using Computers for Small-Farm Management," may decide to pool their money to purchase a modum to link the school computer with free farm programs available through the state university and cooperative extension program. High school students can then use this same equipment for their computer education classes.

Like hundreds of thousands of rural communities across our nation, Peaks Mill can mold the community education model to fit its needs. And through community education, they have an opportunity to improve the quality of life.

Notes

1. Interview with Phyllis Rogers, Community Education Instructor, Frankfort, Kentucky, January 7, 1986.
2. Interview with Lee Troutwine, Chair, Franklin County Community Education Board, Frankfort, Kentucky, February 10, 1986.
3. Interview with Doe Martin, citizen, Grayson County, Kentucky, December 27, 1985.
4. Ricardo Barros, **Rural-Hispanic Community,** Community Education Proven Practices Series, (Chama Valley Independent School District #19), p. i.
5. Jesse Stuart, quoted in University for Man, Division of Continuing Education, **The Rural and Small Town Community Education Manual** (Manhattan: University for Man, 1980), p. 1.
6. Larry E. Decker, **People Helping People,** Community Education How to Series, No. 1 (Midland: Pendell Publishing Co., 1976), p. 4.
7. Franklin County Community Education, **An Overview of Community Education in Franklin County, Kentucky** (Frankfort: Franklin County Community Education, 1983) p. 2.
8. Decker, **op. cit.,** p. 6.
9. Interview with Don Patrick, Former Director of Community Education, Montgomery County, Mount Sterling, Kentucky, February 13, 1986.
10. Interview with Clarence Gamble, Assistant Superintendent, Russellville Independent Schools, Russellville, Kentucky, February 13, 1986.
11. Mary Richardson Boo and Larry E. Decker, **The Learning Community** (Washington, D.C.: National Community Education Association, 1985), p. 1-2.