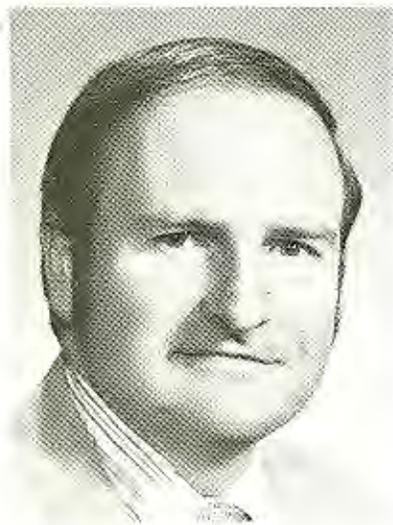# The community education level development process: a taxonomy

by William F. O'Neil

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During the past decade much has been written about community education and community schools. Authors have correctly portrayed the community education concept as an approach to many of the social and educational problems that are plaguing this nation and keeping it from social greatness. No more need be written here concerning the potential of community education—it has all been said! Writers such as Ernest Melby have expressed the potential impact of community schools on social progress very succinctly.

It is true that we must still bring the message to the uninitiated. This is part of the "Missionary Zeal" which appears to be a commonality among people in the field. But what do the initiated do? They have the philosophy and also a series of component models to use for their own needs. Is this enough when every model reduced to paper appears to imply that "their" approach meets most of the generally accepted philosophical tenets in the literature?

It is this writer's belief that all school models have to progress through an ordered series of phases or levels in order to implement the various component parts of the philosophy as articulated in the national writings. This is not to say that every model will develop to every level. Indeed many apparently acceptable models never proceed beyond level four in the accompanying taxonomy.

One should not be overly concerned about how other models are developed or indeed if their level has been superseded by others. The key question is: does our model meet the level requirements which are appropriate for our community as determined by both school and community representatives? If the answer to the question is affirmative, then community and school people alike need not be concerned about the level development of other institutions, nor should they be overly concerned with the articulated philosophy of the national movement.

It is sufficient to say that any model has to pass through certain steps to become successful. It is not enough to know that certain communities have been successful. Communities must know the process from initiation through fulfillment. The community education level development process is an attempt to guide any community school model. The taxonomy is not intended as a model itself. Emphasis has been placed on community schools in this taxonomy because they are the major delivery system in the field of community education.

The taxonomy follows:

Level:

1. The establishment of initial support mechanisms.
2. The assessment of proper utilization of expanded facility operations.
3. The initiation of formal and/or informal community communication structures.
4. The development of community based program components.
5. The involvement of the community education coordinator in community need fulfillment, other than program.
6. The blending of community volunteer, professional, and other paid personnel in all aspects of the school.
7. The adaptation of portions of the curriculum to meet the esoteric needs of the community.
8. The convening of necessary public and/or private social agency services around the community school.

It has already been stated that not all schools will embrace all eight levels and that level attainment should not be based on the arbitrary decision making of a building coordinator. Decisions in this development process should be made, when possible, on objective data gathering evaluation procedures. Evaluation should be mandated on levels two through eight.

The levels of this taxonomy are based upon a continuum with the exception of levels seven and eight which could be reversed in certain circumstances.

The latter portion of this article will deal with a brief explanation of individual levels. This discussion will only suggest what might occur in order to achieve each level—most of that process would be determined by the specifics of the particular community. The explanations given here are designed *only* as a clarification of the taxonomy.

Level 1: The establishment of initial support mechanisms

A community cannot begin the development of community education until both the formal and informal power structures give a measure of support to the concept. How this is accomplished depends largely on the individual community. It is appropriate to say that both elected and appointed school officials would be logical individuals to contact. Business and service organizations are important to the community and should also be included.

The support process could not function without a direct relationship with lay citizens served by the community school. The person or persons first attempting level one should seek people in the community who seem to exercise a degree of leadership. As these people are identified and convinced, the support mechanism should escalate.

The person first attempting to introduce the movement in a given community need not have professional educational qualifications but only a good grounding in the basic philosophy of community education. As the levels increase, so will the necessity of increased professional preparation. Specific knowledge of school organizational and curriculum patterns is necessary in levels seven and eight of the taxonomy as formal curriculum activities are included.

Level 2: The assessment of proper utilization of expanded facility operations.

Most buildings provide some space that can be used for expanded operations which are necessary for a community education program. The people involved in this level of activity will obviously be guided to a great extent by those facilities which are available in their school building. For example: If there is no large flexible use area, then group size would be a consideration in program planning.

Where new construction is contemplated, this level takes on increasing importance and involves a great deal more latitude in the development of ideas for the planners. Flexible, multi-use areas planned for individuals of any age must be uppermost in the planners mind. Individuals of all ages must be considered equally when planning a community school.

Minzy and Le Tarte state:

"At the risk of educational heresy, Community

Education believes that education facilities should be available to all persons with need on an equal basis. Based upon this belief, it then becomes necessary to develop educational specifications which take into account the differences in age, size, and availability of those served."[1]

If level two is developed by professional staff, it is essential that they work in concert with members of the community in planning a new facility or in ascertaining utilization of an older structure.

A neighborhood survey should be undertaken to determine other facilities that might be used for programming outside the school building. Community education programs are not limited to any given structure.

Level 3: The initiation of formal and/or informal community communication structures.

Communication is the most important ingredient for any successful community education endeavor. Various forms of communication have been established from informal "door knocking" surveys and leader identification to the more formalized community school advisory councils.

The difficulty encountered on this level is that of making certain that substantial process as well as ritualized application of a program is taking place. Dr. Seay, in his recent book, describes this ritualized application as the institutional process, which uses testimony from the literature or from a neighboring community rather than objective data that was generated to determine need, to develop community education activities.[2]

Many councils, for example, are successfully elected or appointed, but little is done to impress upon the members that a major duty is to develop communication links with community and other interested individuals. The community education coordinator cannot accomplish communication without an effective and permanent community link. In short, there is more to being a council member than going to meetings.

The school administration must define for council members the legal system under which all public schools operate. Advisory councils are frequently not told that many state regulations limit flexibility on the individual school level. The council members can utilize their right to initiate action to have any offending regulation altered, and must realize that the principal cannot affect all desired changes on his own authority.

Goals and objectives should be developed so that progress can be measured and communicated to the school's constituency. The community council should be used as a vehicle to reach the entire community with information. The council can be a major force in bringing community reactions to the school.

Level 4: The development of community based program components.

It is important to demonstrate to the community that the school implements the community education philosophy. One of the elements that the school can deliver at level four is the program component.

Adults, teenagers, and children can be served by academic and other activities which are designed around the basic needs structure of the immediate service area.

The author believes that to attempt high level community involvement before some successful attempt by the school at program development could cause people to be disenchanted with efforts demonstrated in levels 1-2. Some people might begin to think that community education is just another empty phrase that claims to promote the betterment of their school-community. This would be particularly true in urban schools where the people have been promised so much by various federal anti-poverty programs, but have received very little to help them better their lives and the lives of their children.

When the program component is functioning, it can then be used as a positive reinforcement toward the development of a harmonious sense of community.

Additionally, by getting people into the building, the program allows the school staff, community education coordinator and principal to meet more people and expand the basis for community involvement. When a successful program is established, the school and community are ready for the fifth level.

Level 5: The involvement of the community school director in community need fulfillment, other than program.

Community educators have difficulty fulfilling many of the people's needs because of the increasing demands made on their time for program development. Collectively, community school advocates are attempting to develop what in the field has come to be known as "process."

One key to the process is the daily time frame within which the community education coordinator operates. Most building directors spend time establishing, maintaining and monitoring programs. As the program becomes more effective, more time must be given to the above tasks. A successful coordinator in many community schools is the one who has the most programs.

In order to achieve true community involvement at level five, the director must leave the task of maintaining and monitoring programs to other people under his direction. Perhaps community volunteers could be used in this capacity. The coordinator must become the advocate of the constituency he serves. More time must be spent on community based problems that hinder implementation of the total concept. The coordinator must serve the community council as an ombudsman or advocate.

Only when the coordinator develops an awareness of community need that can preempt the school establishment can meaningful community involvement be accomplished.

Research strongly indicates that parents are vital to sound learning.[3] Certainly this necessitates that the community school become more responsive to community need than merely opening the school or other facilities on an extended basis.

Level 6: The blending of community volunteer, professional, and other paid personnel in all aspects of the school.

The community education movement has often been criticized for attempting to be all things to all people. That notion not withstanding, most people in the field fully recognize that they are only facilitators at best and that it takes a team to fully bring to fruition the idea of community education. The task of assembling the necessary expertise to help solve people's problems is an awesome responsibility. A responsibility that all community residents need to share. Teachers, teacher aides, and auxiliary personnel are important people in blending the community education philosophy into a practical, positive school climate.

The teacher of the future will need many people to help him/her carry out the development of teaching procedures that are commensurate with individual learning styles. The teacher will need leadership skill to meet classroom and other school needs.

Level 7: The adaptation of portions of the curriculum to meet the esoteric needs of the community.

The implementation of level seven is as difficult to accomplish as finding and welding a sense of community among a given community school population.

If K-12 is to be an important part of the community education philosophy as Minzey suggests,[4] then community educators have to bring about integration of basic cognitive needs and the demands of an ever changing society. One fact seems clear; merely the opening of school buildings is not community education.

The community must help the educator bring about the curriculum revision that meets the people's most immediate need and still provide for organizational change that will allow each individual, regardless of age, to grow in such a way that he may cope with change. The twenty-first century is upon us and as educators, we must adjust to technology. Technology is already causing serious problems in our society, both environmentally and in changing life styles.

The community school can become a social oasis that can cushion technological change by human friendship and interaction, as well as help prepare for its ceaseless advance.

Level 8: The convening of necessary public and/or private social agency services around the community school.

Community educators at this level should find ways to bring attention to community resources that can affect learning. Attention should be focused on the total neighborhood environment.

In order to bring the neighborhood to regard learning as a life long necessity, educators must develop a prescriptive approach to learning, utilizing community resources. Every teacher must become a diagnostician of each student's learning needs. To establish learning needs, a teacher should have all available informational input that the expertise of the various community service agencies have to offer. This material could then be added, in the case of children to the information the school already has to complete the profile on each child. Educators have to utilize this pool of data in the classroom if they are to be successful. If the community school is to carry out all of the dictates of the philosophy, they will need multi-agency expertise in addition to what they already possess.

Summary

All community schools need to have a step process or taxonomy to bridge the gap between model and program. The development of levels will also allow for an orderly accountability process. Objectives and procedures can be divised for each level. The taxonomy also attempts to bring into focus the process elements of community education that are associated with a community school.

It has been the experience of this writer that many people in community education ask for ideas that will allow for articulated development of all the elements of the community education philosophy. This taxonomy is an attempt to meet such requests.

Footnotes

1. Minzey, Jack D. and Le Tarte, Clyde. *Community Education from Program to Process.* Pendell Publishing, Midland, Michigan, (1974) p. 231.

2. Seay, Maurice F. at. el. *Community Education: A Developing Concept,* Pendell Publishing Co., Midland, Michigan, (1974) pp. 86, 87.

3. Rockwell, Robert E. and Liddle, Gordon P. "Modifying the School Experiences of Culturally Handicapped Children in the Primary Grades." Quincy, Ill.: Quincy Youth Development Commission, (June, 1964).

4. Minzey, Jack D. "Community Education Another Perception," *Community Education Journal,* Vol. IV., (May-June 1974) p. 7.

Facility planning assistance for local schools

The Center for Extended Services of the College of Education at Kansas State University is organized for the specific purpose of providing assistance and services to local school systems throughout the state of Kansas and the Midwest geographic region. Conducting educational facility planning studies is one of several services offered by the Center. Usually such a study is initiated by a school system wanting to obtain a professional outside evaluation of existing facilities plus a study of potential alternatives for needed facility expansion or improvement.

On being contacted by a school system, a representative of the Center will under normal circumstances visit with the local Board of Education at a regularly scheduled Board meeting, to provide an overview of the specific kinds of facility evaluation and planning activities which might be appropriate to that school system situation. At this initial meeting an opportunity is also afforded to clarify in general terms the facility issues in question, and to thus establish a working understanding of the goals and objectives of the district. After this initial meeting, the Center for Extended Services staff will prepare a contract which specifies in detail exactly what services will be provided to the district by the Center. This contract is subsequently signed by the President of the Board of Education, the local superintendent of schools, and by appropriate personnel from Kansas State University.

A complete facility study will usually include an evaluation and examination of all buildings owned by the district, a review of building sites that are currently owned by the district, a determination of new sites which might be needed, and a determination of student population characteristics and future trends which provide an indication of building needs.

A written report is prepared and submitted to the local Board at the conclusion of the study. This report usually sets forth a series of facility recommendations which are incorporated into a comprehensive 5-year Capital Improvement Program plan for the district. A final meeting is scheduled by the Center's director with the local Board of Education to discuss and review the study and recommendations.

For information about this service, contact G. Kent Stewart, Center for Extended Services, College of Education, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506.