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# The community school director— a changing role

by Pat Edwards and Stuart Parsell



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The Community School Director in the local school or town has one of the key roles in the delivery and implementation of the community education concept. In the recent transition from the traditional in-school, school house oriented programming to community-based, citizen-involved education, the role of the Community School Director has greatly expanded. The background of the evolution of the role of the Community School Director is necessary in order to understand this evolution.

## Evolution of the Role of the Community School Director

The rapid growth of community education has been one of the most dynamic educational trends of the past decade. The implementation of the community education concept, as recognized today, began in Flint, Michigan, in 1935. Frank J. Manley, former Director of Physical Education and Recreation in Flint, realized the potential of "lighting the school house" after 3 o'clock and secured funds from Charles Stewart Mott to operate an "after-school recreation program for boys" in the Flint public school buildings. Most of the initial funds were utilized to employ part-time employees whose responsibilities included building security, program operation and the procuring and maintaining of equipment. Most of the part-time employees were lay people, not trained in the field of recreation. They were employed full-time in other lines of work. In the Flint system, the use of part-time people as "building directors," was initiated in 1935 and continued into the mid-1950's.

The program mushroomed, and the schools became the center of community education in Flint. It soon became evident that personnel specialized in the techniques of community education were essential. In 1951, the full-time position of Community School Services Director (later renamed Community School Director) was established. By 1958, every public school in Flint had a Community School Director whose main community education responsibility was to "program" afterschool and evening recreational activities for children and adults. Historically, the initial role of the Community School Director was that of a "programmer."

Traditionally, Community School Directors were selected from the ranks of teachers; therefore scheduling, promoting, staffing, and supervising recreational activities were tasks commensurate with their levels of experience and education.

As the Flint community school model began to be emulated elsewhere, many of the Flint "experienced-trained programmers" were hired to implement the community education concept in various school districts; thus the "program" community school model was developed sporadically across the United States.

Less than three decades have passed since the full-time Community School Director position was developed in Flint, Michigan. Today, over 3,000 Community School Directors are employed throughout the United States. Many of the traditional patterns of the evolution of the role of the Community School Director exist today, that is, directors are selected from the ranks of teachers; they are responsible for building security, program operation and procuring and maintaining equipment; and they are programmers for after-school and evening recreational and educational activities for children and adults.

### From Program-Centered to Process-Centered

While the role of the Community School Director has changed very little in the past three decades, the community education philosophy has gone through a great transition. The "after-school recreation program for boys" of the late 1930's has evolved into the "lifetime educational process for the community," as illustrated below:

| Components | 40 Years     |                   |
|------------|--------------|-------------------|
|            | Late 1930's  | Late 1970's       |
| 1st        | after-school | lifetime          |
| 2nd        | recreational | educational       |
| 3rd        | program      | process           |
| 4th        | for boys     | for the community |

The first, second and fourth components of the above illustration have been effectively implemented in practice by Community School Directors. In general, a variety of educational, social, health and recreational programs and services are offered to the entire community throughout the day and/or year.

The third component in the above illustration—the "program-process" component is the most difficult to define; to understand; to observe; and consequently, to implement.

Community education is essentially an educational and community development process—a process based on the assumption that people within communities must be allowed avenues for involvement in identifying concerns, mobilizing community resources, making decisions and implementing actions which bring about educational and community development.

The genius of community education is found in the process—a process of doing and becoming. Community Education is not a bag of tricks, a gimmick or a package that can be superimposed upon a community. It is a process through which individuals and communities discover themselves and each other. The process provides for discovery and rediscovery. Rediscovery of the joy of learning and the excitement of commitment, the interdependence of individuals and the need for community action. . . . The result is a continuous process of self discovery, a sense of individual and community achievement that fosters a positive self concept and pride in 'our school' and 'our community.'

"Process," as described is central to the philosophical definition of community education. However, one should note that there is a vast difference between the philosophical claims of current community educators and the actual programs in operation.

The gap between the "process" component and current practice must be closed if the community education concept is to survive, and one of the most important persons in implementing such a move is the Community School Director. Today's Community School Director tends to be program-centered and school-based. Tomorrow's Community School Director needs to be *process-centered* and *community-based*. The two dimensions, program-centered and process-centered are not at opposite ends of the same continuum; they are dimensions which are more appropriately described as being mutually exclusive. The effective Community School

Director is dependent upon the presence of both dimensions (program-centered and process-centered) and needs to identify the mix of the two dimensions which is most appropriate for the school-community in which he/she functions.

At this time, one of the largest deterrants to the Community School Director assuming the "process" role is his perceived lack of knowledge, experience or skill in the role. Past experience or training has not provided theory or practice in the areas of citizen involvement, power base, group facilitation, group problem-solving techniques, conflict management, personal risk, the role of the change agent and other "process" components necessary for effective leadership by the Community School Director.

A discussion of some basic tenets commensurate with the "process" component role, will allow Community School Directors an opportunity to assess their self-understanding and self-development in the process role and more importantly, the Community School Director will be able to assess the "administrative climate" which must be present in order for the Community School Director to "function" in the process role. This discussion will focus on three tenets: the relationship of the "helping people help themselves" philosophy to the Community School Director's feelings of personal adequacy; the attitude change necessary of school administrators; and the Community School Director as a facilitator in group decision-making.

### Philosophy: Helping People Help Themselves

The ultimate goal of education is to help people achieve more effective relationships with others and the environment in which they live. People are needed who can make decisions which enhance themselves as well as contribute to the welfare of others. Basic to this ultimate goal of life is the concept of "helping people help themselves." The Community School Director is first, and foremost, a professional in the "helping" professions. He must believe in the dignity of man.

The basic idea of democracy is a belief in the dignity and integrity of man—not just a few men, but all men everywhere and of every kind and description. We believe that when men are free and informed, they can find their own best ways. Our forefathers dared to adopt this dream as a basic tenet of our way of life, and little by little, over the years, we have come closer and closer to making it a reality. The fulfillment of the democratic ideal, however, will depend upon how successful we are in producing people who can act with intelligence, independence, and responsibility. We must have people who are well-informed, who can make up their own minds, and who can be counted upon to behave in ways that contribute to the welfare of others as well as themselves. To aid in the achievement of these ends we have invented the "helping" professions.<sup>2</sup>

Professional helpers must be thinking, problem-solving people; and the primary tool with which they work is themselves. Perhaps most basic to the effectiveness of a community educator is his feeling of personal adequacy. He must have a positive self-image. In order to do this, the Community School Director must have worked through his own personal problems and goals and brought

them in line with the goals of community education. Minzey and LeTarte in *Community Education: From Program to Process*, state:

There are certain things which the person working with the community must ascertain about himself, and then attempt to develop between himself and the community. One of the first things is to analyze his own goals and motives. It is very easy for the director to establish himself as a leader and to try to achieve both political and personal power. He must be sure that his goal is the self actualization of the community and not one of self-aggrandizement. He is also not a person who obtains his own desires by use of the power he has through community backing. Instead, his role is one of showing the community how, by working together through a certain process, they can attack and solve many of their own problems. If the director is successful, the group will develop no dependency on him and will often not recognize his total contribution nor his later absence from the group.<sup>3</sup>

Community School Directors, depending on their self-adequacy beliefs, operate at three levels: helping self, helping others and helping others help themselves.

Level one, *helping self*, refers to a Community School Director who has feelings of personal inadequacy. "Inadequate" feelings are visible in "I-centered" behavior, such as ego-tripping, building empires, protecting "turf." He is more intent on helping himself than clients or the community. Frequent vocabulary words of the Community School Director are "my program," "my school," "I started," etc. At this level, the Community School Director is not effective in "helping people help themselves" and is not involved in the process role of community education.

Level two, *helping others*, refers to a Community School Director who has feelings of personal adequacy to the extent that he can productively give service to others; i.e., supplying information and answering questions which satisfy immediate needs of clients or the community. The Community School Director is satisfied (feels successful) when he is able to provide a requested service. Frequent vocabulary words of the level two Community School Director are "the program," "the school," etc. At this level the Community School Director is helpful, perhaps, but not effective in "helping people help themselves," nor is he involved in the process role of Community Education.

Level three, *helping others help themselves*, refers to a Community School Director who has strong feelings of personal adequacy at least to the extent that he can effect constructive change in the behavior of others. The Community School Director is satisfied (feels successful) when he provides opportunities for others to experience self-growth: to develop skills for decision-making; to effect changes which enhance the client as well as contribute to the welfare of others and the community. Effective helping is not accomplished when the Community School Director knows the answers and provides the answer to the clients. As a matter of fact, the Community School Director may know the answer and, on occasion, not provide it to the client; rather he will provide the client with the skills or methods necessary to discover the answer for himself. Effective helping is accomplished only when a change for the better occurs in the life of a client or the community seeking help. Frequent vocabulary words of the level three Community School Director are "our program," "our school," "my error," "the community council's efforts," etc. At this level, the Community School Director is effective in "helping people help themselves" and is involved in the process role of community education.

Being an effective Community School Director in the process role involves "personal risk"—risk which can be effectively initiated primarily by Community School Directors with realistic, healthy self-concepts and a sound, power base.

People who see themselves in positive ways live in a less threatened world, and more of their experience is likely to seem challenging to them. They can risk involvement. They dare to try. They may even find joy in the confrontation of problems.<sup>4</sup>

#### Current Attitude Change of School Administrators

Current demands for more community participation in education are being received by many school administrators with reluctance and fear. Concerns over loss of power, crisis operation, evaluation, unilateral decision making, as well as a lack of knowledge and experience in citizen involvement in education, add to the reluctance expressed by administrators. Traditionally, school administrators have been able to make school decisions with little or no input from the community; however, those days are over and there is no sense in administrators currently continuing to block avenues of citizen involvement. Traditional administrator types are frightened of community "control"—perhaps a legitimate concern; however, if proper avenues for citizen involvement are

#### Self Assessment:

Where do I, as a Community School Director, place myself on the continuum of personal belief in my own adequacy as a professional in "helping people help themselves":

|      |   |   |   |   |                   |   |                  |   |   |                 |
|------|---|---|---|---|-------------------|---|------------------|---|---|-----------------|
| 0    | 1 | 2 | 3                                       | 4 | 5                 | 6 | 7                | 8 | 9 | 10              |
| None |   |   | Need more feelings of personal adequacy |   | I think "I'm OK!" |   | I know "I'm OK!" |   |   | Self-actualized |

**As a Community School Director, how much personal risk am I willing to take:**

| 0    | 1  | 2 | 3  | 4 | 5 | 6   | 7 | 8 | 9  | 10 |
|------|--|---|--|---|---|---|---|---|--|----|
| None | Some-so long as I know the outcome is going to be successful |   | Some-so long as someone else takes the blame if the outcome isn't successful |   |   | More-after I've helped establish an atmosphere for change |   |   | Alot-to the extent that others involved can share the recognition for success, I'll take the responsibility for my actions |    |

allowed in the educational process, "control," in its negative sense, will not develop. Only when people have had no opportunity for involvement will they become so incensed, as to demand complete "control."

School administrators, particularly principals, are becoming increasingly aware of the new demand on their time. Kerensky and Melby in *Education II, Revisited* describe the principal's role in the process of community education:

With total community education the principal's concern is not only for the children but for all of the people within the area. Principals must relate not only to the teachers and the children but to all of the people and to all of the agencies within their communities. Their educational resources have become not only those in the school house but include those found throughout the community. The primary leadership task, therefore, is not to tell people what they need in education, but rather to ask what they want and feel they need! Administratively the task then becomes the mobilization of the community's educational resources. To date, we have achieved only a glimpse of the scope and power that true community education can bring to the principalship.<sup>5</sup>

Kerensky and Melby comment further on the inherent difficulty in assuming the desired role change:

It is not easy for superintendents and principals who have grown up in the old vertical organization to adapt themselves to the type of leadership community education demands. Distribution of decision making often threatens such leaders. They have to learn how to share, share power and share credit for accomplishment. They have to acquire the humility to listen, to function as a member of a group, to admit they are at times wrong, to grant the superiority of others, to be ready to discard their own proposals for those of others if these are found more desirable.<sup>6</sup>

The principal must become the leader of the community school and accept the responsibility demanded by this expanded role. The Community School Director becomes a member of the principal's team as a catalytic agent in the community education process. Both the principal and Community School Director are dependent upon each other's attitude, directions and responsibility for the community education process. Dr. Peter Clancy, Community Education Superintendent of the Flint (Michigan) Community Schools stated, "The principal is the key. Match an effective Community School Director with an ineffective principal and the community education process is diminished radically. If a relatively ineffective Community

School Director is placed with an effective principal, chances are—growth will take place, and the community education concept will develop for the good of the community."

Simply initiating a community school by board action or employing a Community School Director does not indicate the development of the community education concept. The real difference may be the administrator's feelings of personal adequacy, his willingness to take risks and his attitude toward a team approach to facilitation of citizen involvement avenues.

**The Community School Director as a Facilitator in Group Problem Solving**

The "leadership role" of the Community School Director in the process of community education, is one of "facilitator"—one who assumes leadership only long enough to identify or develop leadership in others. His job demands that others be helped to take on leadership responsibility, after that is accomplished the Community School Director assumes a "followership" role.

The Community School Director, as a facilitator in group problem solving (such as Community Advisory Councils, Task Forces) is responsible first for "creating a climate" in which all group members are encouraged to participate, to share and to create. Essential to the functioning of any "on-going" group is the development of group "trust"—a realization by individual group members that every member has a responsibility to share equally (time-wise) in input and listening—including the Community School Director. In the initial meetings, as well as subsequent meetings, activities need to be planned (and on the Agenda) to allow for member participation.

Another skill needed by the Community School Director in the process role is a thorough understanding and experience with the "brain-storming technique" of group problem-solving. Through *proper* use of this technique a continued climate for group participation is enhanced. The technique allows for input from the total group; allows several solutions to materialize as action alternatives to a problem; allows opportunities for leadership to develop as several group members assume the responsibilities inherent in accomplishing the various solutions; and allows the group to experience "group success" or "group failure" through the efforts of the group and its individual members.

The Community School Director, as a facilitator in group-processing, soon realizes: that his ideas may or may not be among the accepted solutions; that groups are willing to take the recognition for successes, but would like the Community School Director to "receive credit" for

**Self Assessment**

Where do I, as a Community School Director, place my immediate supervisor (principal, superintendent?) on the continuum of willingness to take risk as a team in citizen involvement as it relates to the process of community education:

| 0   | 1    | 2 | 3                         | 4                            | 5 | 6   | 7   | 8 | 9   | 10 |
|---|------|---|---------------------------|------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| I don't know who my immediate supervisor is!! | None |   | He will read this article | He will discuss this article |   | He has been waiting for me to take the responsibility by myself | He is willing to try citizen involvement on a small scale |   | He is willing to "risk" a lot more than I am! |    |

failures; and that motivating citizens to take responsibility for action is the *critical point* in the process of "helping people help themselves." After a group has accomplished the process of identifying a problem, selecting solutions, and has developed action plans, the Community School Director has the ideal opportunity to stimulate leadership within the group. It is *critical* that, at this point, the Community School Director *does not* volunteer to accept or receive through appointment, the major responsibility for implementing actions adopted by the group. The group will learn to take responsibility for its actions *only* when it has had the experience of assuming and carrying out responsibility. If no group leadership can be found for a specific solution, then the group must be willing to drop the solution or find another alternative. If a Community School Director has accepted major responsibility for the group's action, he will be expected to continue in this role—developing his own skills at the expense of "helping people help themselves."

The number of lay citizens involved in Community Advisory Councils is not an indication of the process of community education—**Continued Involvement** is! Once the lay citizen is involved, continued involvement will result if Community Schools Directors continue to create a climate whereby the citizens have the opportunity to take an active part in the process of "community" education.

Kerensky and Melby have stated that "The discovery of the power of lay participants in education may well be the most important educational discovery of many

decades." It is the Community School Director, as a part of the administrative team, who must assume the facilitator role in the process of community education to assure the effective involvement of the lay citizen in the education process.

**Conclusion**

This discussion has described three components in the "process" role of the Community School Director. The reader has had the opportunity to assess his personal adequacy, his group facilitation skills and his immediate supervisor's attitude in the "process" role. A level near or above "7" on *all* of the assessment continuums indicates a "healthy climate" which should foster citizen involvement in education. Levels below "7" indicate areas where work needs to be done. The Community School Director has the responsibility to improve his personal adequacy, his group facilitating skills and in prompting a change of attitude and role identification for his immediate supervisor.

Intentionally, we have discussed components in the process role that are directly associated with the role of the Community School Director. In order for the "process" of community education to occur, the top administration (school board, superintendent, etc.) must be committed to the process concept. The "process" role of the "Principal-Community School Director team" must be authorized and the power and support granted from top administration.

**Self Assessment**

Where do I, as a Community School Director, place myself in the continuum of having the ability to be a "facilitator" in problem solving groups

| 0          | 1   | 2 | 3 | 4  | 5 | 6 | 7   | 8 | 9   | 10 |
|------------|---|---|---|--|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| Forget it! | First, I better give a speech to the Kiwanis Club |   |   | As long as a group means two or less—I'm game! |   |   | I can't wait for next week's Community Advisory Council, now I've got the idea! |   | I've done it and experienced the immeasurable feeling of watching individuals & the community grow! |    |

**Self Assessment**

**How committed is the top administration of our school system to the "process" component of community education:**

| 0                           | 1                                       | 2 | 3                       | 4 | 5                     | 6 | 7                                | 8 | 9   | 10 |
|-----------------------------|---|---|-------------------------|---|-----------------------|---|----------------------------------|---|---|----|
| Won't consider process role | Wants community school programming only |   | Verbalizes process role |   | "allows" process role |   | Fosters, encourages process role |   | Committed (mandates) process role through structural avenues to citizen involvement |    |

If the school or community allows the Community School Director to work in a process role, then he in turn has an excellent opportunity to initiate or implement the process role of community education. If the top administration in the system exhibits traditional, non-democratic behavior, the Community School Director is destined to be a "programmer." Many systems and administrators will never change. The Community School Director within such a system has a choice: remain a "programmer" within the system—or look elsewhere. He should seek a position where the "climate" for process is evident, in a system a "step ahead" in actualizing citizen involvement in education.

**Footnotes**

1. V.M. Kerensky, and E.O. Melby, *Education II, Revisited*, (Midland: Pendall Publishing Co., 1976), pg. 187.
2. Arthur W. Combs, Donald L. Avila, and William W. Purkey, *Helping Relationships*, (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1971), pg. 2.
3. Jack Minzey and Clyde LeTarte, *Community Education: Program to Process*, (Midland: Pendall Publishing Co., 1972), pg. 37.
4. Combs, *Helping Relationships*, pg. 147.
5. Kerensky, *Education II*, pp. 148-9.
6. Kerensky, *Education II*, pg. 159.
7. Kerensky, *Education II*, pg. 167.

# An invitation to Community Educators

**Educational Considerations** from its inception in the Spring of 1973 has displayed a consistent involvement in community education.

The editorial staff wishes to follow up this interest. We are planning to include further articles by authors in the field. We would encourage new readers who are professional community educators to consider submitting an article and also to start a subscription with us.

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