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When I think of a community, I think of people. When I think of education, I think of all kinds of teaching-learning experiences—formal classes, apprenticeships, real-life problems being solved, advice being given, examples being set, human relationships being worked out and so forth. When I think of Community Education, I think of various systems, that is, institutions, organizations and other formalized groupings. These are the community instruments for developing and administering most of the classes, apprenticeships, problem-solving efforts, formal advising, and planned human interactions, which constitute much of the educational experience.

The nature and activity of these systems is the basic determinant of what might be called the *educational climate* in the community. These *systems* include, among others, school systems, (public and private), parks and recreation systems, social agencies and organizations, businesses, labor organizations, political and governmental systems and so on. The term *educational climate* includes not only the numbers of learning opportunities available, but also the relevancy of those opportunities, the access of people to those opportunities, and the general attitude of the people to both the opportunities and the deliverers or processors of those opportunities. A community in which these systems consistently process *sufficient, relevant, accessible* opportunities to a *receptive* population is well on the road to becoming what some have called *the learning society* or what the Ball State Institute for Community Education Development staff refers to as *the fully functioning community*. The route to a fully functioning community is the development of a fully functioning Community Education process. A fully functioning community is one in which lifelong learning is a dominant ethic; the total community as a learning environment is the setting; the development of an effective, responsible citizenship is the goal; the development of a coordinated responsiveness of community service systems is the key strategy; and people involvement in participatory decision-making is the central feature.

In creating comprehensiveness, relevancy, accessibility, and public confidence, the essence of a Community Education effort which moves toward the *learning society*, it seems to me, is the development of systems which become increasingly *open*, that is, have more and more direct interaction with the community, both with the people and with other systems. The notion is that broad-based relevance and accessibility and public confidence in the systems are related to the degree of *openness* of those systems, individually and collectively. In implementing a more extensive Community Education approach, the issue is *not* simply whether to expand service/program dimensions, but whether to alter the fundamental nature of the systems in the direction of more *openness*.

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The school as an example of system openness

The *openness* concept can be illustrated on a programmatic level by a careful examination of the major areas of activity in a comprehensive school system Community Education effort. Public school participation in Community Education seems to have five potential focuses: K-12 schooling, extended K-12 schooling (pre-school and adult), leisure education, community problem solving and community based education. *K-12 schooling* (youth) refers to the kindergarten thru twelfth grade schooling for the young. *Extended K-12 schooling (pre-school and adult)* refers to those activities, primarily academic and/or vocational in nature, which are a normal part of the K-12 curriculum and are made available to the pre-school and adult populations. *Leisure education* refers to recreational, avocational, enrichment and social activities. The addition of these activities to the school curriculum typifies the now familiar "community schools" or "lighted schoolhouse" movements. *Community problem solving* refers to the kind of educational activity required to deal with such matters as environmental usage, energy usage, the aging process, public housing, public health, vandalism, neighborhood problems and so forth. *Community based education* refers to school participation as a peer resource system in the community's educational activity outside of the school facilities and outside of the school's administrative domain.

If put in a pyramidal structure as follows, each focus in ascending order not only adds an extra area of program activity, but indeed commits the system which administers the programs to a more open-ended kind of interaction with the community, both in terms of the people to be served and the kind of activities that may have to occur. In fact, the community problem solving focus and the participation in a community-based pattern presume a willingness by the school system to address situations that arise in whatever manner is necessary. In effect, the pyramid demonstrates that each focus represents a different *level* of openness. As we ascend the pyramid, we see an increasing breadth of responsibility and, more importantly, an implied increase in open-ended interaction between system and environment (community).
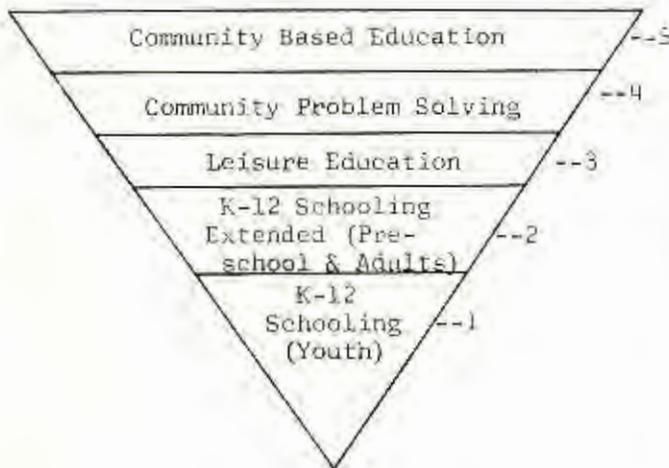
The pyramid levels also have a collective quality about them. That is, each level presumes the inclusion of the activities in the levels below it. With respect to *community problem solving* (level four), for example, to the extent that the academic needs of youth, adult education needs, early childhood education needs, leisure time learning needs, career learning needs, environmental learning needs, social learning needs, political learning needs, and the learning requirements for the solutions to individual and group problems are all situations about which the community must do something, then all of these categories of learning activity fall under the general heading of community problem solving. Similarly, implied in the term *community based education* is the notion that education is ultimately a function of the community and that the role(s) and location(s) of system activity, even those that are traditional, are subject to community definition and redefinition. There is also a further implication, that is, that at this level the system voluntarily participates in and becomes subject to community-based decision-making and planned coordination to the extent that such decision-making and coordination are active functions of the community.

What happens, of course, is that the school system decides which levels or focuses will be included in its local Community Education effort. In determining the composite focuses of its implementation, the system is defining its mission or role in the community and, consequently, the level of openness on which it "intends" to operate. However, *openness* consists of more than specified intentions. *Openness* involves at least the communication, planning, decision-making and resource allocation patterns of the system. The idea is that if the system intends to function effectively in the focus areas that it specifies as its mission, then it must adopt communication, planning, decision-making and resource allocation procedures which can support the system's efforts in those areas.
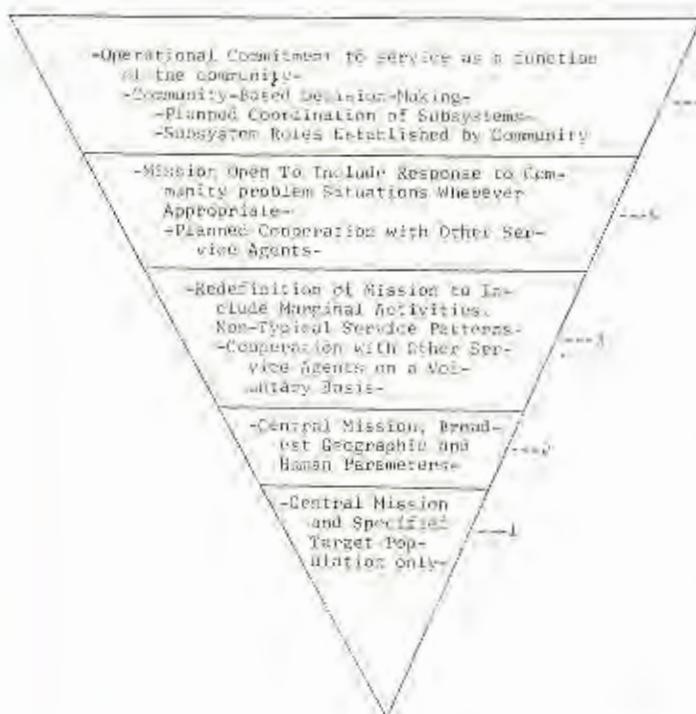
The resulting condition of a system which gears its communication, planning, decision-making and resource allocation to support the system mission is a particular level of *operational openness*. As the mission changes in dimension, the degree or level of openness of the system itself changes toward greater or lesser openness.

Several implications are evident here. Sometimes the mission of the system is determined less by what is appropriate for the community than by the degree of openness that system leaders can "tolerate" in their personal and professional behavior styles. Sometimes the system mission is determined on the basis of community needs, but the system fails to recognize the importance of adopting the *openness* characteristics necessary to support the mission. Sometimes well-meaning Community Education advocates promote the idea that the concept is simply a "program expansion" notion which does not require fundamental change by the system, but only some "additional" resources or activities.

The variable which identifies the relative condition of the system's Community Education effort at any given moment is system *openness*. The key indicators for fixing the degree of system openness are its role assumptions, its communication patterns, its planning procedures, and its resource allocation procedures. The reader should be cautioned that temporary and/or exceptional activity in any one of these indicator areas can produce inaccurate conclusions about system openness, if the exceptional indicator condition is the only factor considered.

Community Based Education --5

Community Problem Solving --4

Leisure Education --3

K-12 Schooling Extended (Pre-school & Adults) --2

K-12 Schooling (Youth) --1

2

Conditions in all indicator areas, taken together, produce a measurement of system openness which is certainly substantial and even possibly conclusive. The fact that a system, by virtue of incidental circumstance or temporary credibility requirements, may be able to point to programs or services or isolated people involvement actions does not mean that the system is operating at the level of openness which is apparent in those actions. The entire system operation must be examined. Operating assumptions must be identified and tested. Communications and decision-making patterns must be checked out. The isolated actions must be found to be consistent with the fundamental operational mode of the system.

In the same way that schools can be seen as *opening*, so can other agencies and organizations as they participate in the Community Education process. Each system can be described in Community Education terms as operating at a *level of openness* on the following five-level pyramid:

-Operational Commitment to service as a function of the community-
-Community-Based Decision-Making-
-Planned Coordination of Subsystems-
-Subsystem Roles Established by Community

-Mission Open To Include Response to Community problem Situations Wherever Appropriate-
-Planned Cooperation with Other Service Agents-

-Redefinition of Mission to Include Marginal Activities. Non-Typical Service Patterns-
-Cooperation with Other Service Agents on a Voluntary Basis-

-Central Mission, Broadest Geographic and Human Parameters-

-Central Mission and Specific Target Population only-

The school system pyramid previously described is a specific example of this general systems pyramid. The contention here is that similar specific pyramids can and should be developed for recreation departments, social agencies and other systems.

Multi-system openness = "Community" Education

If the relative condition of a system's Community Education activity is determined by that system's openness, then the nature of an entire community's condition is determined by the openness of its many systems acting in concert. The functions of individual systems can best be described by the phrase *participation in*, as in "school system participation in Community Education" or "the parks and recreation department participation in Community Education." *Community* Education refers to the conditions and processes which result from the multi-system interaction pattern, which in turn is determined by the openness of the individual systems.

Cooperation and coordination among systems comes first from their operating at a level of openness which structures the necessary interaction as logical operating procedure. Given the *openness* necessary in the operating systems, what remains to be done is the structuring of operational mechanisms (mutually agreed upon patterns or processes for initiating and maintaining ongoing interaction among the systems). Again, the key to this coordination dimension of the concept lies in the conscious *structuring of appropriate mechanisms* consistent with openness characteristics of the various systems involved. Although cooperation in any form or for whatever reason is ordinarily commendable, the principle being examined here is *not* found in cooperation efforts, incidental or long range, whose purpose is to comply with externally imposed sanctions or legal requirements or funding guidelines. Nor is the principle at work when the cooperation is the result of informal personal relationships developed by middle management people in the various systems to accomplish what the systems themselves can't do formally. The principle being described refers to a system level of openness and the resulting cooperative relationships which result from a consciously planned, fundamental operational mode for the system(s). Looking at Community Education from a systems perspective, one sees that the process for increasing the effectiveness of the multi-system Community Education effort should logically begin with working with individual systems to be more *open* and then move to establishing mechanisms for translating the greater openness into increased productive interaction. In arguing that the proper procedure for developing a cooperative Community Education climate is first to open each system and then develop *interaction mechanisms*, I am aware that the process is not as orderly or as clearcut as the argument suggests. Actually the mechanisms are developed *as the systems open*. However, the point is that a mechanism can't be expected to work if the systems are not *open* enough to participate at the level necessary for the mechanism to function productively.

At this point in the development of the Community Education concept across the country, the focus has largely been on *opening up* the school system in each community. It has been a *community schools* effort to increase the school system's *participation in Community Education*. The school system is a very important system, but only one of the many systems that effect the educational climate in any community. The *multi-system* approach is still largely untried. For this reason, the process for increasing cooperation among systems has often been one of creating a "mechanism" arbitrarily for the interaction (an agency council created by the schools, for example) and then trying to persuade systems to participate in the mechanism, without regard to the levels of operational openness in the systems or the type of mechanism which would best accommodate the operating conditions of the particular systems in question.

The ultimate hope

Community Education addresses the interrelationship, even the interdependence of public

schooling, adult education, early childhood education, leisure education, community problem solving and community development in a community educational pattern. It doesn't address any component so much from a programmatic point-of-view as from the matter of its place in the total educational pattern of the community. Program activities are necessary and important, of course, because serving people is the bottom line. But the question of *how* people are being served is at least as important as *how many* people are being served. Within the Community Education concept, the program activities have a special importance with respect to their *influence upon* and *relationship to* all of the other education that is going on in the community.

If recreators and public school people, for example, really believe in Community Education, they believe not only that cooperative programming and sharing facilities and resources make economic and public relations sense, but also that their educational missions are inevitably related, that they are dependent upon one another in an educational sense. What we are really aiming at, in the educational process, I would hope, is helping people to improve their self-images, helping people to learn to adjust to change, to create meaningful social patterns and relationships, to make better use of the environment, etc. It is unrealistic, I think, to assume that such matters as personal self-image, the aging process, peer social relationships, social change adjustment or effective environmental usage, either at the individual level or the community level, can be addressed by agencies acting unilaterally or in a loose programmatic alliance posture, where the main function of the alliance is to divide up the service pie and make sure that each agent doesn't interfere with the other's territory. Possibly one of the reasons that Community Education as a concept has been threatening to a good many people, including scores of public school people, is that in its broadest conceptual form, it says, "The old notion of territory is out-moded." It doesn't provide a basis for getting at the real socio-educational questions which confront us. The needs are not simple, but complex. Each one requires the joint action of many community systems in differing combinations. The resources must go where the need is and in whatever form the need requires. Although we need service systems of people with special skills, these systems must be less concerned about maintaining an exclusive organizational structure and territory and more concerned about adapting to the need requirements. Somehow there has to be created a consistent and effective process of multi-system decision-making and interaction to deal with education as the complex process that it is.

The ultimate hope of the Community Educator is that all systems participating in any form of educational endeavor will willingly and continuously relate to the larger community educational picture and will participate openly in multi-systems planning, decision-making, and implementing. The process of multi-system resource interaction, planning and decision-making which results in a community problem solving orientation for education is the focus of Community Education as practiced in its most conceptually-advanced form. Community Education then is community development in an educational sense or with *education of some kind* seen as the cornerstone of, and an ingredient in, all developmental community activity. It is a way of looking at education as multi-faceted, multi-system, interrelated sets of activities designed to produce some specific problem solutions and to promote the interactive pattern of community problem solving.

The director or coordinator

The visible Community Education structure for the multi-systems model becomes whatever administrative pattern functions best in the given community. Whether the processes and programs and resources are physically managed by someone formally titled "The Community Education Director" or other people is not the real question. In fact, it can be argued that as a programmer, the Community Education Director really is a recreator or an adult educator or a social director, stepping in and out of those roles as the occasion demands. In that case, the role of such a programmer in leisure education or adult education is exactly the same as the people who are called *recreators* and *adult educators*. He plans, implements and supervises activities as time and resources permit. And he is responsible for any programs that occur in his physical sphere of influence.

For many communities, Community Education is just this kind of catch-all programming with a jack-of-all-trades leader who does his thing. But if Community Education is really a systematic and purposeful mix of the community's educational forces, the community educator is not the expert or supervisor of any one of those forces, except as emergency requires such an action. Instead, Community Educators are motivators and facilitators for community problem analysis; for communication across geographic, social and organizational lines; for developing multi-system educational action designs or master plans; and for optimizing the involvement of community people in making action decisions. He/she is the *advocate* of education as a complex, community problem solving force and the *servant* of community individuals and organizations who want to participate in implementing such a concept.

For purely economic or other practical reasons, the Community Education leader(s) may be housed in one community system or in a position jointly created by two or three systems. Or, for local political reasons, there may be a need in some communities to create a *community* position, not directly tied to any single system. The intention here is not to argue the merits of alternative administrative structures.

Whatever the administrative pattern adopted, the kind of role that such people must play is clear. At least four role functions seem imperative: 1) community ombudsman or advocate, 2) community process person, 3) community information gatherer and disseminator, and 4) evaluator-analyst-reporter-to-the-community on the condition of the *educational climate*. These functions are to be contrasted with the other role such a person is expected to play, that of *community manipulator* for the system(s) which signs the paycheck. Parenthetically, this is to suggest that even where systems are interested only in better "public relations," they would do well to identify their community services or relations director as "the community's person on our premises" and then really encourage him/her to function in that role.

In the larger context, the Community Education leader has to be the community's person *on every system's premises.* And the real question which confronts

communities who are moving in Community Education directions is not "Do we want another leisure education director or adult education director?" but instead "Do we want to operate with a master educational plan for the community?" And for system leaders the questions are "Do we want to commit our respective systems to interaction and interdependence patterns prescribed by the problems to be solved, rather than the traditional missions of the interacting systems?" and "Are we willing to be coordinated in a decision-making process to which we contribute, but which our system does not unilaterally control?" The level of Community Education that a community can expect to actualize depends upon the answers.

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The Board of Directors of the National Community Education Association extends a cordial invitation to all educators and lay citizens to attend the National Community Education Association's 12th Annual Convention.