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Building blocks for a complete community education program:

A case for the deaf community

by Roland G. Frank



Roland "Ron" G. Frank is the Director of the Community Education Development Center at Gallaudet College in Washington, D.C. Dr. Frank assumed this position in June, 1976, and in the past has served as Director of the Northeast Community Education Center and as Associate Director of the Community Education Center at Western Michigan University. He has been active in Community Education since he was an intern with the Mott Leadership Program in 1964.

Since you are new to the community, you are happy to see the lights on in the local school building as you approach it in the evening for the first time. You notice that the word community has been added as a descriptor to the name of the building. Once inside there are many activities being carried on. There are classes in conversational French, classes in cooking, meetings of some parents who are very concerned about improving the services of the crossing guards and some citizens who are discussing local governmental issues with the local council representatives. Yes, this is a community school with a trained community school director, and advisory council. However some of the community is not involved in this school. Not the part of the community who chose not to participate, but a segment of the community that is left out because of the lack of understanding on the part of the community in general. I am speaking about the DEAF COMMUNITY within the general community.

You see, the deaf and hearing impaired community cannot benefit from the classes and discussions mentioned above without some very special considerations. In a recent survey conducted by Jerome D. Schein, the following four items were listed as the most important reasons for deaf adults not enrolling in continuing education classes:

1. Classes for deaf adults not available
2. Lack of qualified teachers for deaf adults
3. Not a sufficient variety of classes for deaf adults
4. Lack of qualified interpreters¹

The above four items are not meant to be an inclusive listing, but are an indication of some of the considerations that must be examined when developing a complete community education program. Mary E. Switzer and Boyce R. Williams gave some perspective on the need for special considerations when they stated:

Most deaf people have normal strength, mobility, and intelligence and strive for achievement within the limits society sets in response to their serious communications inadequacies. This then is the handicapping base of their disability. It is primarily psychosocial. It manifests itself in many ways, each of which is in turn an important life problem of the deaf people: under-involvement in the mainstream of community life; limited sharing with fellow men; lack of acceptance among family, neighbors, employers; severe under-employment, to mention a few.²

In order to begin to alleviate some of these psychosocial problems, special services need to be developed by the local community school director. Some of these are: making interpreters available to the deaf, utilizing captioned films for education and entertainment, developing and promoting sign language classes for the hearing population, running a special needs assessment for the deaf population in your area, developing special Adult Basic Education programs where appropriate, assist teachers of adult classes in obtaining special materials where appropriate.

Let us now turn to a discussion of how this all fits into the general concept of community education and then return to a description of where and how the local community school director can get and provide these services for the deaf.

Karl Weick in a recent article about educational organizations discussed the concept of loosely coupled systems and the implications for analyzing organizational behavior. In defining this concept he said:

By loose coupling, the author intends to convey the image that coupled events are responsive, but that each event also preserves its own identity and some evidence of its physical or logical separateness.³

Community education and community schools by their very nature are concepts loosely coupled to many organizations and groups. The deaf population is, in fact, a separate group due to their deafness, but they are part of the total community. The deaf are sometimes loosely linked to the hearing world by the taxes they pay, the goods and services they produce and purchase and the culture only then can impart to the hearing world. The evidence of the physical or logical separateness as described by Weick can be readily seen by the use of an interpreter or the captioning of an educational film. The fact that loose coupling does exist does not justify exclusion—in fact the opposite is true. Switzer and Williams stated it best when they said:

More marshalling of total community resources to the support of the subculture is essential to move local deaf groups from their current ghetto-like existence to the point where they can take pride in belonging and in involving their interested normally hearing friends and relatives.⁴

Let us now examine the possibilities for marshalling those community resources through the concept of community education which is already in the developmental stages in many communities. It does not seem wise to make an entirely new beginning in order to include the deaf population, which has been omitted. I believe that we can turn to the concept of coupling as an answer to this problem.

A final advantage of coupling imagery is that it suggests the idea of building blocks that can be grafted onto an organization with relatively little disturbance to either the blocks or the organization.⁵

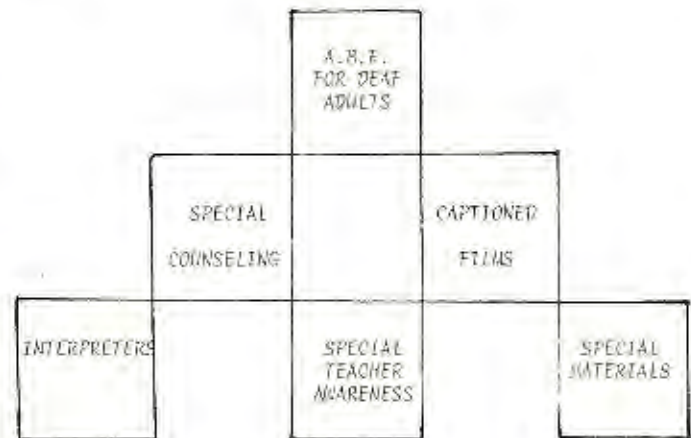
Figure One illustrates some of the blocks that have been used to design and build a typical community education program. These blocks have been chosen at random and are not to imply that these are the only components of a good community education program. Some of these blocks are conceptual and process oriented; e.g. development of inter-agency cooperation and some of the blocks are programmatic in nature; e.g. high school completion programs.

Figure 1. Building Blocks for a Typical Community Education Program



As Figure One illustrates there are some open spaces between each of the building blocks that will allow for additions without changing any of the basic structure of the organization. These additions will, in fact, give added strength and dimension to the organization. Figure Two illustrates the possible additions which could make for a stronger community education model and one which will begin to serve the deaf population of the community.

Figure 2. Building Blocks for a Community Education for the Deaf



You will note that these building blocks can be inserted into Figure One with ease. Thus a grafting of the blocks does not disturb either organization, but the grafting serves to demonstrate the concept of synergism—the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

The advisory council has been placed on top of Figure One because through this council the real process of democracy works in community education. Therefore, a word of caution is needed at this point. The inclusion of the building blocks for the deaf population and exclusion from the advisory council will not strengthen the concept,

A widespread, persistent, and pernicious problem is the paternalism that enmeshes deaf people. These group inadequacies have been the base for general attitudes of doing things for rather than with deaf people; of proceeding with substantive plans on their behalf without involving them in the planning process.⁶

In other words these building blocks will crumble if the cap stone is not a solid and complete block.

With this basic design in mind, we can turn our attention to the problems faced by the community school director who is seeking to locate some of the needed resources to make the program a reality. First, the problem of interpreters—where to locate them and how much do they cost. There is a national association of interpreters called the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (R.I.D.). Their address is: P.O. Box 1339, Washington, D.C. 20013. By writing to this association you can get the address of your state chapter of R.I.D. and thus the local talent pool of interpreters. The local or state office can also provide you with cost information.

Second, the problem of special materials. The Center for Continuing Education at Gallaudet College has developed some special materials and full information is available by writing to:

Center for Continuing Education
Gallaudet College
Office of Curriculum Development
Kendall Green
Washington, D.C. 20002

In addition to these materials there is a depository of captioned films available. Information about these films can be obtained by writing to:

Bureau of Education for the Handicapped
Media Services and Captioned Films
7th and D Streets S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20202

Third, information on the development of sign language classes for hearing people can be obtained from your local R.I.D. or by writing to:

Sign Language Programs
College Hall
Gallaudet College
Kendall Green
Washington, D.C. 20002

Fourth, is the development of special Adult Basic Education courses for the deaf. Teacher awareness and other special materials are very helpful. Further information can be obtained by writing to:

Center for Continuing Education
Office of Adult Basic Education
Gallaudet College
Kendall Green
Washington, D.C. 20002

The basis of the community education movement is finding solutions to community problems. The deaf are indeed a *part of your community* and not *apart from your community*.

Footnotes

1. Schein, Jerome D., et. al. *Continuing Education of Deaf Adults*, Deafness Research and Training Center, New York University, School of Education, 1976, p. 36.
2. Switzer, Mary E. and Williams, Boyce R., "Life Problems on Deaf People," *Archives of Environmental Health*, August, 1967, Vol. 15, p. 250.
3. Weick, Karl E., "Educational Organizations as Loosely Coupled Systems," *Administrative Science Quarterly*, March, 1976, p. 3.
4. Switzer, Mary E. and Williams, Boyce R., *op. cit.* p. 254.
5. Weick, Karl E., *op. cit.* p. 3.
6. Switzer, Mary E. and Williams, Boyce R., *op. cit.* p. 255.

Politics in education

"The movement for greater community participation in the policy process in American cities extends beyond school reform. It represents the hope of a large segment of the population that has been alienated from the institutions of the society. Because education is so integrally a part of local government and because it will be a major target of community activists in the next decade. The test of the vitality and responsiveness of the city school systems will come in the next decade."

Confrontation at Ocean Hill-Brownsville. Maurice R. Berube and Marilyn Gittell, Eds.
New York: Praeger. 1968. p. 334.