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Use of local resources through community education

Closing the gap between the K-12 curriculum and the community:

by Anthony J. DeLellis



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For the last four decades some educators have been attempting to foster a reintegration of the school and community. Significant headway has been made on many fronts. Yet, the integration of the curriculum with the community remains an elusive goal. Perhaps this is the result of the massive complexities that comprise even the most simple of curricular programs; perhaps it is the result of educators who are reluctant to take even moderate risks; or perhaps it is simply not knowing where to begin that causes our schools to segregate their students from the mainstream of life.

Community education might bring this desired integration between the school and community. To do so, the community school coordinator and the principal must begin to observe systematically the resources that abound in their community and tap these resources for the mutual benefit of the students and the community. The emphasis in this discussion is upon expanding the concept of the K-12 curriculum to the extent that, through a community education approach, it affects an integration with the community. The discussion also attempts to stimulate thought regarding how to locate resources for bringing about such changes.

The steps that follow are a few that can be taken in the direction of bringing about a reintegration of the school with the community. They have been selected for discussion, however, because they are representative of the resources that exist, to varying degrees, in most communities.

1. Expertise in the Local Community

The principal and coordinator should attempt to learn the talents of local community members, as those talents relate to curricular matters. They should list the persons who possess those talents. The list could include people with special knowledge of some topic area, skill at performing some specific task, or possession of some property of particular interest. For example, there may be a community member who is knowledgeable about the history of the neighborhood or who is an amateur astronomer. Another resident of the community may be an accomplished gardener or wood carver; and yet another may have unique pets that would be of interest to the students.

These people should be asked if they would be willing to share with the students their knowledge, skills or possessions from time to time. In some cases, they would visit the school while in others it might be possible for the students to visit them in their homes. It is not uncommon to find that many will decline the opportunity to assist in the educational process, but a surprising number will be glad to help, and still others will be honored that they had been asked.

2. Musical Resource List

There are numerous musical groups in every community. They range from highly proficient professionals to good amateurs. Local bands consisting of teen-aged youth, high school and college ensembles, military bands and orchestras, school bands and orchestras, professional combos and others can be invited to perform at the school. Not all will accept the invitation, but a surprising number will. The American Federation of Musicians, for example, encourages its members to give free performances to many nonprofit organizations as a

public service. Many church choirs will be only too willing to perform for students, and many school choirs can easily be coaxed into performing for other schools.

3. Dance and Theatre Resource List

More difficult to bring to the school are dance and theatre groups. In part, this is because they are not very numerous and their activities tend to be seasonal. As with the musical resource list, there are many amateur groups that would be willing to perform all or part of their show for the school. Even if a total performance cannot be arranged, a theatre group may provide several members from its set design crew to show the students how stage sets are created. Another group may provide make-up people who would show the students how make-up is applied and how it affects dramatic performances.

4. Science Resource List

Scientists, both professional and amateur abound in this society. Also, many technicians who are not generally classified as scientists possess a great deal of scientific knowledge and ability and should not be overlooked. Large research and manufacturing companies frequently seek out methods to provide public services to their communities, particularly inexpensive services. Therefore, many would be quite willing to allow a class to visit or to release one or more of their employees to make a presentation at the school. Such a presentation could be coordinated with the science classes and would add a desirable dimension.

5. Occupational Resource List

There are a number of programs in secondary schools designed to expose students to the wide variety of occupations that exist in the U.S. economy. Such programs can take advantage of the average person's interest in his/her job by extending an invitation to visit the school to discuss it. Of course, there is no reason why such a resource should be reserved for the secondary schools, and considerable reason to include it in elementary school curricula as well.

Many teachers discuss the more glamorous occupations with their students. Yet, there is value to be derived from inviting to the school those who can discuss less conspicuous occupations. Of course, the old stand-bys, the nurse and police officer should not be forgotten. This resource list, however, unlike some of the others, does not have to consist of highly specialized individuals. Anybody who has or has had a job qualifies.

6. Service Clubs, Social Clubs, and Professional Associations

Groups such as the Jay Cees, church groups, Kiwanis, Association of University Women, trade unions and others are a constant resource for special programs, for communications networks and for occasional fund raising efforts. In addition, they can assist in recruiting labor for special projects.

7. Enrichment Programs

In many communities, departments of recreation are encouraged to operate their programs in school buildings. However, other agencies exist in most communities as well, and might be willing to provide their services in the schools if invited or allowed. Agencies such as cooperative extension services, public health departments and others can design programs to enhance the

curriculum if they are encouraged to do so. In addition, groups such as Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, 4-H Clubs, churches and others can also provide programs that are coordinated with the curriculum. Supplementing and complementing the curriculum can enhance the opportunities for both the advanced and the remedial student. It should be kept in mind that such programs do not have to carry curricular sounding titles or be staffed by certified teachers. It is sufficient that the individuals who lead such programs receive open cooperation and encouragement from all school personnel and that growth of the student be held as the primary goal of the organization or agency.

8. People

In discussing the integration of the school curriculum with the community, one is really talking about bringing people and ideas together, and bringing people and people together. There is no reason that can justify the way young people are systematically segregated from the adults in the community, and it is done to such an extent that it may encourage voluntary segregation of the generations in later years. One way to enrich the school curriculum and to provide a needed service to a major portion of the community is to invite people into the schools. Let students see adults in the buildings. Adults can be there for any number of reasons; perhaps they could provide one of the services listed above; perhaps they could simply be observing the school in action; or perhaps they could participate in a lunch program for senior citizens. The principle is that it is essential, if the school is to become part of the community, that it allow the community to become part of the school.

As the several resource lists are being developed, the principal and coordinator should begin to design a method for sharing the information with others in the school. A continually updated master list should be maintained, and it should be kept in a place easily available to teachers, administrators and clerical personnel.

This approach to the integration of the K-12 program with community education efforts calls for the reasonable use of community resources in a systematic and deliberate manner. Also, professionalism in the community, should not be the only level of expertise sought. Knowledge, skills and people abound in every community, and many of those people will gladly share themselves with students, if asked. If, through community education, the joint effort of schools and their communities cannot tear down the walls it may, at least, result in opening the doors.

RELATED READINGS

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