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In the 1970 version of community education, as opposed to earlier models, community education is not added on to the school's primary responsibility of educating children. Instead it is the conceptual base for the entire schooling program.

community education: where we have been and where we're going

By Jack Minzey



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The history of Community Education varies according to who is doing the telling. While the "Flint Story" probably is the best-known throughout the country, there actually were several developments taking place simultaneously in community education. The literature of community education reveals that a great deal of writing on the subject took place in the 1920s and 1940s and that one could find community education experiments in California, Georgia, Tennessee, Michigan, Connecticut, Nebraska and indeed in many other places in the United States.

However, even though community education is not entirely a Flint, Michigan phenomenon, the history of the development of community education in that city provides some important lessons in the current perception of the community education movement. These lessons are primarily related to the changes which have taken place in community education, for it is these changes which not only affect the present interest in community education but cause a great deal of the misunderstanding related to the concept. It is, therefore, important that we look at the historical development of community education in Flint, Michigan in order that we have a better understanding of what is happening in community education today.

The present perception of community education did not emerge as a fullblown concept at its inception. When Frank Manley proposed to C.S. Mott a plan for community education in the 1920s, he was only interested in one idea—the use of public schools as recreation centers for school-aged children. It was not until a few years later that such recreation programs were expanded to include other activities for students, such as remedial and enrichment programs, and still later when these programs were made available to adults. Thus, community education was actually an evolutionary process which grew and changed to meet some existing needs and by the 1950s, could be defined as programs for youth and adults, over and above the regular school day, making maximum use of school facilities.

This definition of community education continued to be used through the late 1950s and early '60s and is probably the basic component of most community education programs throughout the country. In the 1960s, however, several persons advanced a "broader" base for community education and, as a result, a new definition with new responsibilities and greater potential began to creep into the community education movement.

If one were going to identify a primary difference between the 1950 model of community education and the 1970 version, it would be related to the intensity of the role of public schools in the community education movement. In the 1950 version of community education, the movement was primarily interested in the programmatic aspect of community education. Community education programs were those activities which were added onto the regular school day and included such things as recreation programs, adult activities and various types of classes and programs which were operated over and above the school day on a self-paying basis. Schools favored such activities as long as they did not interfere with the daily programs of the school's primary task—that of educating school-aged children.

The 1970 version of community education has replaced the program aspect of community education and adopted community education as the philosophical base on which schools operate. Instead of community education being an "add on" program, it is the conceptual base for which schools exist. As a result, the schools adopt a much broader view of their responsibilities in the community and commit themselves to these new responsibilities rather than merely tolerate the old community education programs. The schools continue to provide for the training of school age children as they have in the past, but in addition they accept a leadership and catalytic role in providing for other needs of the community. This new role charges the public schools with the following responsibilities:

1. To provide for the education of the kindergarten through 12th grade youngsters.
2. To make maximum use of school facilities by the members of the community.
3. To provide programs for children and school-aged youth over and above those offered in the regular school day.
4. To provide similar programs for adults in the community.
5. To assist in the delivery of existing community services to community members.
6. To provide leadership in the area of community development.

The immediate reaction of many educators to this new role for public schools is often one of dismay and rejection. They cite the fact that the role of the schools is to teach the "three r's" and explain that schools cannot be "all things to all

people." The fact is, however, that the impact of community education over the past few years has been impressive:

1. There are in excess of 700 communities with community education.
2. There are 61 universities with community education centers for the promotion of the concept.
3. There have been 750 persons trained in Flint through a year-long intern program and 2,000 trained in short-term training programs there. These figures do not include those persons trained at the various university centers.
4. There are six states which have supportive community education legislation.
5. The federal government has passed national community education legislation.
6. There is a national community education organization and 14 state and regional organizations.
7. Community education has been the focal point of several national publications and is one of the most written on themes in current literature.
8. Community education is a part of the national platforms of the Parent Teachers Association and the Junior Chamber of Commerce and is actively supported by several other national groups.

It is hard to say why there is such interest in this concept. Some people in our society feel that our schools are just not doing all they are capable of doing. Others feel that community education can help restore participatory democracy. Some feel that community education is really an answer to the hypocrisies of education while others think that it just makes good economic, educational and social sense. In any event, our changing social structure requires new roles for our existing institutions and many communities are demanding that their schools adopt the community education concept.

Whatever the reasons for the current interest in community education, it does appear to be a forceful movement with which educators must cope. Communities feel that community education offers hope for making positive changes in our social setting which can help meet some of the pressing community needs and educationists are going to find it necessary to react to the pressures of communities for such programs.

"Americans delight in the ease with which they can get things done, but we owe it all to the simple device of having abolished every social mechanism for weighing actions in advance."

Philip Slater, **Earthwalk**
Anchor Press-Doubleday, Garden City,
New York, 1974, pp. 25-26.