

REBUILDING THE PARTNERSHIP FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

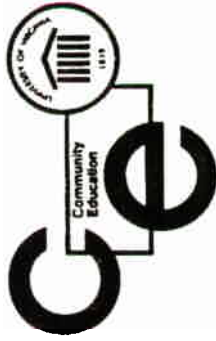
by

Larry Kilbourne, Larry E. Decker, and Valerie A. Romney

Foreword

by

John W. Gardner



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Curry School of Education
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(804) 924-0866

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CHAPTER IV

BRIDGING THE GAP

¹*Costs and Cost Savings of the 1992-2000 Comprehensive Prevention Plan for Virginia: A Report of the Virginia Council on Coordinating Prevention*. Richmond, VA: Council on Coordinating Prevention, May 1992, 4.

²David L. Clark and Terry A. Astuto. "Redirecting Reform: Challenges to Popular Assumptions About Teachers and Students," *Phi Delta Kappan*, LXXV, 7 (March 1994), 520.

Rediscovering Community Education

The innovative programs described in this chapter were designed to reform the relationships among home, school, and workplace. They are not isolated attempts to bridge the gap between the economic realities of a changing world and the needs of families. Rather, they are logical applications of an educational philosophy that has successfully reunited the natural allies of education in a variety of settings, from industrialized inner cities to rural Appalachia. It is a philosophy and a movement whose roots are firmly anchored in John Dewey's *School and Society*, which looked at the school in terms of its social obligation to the community. It is a discipline that views the educational system as more than a classroom and instruction, that recognizes, as Moorman and Egermeier point out, that an effective learning environment must create "a sense of community among students, teachers, parents, and community members."¹

This philosophy is known as community education.

Community education's tenets and practices predate today's acknowledgement of the need for education reform. In fact, practices that have been in place in community education programs for more than half a century are among the very practices that are being rediscovered to address today's urgent needs.

An Integrative Approach

While community education philosophy has sometimes been misunderstood by professional educators, policy makers, and the lay public, one of its practical applications—community schools—has been well received in many communities for many years. Elsie

Clapp, a community schools pioneer, described community schools as an answer to the question "Where does the school end and life outside begin? There is no distinction between them.... [The community school] is, in effect, the place where learning and living converge."²

This convergence leads to a *learning community*. The school, as community center, is the place where agencies and institutions offer services and learning opportunities to all community members.³ In this community effort, Hughes and Krupcey observe, "the focus must be on the individual needs of the child and the family...in the context of community," emphasizing that the focus must be kept on "the learner not the system."⁴

Community educators take a broad view of education's role in society, recognizing the interrelatedness of school and society, the unity of home-school-community. Community educators view schools and learning in a broad societal context.

As a process, community education promotes and facilitates cooperative action by community residents and agencies to address community concerns. Many of its salient principles—local control, integrated delivery of services, maximum use of resources, lifelong learning—are now recognized as promising ideas in the arena of education reform.

Community education is essentially a simple concept. The "little red schoolhouse," the "lighted schoolhouse," the "school as community center," and the most noted, the "community school" are familiar, accessible images, and each conveys something of the essence of community education. Recalling an earlier time, it is easy to imagine a small American school, often built before the town hall was built, serving as the community's secular meeting place as well as its learning center. The townspeople gather there to figure out what to do about some shared problem—how to get produce to market, react to a drought, plant a new crop or a new type of seed, maintain a water supply, hire a teacher or sheriff, deal with unruly cowhands. Whatever the need, the community would attempt to address it together. A sense of the common good—a certain neighborliness—would guide the deliberations.

PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Community education provides local residents and community agencies and institutions the opportunity to become active partners in addressing community concerns. It is based on the following principles:

- **SELF-DETERMINATION.** Local people have a right and a responsibility to be involved in determining community needs and identifying community resources that can be used to address those needs.
- **SELF-HELP.** People are best served when their capacity to help themselves is encouraged and developed. When people assume responsibility for their own well-being, they become part of the solution and build independence rather than dependence.
- **LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT.** The training of local leaders in such skills as problem solving, decision making, and group process is essential for ongoing self-help and improvement efforts.
- **DECENTRALIZATION.** Services, programs, and other community involvement opportunities that are close to where people live have the greatest potential for a high level of public participation. Whenever possible, these activities should be decentralized to locations of easy public access.
- **INTEGRATED DELIVERY OF SERVICES.** Organizations and agencies that operate for the public good can meet their own goals and better serve the public by collaborating with other organizations and agencies that are working toward common goals.
- **MAXIMUM USE OF RESOURCES.** Full use of the physical, financial, and human resources of every community must be coordinated if the diverse needs and interests of the community are to be met effectively and without duplication.
- **INCLUSION.** Community programs, activities, and services should involve the broadest possible cross section of community residents. The segregation or isolation of people by age, income, social class, sex, race, ethnicity, religion, or handicapping condition inhibits the full development of the community.
- **INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSIVENESS.** Public institutions exist to serve the public and are obligated to develop programs and services that address continuously changing public needs and interests.
- **LIFELONG LEARNING.** Learning begins at birth and continues until death. Publicly supported formal and informal learning opportunities should be available to residents of all ages in a wide variety of community settings.

(Developed by Larry Homyra of the Utah Department of Education and Larry E. Decker of the University of Virginia for the National Coalition for Community Education, 1992)

This kind of communal effort shares with community education the belief that citizens should be involved in addressing their own needs. Such a straightforward approach may seem simplistic in a more complicated society, but the worth of an idea is not negated by the complexity within which it must operate.

The idea of education reform is hardly new. The common school movement of the early nineteenth century was promoted as a way of "binding the nation together to eliminate growing distinctions between social classes and to counter the emergence of urban crime and poverty."⁵ Today's reform movement is clearly driven by economics, yet colored by a sense of moral outrage at the condition of our society, especially the condition of our children. The Committee for Economic Development urges us to redefine the functions of schools to meet the changing needs of society and children, recognizing that the failure of our education system could threaten our social and economic future.⁶

Community education offers an integrated way to address the needs of children, families, and community. Community educators have long supported the view of McLaughlin and Kirst, Stanford University education policy analysts, that schools can no longer be merely a "deliverer of educational services," but must become a "broker of the multiple resources that can be applied to achieve successful, productive, and happy lives for children."⁷ Hall says that "the provision of services [children] need is integral to the public school's mission."⁸ Criticizing testing, standards, and sanctions as methods for improving education for disadvantaged children, Clark and Astuto continue this theme, asserting that "a proposal to convert...schools into youth service centers that would be open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, serving three healthy meals to students and providing social, psychological, and medical services would be an authentic proposal for reform."⁹ Hodgkinson issues perhaps the most eloquent call for a holistic approach to addressing children's needs.

Children who are hungry or insecure about their personal safety, who have limited access to decent health care, who enjoy lit-

tle guidance in the matter of values or ethics, who daily try to cope with an unwholesome environment, and who do not have a decent, supervised place to play cannot be reached effectively by the schools. To address these problems so that children can be "enabled" to achieve educationally will require the committed collaboration of school systems and the broad spectrum of governmental agencies that are responsible for the health and well-being of children.¹⁰

Community Education: Programs and Processes

The practice of community education as we know it today began as an effort to meet the needs of youth. Denton traces that beginning to the early twentieth century, seeing it as "part of a vast progressive reform effort which sought to utilize the schools to meet the challenges of urban industrialization."¹¹ Public school-based community education grew out of the frustration of a physical education teacher over the coexistence of locked schools and children without a safe place to play. The collaboration between that teacher, Frank Manley, and industrialist-philanthropist Charles Stewart Mott led to a \$6,000 grant to the Flint, Michigan, Public Schools to keep five schools open in the summer of 1935. Manley's—and Mott's—initial concept was simple: give kids something to do and they won't get into trouble.¹² From this modest beginning, the Flint schools expanded to become a model for the concept that community schools could be the mediating agent in a democratic process for addressing the complex and interrelated problems of schools and communities. That process eventually became known as community education.

As a philosophy, community education is responsive and inclusive. Community educators, philosophically and traditionally, have looked to the community to provide its own solutions to community problems. According to Winecoff and Lyday, "The essence of community education philosophy is that local communities should determine the direction, scope, and kind of programs that respond to the needs and interests of citizens within the community served."¹³

2000 is on the entire community, from the nurturing of children in preparation for learning to the retraining of displaced older workers. The "learning community" is, at heart, the goal of every community education program.

Seeley views the concept of "Communities where learning can happen" as the "sleeper" in Goals 2000.¹⁷ The achievement of such communities requires the involvement not only of education professionals, but also of parents, other community members, and community agencies. This collaboration is dictated in part by economic reality: resources are limited and partnerships and collaboration are cost effective. Moreover, there is mounting evidence that collaboration works. Instead of focusing on the symptoms of individual family members, mediators view the family as an interactive whole with a complex set of interrelated needs. Another potential beneficiary is the business community, whose workforce needs may be cooperatively—and more effectively—addressed.

Community education is proactive, because neither learning nor citizenship is a passive activity. Combs stresses the effectiveness of cooperative action: "[C]onfronting local problems and facilitating the discovery of appropriate solutions is the most likely road to effective reform.... [T]he accumulation of solutions brought about by this process can transform an institution."¹⁸ The involvement of community members provides the necessary legitimacy and commitment.

In its community-wide approach to problem solving, community education faces up to the interrelatedness of community needs. Community education offers a means for reuniting traditional allies—schools, parents, and community—and provides the method, community by community, problem by problem, for recapturing the goal-oriented, cooperative spirit that is part of the American heritage.

Community Education in Practice

At the state level, community education provides vision, direction, training, and a support network. Examples are provided by the states of Florida, Kentucky, Minnesota, and South Carolina.

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As a process, community education is integrative: it promotes, facilitates, and thrives on cooperation. Decker and Associates describe the community education model as one in which

the coordinated use of all available community resources—including the resources of the school—are brought to bear on the identified needs of all community members. Education, recreation, and social services providers are brought together to better serve community residents and improve the quality of life for all.¹⁴

As a program, community education is almost unlimited. The community education process identifies needs, and programs are designed to address those needs. Appropriate agencies and individuals within the community are involved, with the school playing a facilitating and coordinating role. In practice, community education varies widely from place to place because it responds to the needs of individual communities.

Within its diversity, community education is consistent in its four major components:

1. Provision of diverse educational services to meet the varied learning needs of community residents of all ages.
2. Development of interagency cooperation and public-private partnerships to reduce duplication of efforts and improve overall effectiveness in the delivery of human services.
3. Encouragement of community improvement efforts that make the community more attractive to both current and prospective residents and businesses.
4. Involvement of citizens in community problem solving and decision making.¹⁵

These components are echoed in today's education reform agenda. Moore points out: "Much of the rhetoric of the current educational reform/school restructuring movement sounds a lot like Community Education 101, and certainly many of community education's traditional practices are mirrored in the prescriptions for school restructuring."¹⁶ The focus in both community education and Goals

Florida: Addressing State Priorities. In 1970, Florida became the second state in the nation to enact legislation supporting the establishment of community schools. For more than 20 years, community education has "mobilized available resources in communities across the state in response to some of the critical educational, social, and economic needs of Florida's population."¹⁹ A five-year state community education plan specifically addressed the state's identified priority areas, including crime, health, education, at-risk youth, aging of the population, rapid growth, school-age child care, and networking between social services and education.

Based on community education's commitment to lifelong learning, education in Florida is not a "child only" activity. Programs address needs that range from prenatal care to the concerns of the elderly. As a result, general citizen support for education has been strengthened.

Current education reform efforts focus on the state's Blueprint 2000, a state adaptation of the national education goals. As part of the plan for overall education improvement, community education was promoted as the development of full-service schools, bringing together schools, social services, and other agencies involved with children and families. Community educators have acted as facilitators in involving the community and soliciting its support for education through such activities as televised community forums.

There is a strong support network for community education practitioners in Florida. Adult and Community Educators of Florida, Inc., holds an annual statewide conference; it was attended by more than 600 persons in 1993. It also sponsors regional meetings that emphasize professional development. Four university centers for community education located throughout the state offer leadership training and technical assistance. The centers also provide demographic information and other data to the state department of education to assist in policy and program development and budgetary decision making.

Florida has many exemplary local community education programs. In Alachua County, for example, community education is a collaboration between the county schools and Santa Fe Community College. Programs are held at the community college and in more

than 100 community-based sites. Anyone over the age of 60 is exempt from the fees charged for these classes; over-60 enrollees comprise about 25 percent of noncredit class participants. Extended-day enrichment programs are offered at 20 elementary school sites. Significantly, the county community education coordinator has assumed the role of project director for a county-wide substance abuse prevention partnership.²⁰

Other community education programs across the state are involved in neighborhood clean-up and safety; collaborative programs with local hospitals, the health department, and businesses; family counseling; the arts, especially dance; family sign language; and environmental studies. In all of these programs, the focus is on meeting specific needs identified by the community and getting maximum use out of community resources.

Kentucky: Making Families the Center of Reform. In 1989, the Kentucky educational system was thrown into turmoil when the state supreme court declared that the financing of the public school system was unconstitutional. What followed was the most sweeping reform anywhere in the country. The Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA), passed in 1990, ordered a "meaningful, fundamental change in the way Kentucky educates its children with a financial commitment to match.... It brought a new way of helping children learn, a way that insured their right to succeed in school and beyond."²¹ Many of the essential concepts of community education, including lifelong learning and family and citizen involvement, can be seen in the provisions of KERA. Mandated programs include pre-school programs for disadvantaged four-year-olds; Family Resource/Youth Service Centers; extended-day school services, such as tutoring before and after school; and school-based decision making.

One of the most striking features of KERA is the establishment of Family Resource/Youth Services Centers (FRYSC) in schools with high percentages of at-risk students. The center concept is based on the belief that school performance can be improved by helping children and their families deal with some of their other basic needs.²² Philosophically, the centers are closely related to the community school concept and the full-service schools being developed in Florida. Christenson and Whitus (1994) describe them as "much

like the 'community school' with an emphasis on social services."²³ Layson describes the centers as offering

an array of services to students and their families, ranging from health referrals and parent education to child care and career counseling.... They will help assure better coordination and delivery of services by various public and private human service agencies and will be a one-stop source of aid and referrals for children and families who need assistance.²⁴

By the fall of 1993, there were 222 centers serving 414 schools, and an additional 150 centers were planned for the 1993-94 school year.

Because the centers work with families as a unit, center coordinators take a holistic approach, facilitating the services of a variety of individuals and agencies. Their training, provided by the Kentucky Department of Education, centers on community education principles. More than 200 FRYSC coordinators have attended training sessions at the National Center for Community Education in Flint, Michigan.

Although the centers have many programs in common—pre-school child care; after-school and summer child care; parenting programs; health and social service referral; substance abuse services and referrals; family crisis services and referrals; and employment counseling, training, and placement—center directors work with local advisory councils to determine specific local needs and identify and coordinate the use of resources to address those needs.

Other community education programs include adult and vocational education; youth community service-learning; adult volunteer programs; recreational and cultural activities; and partnership development. In effect, community education is providing the opportunity for citizens to "take an active role in the education system and the development of their community."²⁵

Minnesota: A Vision of Learning Communities. Community education is recognized in Minnesota as a successful vehicle for a variety of programs, including adult basic education, family education, early childhood education, child care, initiatives for at-risk youth, youth development, and adults with disabilities.

The first community school bill in Minnesota was passed in 1971 and strengthened in 1975 with the establishment of per capita funding for community education. Legislative support is based on the community education precepts of lifelong learning and community involvement. Minnesota community education advocates Hughes and Krupey quote Tad Szulc to describe this belief in the power of community: "[W]hat has built our country is community and that community is not dependent on government. It's dependent on the willingness of people to build together."²⁶

There are practical applications of this philosophy throughout the state. Local advisory councils, required by law, make recommendations to local school boards on community education programs and funding. Educational reform efforts are based on the belief that reform "cannot be achieved with schools working in isolation from the context of communities. All of the potential players, with their ideas and other resources, must become involved."²⁷

Beyond addressing immediate needs and longer-term reform issues, community education is also providing a guiding vision. More than 700 people—community educators, advisory council members, legislators, school administrators, agency personnel—were involved in developing this vision, which evolved from the simple image of a lighted schoolhouse to incorporate the process community educators now use to address complex community issues.

All of Minnesota's communities of tomorrow will be committed to lifelong learning, with each possessing, or having access to, a comprehensive lifelong learning system. These systems will recognize that throughout life each community member is both a learner in the system and a resource to it. In the future, all organizations, agencies, and individuals will work in partnership to proactively create communities that realize their ideal. Community education will act as a catalyst, assisting communities to both envision and create this ideal.²⁸

South Carolina: Linking Schools, Parents, Business, and Community. When U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley was Governor of South Carolina, he used a grassroots approach to drafting the state's School Improvement Act of 1984. Recognizing that

dramatic improvements were needed in the state's educational system, he launched regional citizens forums that involved almost 20,000 people.

Citizen involvement in education took another important step forward in January 1991, when South Carolinians elected a new state superintendent of education with a mandate for change. Prominent in Barbara Stock Nielsen's platform was the promise to implement community education systematically and comprehensively. After her election, the department of education's mission statement was rewritten to reflect this philosophy. The department's mission is

to communicate a vision of what learning can be and to provide the leadership and services needed by schools and communities to achieve educational equity and excellence for the people of South Carolina without regard to creed, race, sex, age, disability, or economic circumstance.²⁹

The department was reorganized into six functional divisions, one of which, Collaboration, was assigned to build coalitions, partnerships, and alliances with higher education, business and industry, public and nonprofit agencies, communities, parents, and other education stakeholders. Emphasis is on Total Quality Education, including standards, restructuring, and involvement. The department says, "We envision an education system that recognizes every individual, agency, and institution as part of the system; that believes learning is not confined to a classroom but is a lifelong endeavor."³⁰

The Office of Community Schools in the Division of Collaboration serves as a catalyst for program development. In practical terms, the department of education defines community schools as: (1) extending the use of school facilities beyond traditional school hours; (2) building interagency collaboration in order to provide comprehensive services without duplication of effort; and (3) promoting community involvement in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of programs and services.³¹ This definition is expressed in initiatives promoting service learning, extended-day programs, and full-service schools. South Carolina's concept of full-service schools is to link schools, functioning as a single point of entry and service de-

livery, with various human service agencies to meet the academic, health, mental health, and welfare needs of children and families.

These changes within the department of education have shifted the focus from the classroom to the family and community. Gibson and Winecoff point out that choosing this change in focus acknowledges the essential link between community economic development and education. It recognizes that education is a lifelong process—a journey, not a destination.³² It establishes partnerships with other agencies to provide school-based services to meet the increasingly diverse needs of students and their families. Most important, it recognizes that every agency, institution, industry, business, organization, college, university, parent, and individual has a stake and a part to play in the educational process.

Notes

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¹⁹Mary Hanley and Beverly P. Robinson. "Community Education in Florida," *Community Education Journal*, XXI (1), (Fall 1993/Winter 1994), 17.

²⁰Larry E. Decker and Valerie A. Romney. *Community Education Across America*. University of Virginia, Mid-Atlantic Center for Community Education, Charlottesville, VA, 1990. Includes descriptions of 132 exemplary local community education programs.

²¹Stephanie Christenson and Marie M. Whitus. "Community Education in Kentucky," *Community Education Journal*, XXI (1), (Fall 1993/Winter 1994), 25.

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²³Christenson and Whitus, 24.

²⁴Christenson and Whitus, 24.

²⁵Christenson and Whitus, 24.

²⁶Hughes and Krupey, 41.

²⁷Marilyn A. Kerns and Ellen Sushak, "Community Education in Minnesota," *Community Education Journal*, Fall 1993/Winter 1994, XXI (1), 31.

²⁸Kerns and Sushak, 31.

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³¹Gibson and Winecoff, 34.

³²Gibson and Winecoff, 34.