

value of such an enterprise to the community. They need to consider whether its location will make the park available to those who need it most, whether plans for its development will make it an area to be used—or a showplace to be admired at a distance. They need to consider the new park from the viewpoint of all the citizens.

All the youngsters need to know that every child in the community does not live in a big house like Larry's, that some of them don't even have a modest home like Woody's. They need to understand that these differences may not necessarily be due to shiftlessness on the part of one group of citizens. They need to be awakened to the social and economic pressures that sometimes seem to make a farce of our Bill of Rights.

It is not always easy for teachers to

understand what goes on around them. They may turn to the daily papers, and so may the youngsters; yet they must learn to analyze what they read, to weigh one editor's viewpoint against another. They must be careful not to fall under the spell of any one group of citizens, but always to keep an open mind and hear all sides. They must teach boys and girls to develop similar powers of discernment. Together they and the youngsters may talk over what goes on in their community, all benefiting from the ideas presented by a Larry, a Woody, and a Henry. An understanding based on a grasp of community problems can help these students to make intelligent analyses of state, national, and international matters. It can help them to *want* to understand. That, perhaps, is most important of all.

Let's Look Behind the Armchair

WALTER K. BEGGS

Some methods of studying the needs of the community and trying to fulfill these needs are weighed here by Walter K. Beggs, associate professor, Teachers College, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, who also asks some pertinent questions concerning the maintenance of a culture worthy of its future participants.

THE CURRENT preoccupation of American educators with meeting community needs may produce results that are synthetic or real depending upon how deep we are prepared "to dig." The point holds regardless of the fact that meeting needs is certainly the province and responsibility of teaching and educating. But stating a responsibility or recognizing it in theory is quite apart from discharging it adequately.

Curriculum bulletins and professional

publications of the present day are filled with suggestions for approaching curriculum study through a survey of community needs. At first glance such statements appear innocent enough and by any standard should be one of the steps involved in curriculum revision. But what then? What is implied by a community survey? Does it mean "digging out" the unique experience pattern of a given social and economic unit of American culture in order to see the reflection of the pattern in the

daily behavior of the people? Does it mean putting the local citizenry under the research microscope to determine their individual and composite potential? Does it mean untangling the twisted skein of folkways and mores, prejudices and pressures that fashion community thinking—or does it mean simply counting people, occupations, bathrooms, radios, and refrigerators?

If the latter, our methods of procedure to date are quite adequate. We are remarkably adept at counting. If we can assume that a community is a simple organism we can count with impunity. Or we can gather around a conference table and “talk through” community needs. When we agree that one exists we can “set about to meet it.”

Or—we can adopt a method that somewhat resembles research. In its first stages it follows the counting and talking through technique. A “jury of experts” meets and agrees on the characteristics of a good community and then carefully formulates these into a check list or evaluative instrument. A community is measured against the instrument and wherever it fails to measure up we have uncovered a need.

Or—we can quit kidding ourselves. No community—even a very small one—is a simple organism, and the fact that we generally act as though it were, doesn't alter the situation a particle. In reality the reason why we oversimplify our approach is probably because the complexity of our communities scares the living daylights out of us. Sociologists and anthropologists have been pointing out the complexity for years. However, they have been concerned in the main with symptoms while we as educators are supposed to do

something about the maladjustments that are believed to exist.

THE FRAME OF REFERENCE

Suppose we look behind the armchair for a moment. Where communities are concerned we must stop dealing in averages and recognize individuality just as we do in people. We must recognize that patterns of experience differ in communities and that each local unit stamps its own impress on the requirements of the culture of which it is a part and thus each community interprets the overall cultural pattern in a specialized system of mores. Then comes the really tough part of the job—discovery and interpretation. Obviously, we want a picture of the local behavior pattern, but even more, we want to uncover the forces behind the behavior. Below are suggested three questions that might serve as a frame of reference for a beginning. It is not implied that this is the only frame of reference nor that it is not subject to additions or revision. But we have to have a point of departure from which to move.

What Lasting Impressions Has the Pattern of Community Experience Left on the Inhabitants? About thirty years ago a northern Kansas town lost the branch-line railroad that had served it for years. Actually the loss should have made little difference in the economic and cultural life of the community because a surfaced highway was completed about the same time and the services supplied by the railroad were promptly assumed by motor bus and truck lines. But the emotional shock suffered by the people almost ruined the town. The catastrophe—their own

name for the experience—genuinely dismayed them at first. Then gradually something resembling self pity set in and they began to enjoy the memory of the dear departed. The reaction might have been merely humorous had they not projected the loss of the railroad into almost every phase of community life. It became a ready escape mechanism for community shortcomings. One still hears such statements as "we are an inland town you know" or "things were different when we had a railroad," even from citizens unborn when the supposed tragedy happened or who have moved into the community since.

Obviously it would be absurd to consider the needs of this particular community without taking such experiences into consideration. Sometimes they are not as apparent as the one just described. Bank failures, fires, periods of drought, a long, involved strike; even the type of work that the people do or the influence of a prominent citizen can condition community reaction. Often the event itself has long since been forgotten but its effect remains and will crop out when the time for decision comes around.

The problem of ferreting out these influences and forces is difficult because they are often so subtle and deep rooted that to recognize them requires the highest type of analysis and interpretation. The task is perhaps somewhat analogous to that of the psychiatrist. His patient presents a maladjustment—perhaps a gnawing fear—for which there is no apparent cause. He must, with whatever tools he can command, search behind the symptoms for an experience or combination of experiences that are

responsible. Once brought to light such information is invaluable.

What is the Ceiling for Community Achievement? Two elements are involved here—natural and human resources. With natural resources it is a matter of discovery and exploitation. A Nebraska town has recently uncovered a rich deposit of natural clay in its own back yard, so to speak, which could conceivably alter the entire economic outlook of the community. The clay has always been there, as a potential source of wealth, but not recognized. Now the community is faced with the problem of intelligent exploitation.

How such exploitation is carried on depends upon a number of factors. The human resources of the community loom large in this connection. Inherent ability is the natural base from which to work, but what are the types and combinations of ability? It isn't enough to find the median intelligence level, although even that much requires some doing. Which way is the curve of intelligence skewed? Is it possible that one town has sufficient human resources to supply adequate leadership, while in another not enough imagination and drive exist to pull it out of the doldrums? Too little research has been done to answer these questions, but they must be answered if we are really sincere in our efforts to determine community needs.

There are other questions just as important. During the war a number of manufacturing plants moved into the prairie states. They employed workers from the area who knew nothing of assembly line techniques and had to start from scratch to learn the hand skills involved. Yet they easily met the

output quotas assigned to them and often surpassed those of established plants. Does this mean that we have a higher level of manual dexterity here? Is attitude the determining factor, or the novelty of new work, or is basic intelligence higher? No one knows. To date we have heard only speculation. Of course all of this is wonderful ammunition for the big guns of chambers of commerce, especially where they are afflicted with hyperthyroid, but it is of no value to the educator. Until he knows basic facts about the human composition of his community he is in no position to help outline its needs.

In What Specific Ways Do the People Respond to the Pressures of the Overall Culture in Which They Live?

In a nation as vast and diversified as the United States it is difficult to define a cultural pattern, especially when one lives in the pattern and is subject to its pressures. And yet American culture does make some specific demands upon its people. It is not our purpose here to discuss why the pressures exist or where they come from, nor to argue that those we use for illustration are the only ones or even the most important. Our point is made if the reader will admit that such pressures do exist. The two most generally recognized are that our culture demands that we make a living and that we keep healthy.

The Pressure of Getting a Living

In our culture, making a living means much more than gaining subsistence. We have been accused of developing the highest level of material existence ever known at the expense of some other aspects of a balanced culture. Be that as it may, to live successfully in

our economy requires that we gain possession of a reasonable number of its gadgets, and rightly or wrongly we find the people of most communities in the United States busily engaged in doing just that. If we are interested in testing the power of this pressure all we need to do is to examine our attitude toward the few communities that do not respond in kind. Or, better still, our attitudes toward other cultures. Our service men and women are inclined to rate the people of other nations in direct ratio to their possessions from bathtubs on down—or up—as the case happens to be.

Such a pressure is certain to have a profound effect on the activities involved in getting a living in any unit of our culture. Local circumstances blunt the pressure and give it direction, but the general impact is the same nationwide.

Hence, money to secure the gadgets has loomed more and more important to us. The self-sustaining economy of many rural units is gradually disappearing—if it has not altogether disappeared for all practical purposes. Money has become so important that the pressure is to get it even though it has meant dangerously depleting our resources in many instances to do so.

Another result has been high specialization in almost every area. The effect of this factor on local communities is startling. It has meant a draining of population to the centers of specialization. Also many of the services that were formerly supplied locally are now provided by absentee entrepreneurs and either shipped in or the people must travel to distribution centers to get them. Purely cultural things like art,

music, and drama are produced often thousands of miles away and sent in via radio, movies, and syndicated column. At present the trend seems to be accelerating and what the eventual direction will be may depend on forces and events as yet not apparent.

Obviously, the pressure discussed gets into the thinking of the people and helps to shape their sense of values. For that reason they may resist any consideration of needs that runs contrary to what they think is important. It is difficult to persuade young people to look with favor on an occupation that does not appear to carry enough monetary reward to insure the possession of the gadgets they consider essential to live properly. Those of us who are interested in recruiting talented youth for the teaching profession are constantly meeting such resistance. Similarly, place of occupation is chosen to insure monetary gain more often than not. As a result we note some peculiar social phenomena unique in our culture. Rapid shifting of population is one, but more revealing is the shift from small to large, not only as concerns numbers, but as concerns significance.

Thus, in the consideration of community needs these factors cannot be ignored. We may be able to make an excellent case for the need of conservation of natural resources. We may point out services that need to be provided locally rather than at some distant point. We can argue that more young people need to remain in small communities or that the community should invest more money in cultural activities, but we are working against a pressure built up widely in our culture that may dictate otherwise in the thinking of the

people. Perhaps the need that really has priority is to persuade thinking people to examine the pressures that motivate them and analyze the effect. If this brings them to a careful examination of what they think is important and why they think so, they may be better able to adjust their own felt needs to the reality of circumstances.

The Pressure to Keep Healthy

Health is almost a fetish in American culture. Its value is editorialized and sermonized, to say nothing of being advertised from practically every magazine page and billboard. The pressure here is many sided. Copywriters play on our fears, our vanities, and our ambitions, sometimes using all three in the same advertisement. The medical profession has become more verbal of late in an attempt to teach us the hard facts of good health, as have schools, dietitians, and departments of home economics. Along with these, however, are other barrages of perhaps less altruistic intent. Every commodity that can possibly be made to appear as a health agent is publicized as such, from vitamin capsules down through the gaudiest assortment of patented pills and remedies ever perpetrated on an unsuspecting public. Even clothing manufacturers claim health benefits for their products, and cigarettes are advertised as being less unhealthy than other brands. Add to these, an assortment of family remedies handed down from generation to generation, along with "old wives' tales of what to do" that may range from pure superstitious incantations to witches brews of herbs and entrails.

It is little wonder, then, that the picture of health as seen by the Amer-

ican citizen may be a little distorted. Unfortunately the absence of sickness is apparently one of the minor factors that he considers, as is his fitness to work. A body type appears to be more important. The cover girl format is the one constantly flashed before women's eyes, while the broad-shouldered, narrow-hipped Adonis serves as the model for men. Moreover, performance figures largely in the concept—to be an outdoor girl, to be able to “dance the whole night through,” to be a man among men, even though flaccid muscles and hardening arteries protest the abuse for weeks afterward.

There is little provision in our culture for growing old gracefully and contentedly. Our idealism is too strong to let us be hardboiled about our old people as in some primitive cultures that kill them off and as in modern collectivist economies where food and comforts are denied them. But neither have we been too successful in treating age as much more than a necessary evil. True we provide meagre pensions and have made a national gesture toward old age security, but there is little evidence that we have our hearts in the process. Meanwhile we are lengthening the life span and are finding that a larger proportion of our people are above the age of sixty-five, and these are becoming more and more restive and making their own needs known as a “troublesome” political minority.

Here again the pressure invades the local citizen's concept of what is important. And again we are likely to meet resistance unless the concept is taken into consideration. Dietitians have given us a very excellent check list of proper foods. We can find out what

people eat and note the deficiencies in their diet, and hence conclude that what they need is to change their eating habits. Very well, but here is a young lady whom nature has endowed with a stocky figure. She is busily engaged in trying to melt herself down to fit the streamlined number adorning a mannequin in the window of the local emporium. Milk means pounds to her not health. Or here is a middle-aged business man deficient in vitamins “B” or “A” or what have you. Advise him to stop eating pancakes and take up green and yellow vegetables. He may point you to the corner drug store where vitamins “A” and “B” abound in colorful boxes. Besides he likes pancakes, they have been a family delicacy for generations on end.

Important as proper diet is in healthful living, important as are proper recreational habits, or annual medical checkups, or any of the elements involved in keeping healthy, the forces that shape human behavior and attitudes are more important to the educator who is trying to meet community needs.

THE NEBRASKA WORKSHOP ON COMMUNITY NEEDS

The foregoing paragraphs are a somewhat rough summary of the thinking of a workshop group that met on the campus of the University of Nebraska during the summer of 1946. The objective was to develop a guide for the study of community needs. To be perfectly frank the group did not accomplish very much. No criteria or check lists were evolved, though many were considered. Out of all of the “sweat and tears” came only a very crude questionnaire which is far from being

in finished form. No one of the group holds any brief for it, nor is any one sure how valuable the information will be that it produces. In fact, the group was divided as to just how it should be used. Some felt that it should be placed in the hands of the people of a community in order to get as wide a spread of response as possible. Others were equally sure that it should serve only as a basis for interviews. As a compromise we have decided to try it both ways and compare results.

Although the questionnaire may prove to have no particular value, the group reached some tentative conclusions that may pay dividends. We were struck first of all with the cold fact that none of us were very well equipped, if at all, to make a community study. In assembling the techniques available to us we contacted the work of the sociologists and anthropologists and studied their methods. We concluded that there are some tools we will have to master in order to secure and properly evaluate needed information.

Assuming, as we did, that community opinion and attitudes are significant, a method of ascertaining what they are is essential. Obviously, every person cannot be contacted and interviewed, hence a sample must be taken and tested statistically. It will probably be necessary for us to experiment with an

adaptation of such techniques as Gallup or Roper use until we can refine one of our own. Whether these same tools can be used to reveal a community behavior pattern is questionable. We can only try them out and see.

We will also have to experiment with non-directive type interviews. But this requires specialized skill and may be an area where the specialist must be called in to make the actual interview, or at least to interpret those that have been held.

Finally, as we worked into the problem we became convinced that it requires more than the efforts of educators alone. Is there any reason after all why we should not join forces with the sociologist and the anthropologist in our effort to discover and meet community needs? And we might add to that list the engineer, the business administration specialist, the economist, the geologist, and even the archeologist, because this job is no simple undertaking. Perhaps it is too vast to even be considered. Perhaps we will have to narrow it down and tackle one small phase at a time, but in any event, we are virtually at the "put up or shut up" stage. We ought either to marshal all of the resources available to us and focus them on community study or we ought to quit talking altogether about surveying communities and meeting the needs which exist in them.

SURPRISE!

Supervisor to a student teacher after three or four weeks of school:

"How do you like teaching, Miss West?"

Miss West, with thoughtful enthusiasm, "Oh, it's just fine. I love the children.

But the work's so *daily!*"

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