

WHAT ARE WE LEARNING?

ALL PERSONS interested in insuring better community relationships realize the need for comprehensive study of the situation. The following articles disclose suggestions from research which has been done on the means of effecting these relationships.

A Dynamic Curriculum Serves the People

GENEVA HANNA

Geneva Hanna, University School, Ohio State University, Columbus, cites the need for education to be on the alert to provide a curriculum which is not static but which will always keep abreast of today's constant world changes.

EDUCATION, to be effective, must take cognizance of the needs and structures of the society in which it operates, as well as the personal and social needs of the individuals being educated. As society changes new problems arise which affect every individual member of it. In order to meet these new social needs and problems which concern the individuals for which it is responsible, the school, as the chief formal educational institution, must be constantly on the alert to keep its curriculum functional and dynamic.

The complexities, and thus the problems, of modern Western society have increased many times in the last fifty years. The concept of the community school has recently come into educational theory in the United States in order to provide more adequately for the multiplied social needs of the nation's youth. Service to the community is one aspect of the new community-school concept. Service to youth is likewise a part of this concept, for youth must be given an opportunity to help solve some of the social problems of the community in which they live if they are to become respon-

sible citizens of their changing democratic society.

Is There Evidence of Action?

Some teachers have used services to the community by groups of young people as a teaching method within the curricular framework. Many of them have found the results to be encouraging. Some few of these activities have been reported in educational publications during the last ten years. Because the community-school theory has been advocated so widely and with such persistent force during the last decade, it would seem that many teachers would have experimented with the idea.

An assumption might well be made that a fairly wide practice of community participation would be found in high schools of America. A study was set up based on that assumption by which some generalizations could be drawn from the experiences of these teachers. It was believed that still more school people would attempt community service as a means of education of school youth if some guidelines or generalized patterns could be discovered in order to guide the novice teacher in

the area of community participation.

This study was made during the spring of 1945. Information was collected by means of questionnaires and visitations to schools. Eighty-six different communities were studied. Each community had at least one secondary school where a minimum of one teacher had directed a service-to-community project with a group of students. In all, 125 projects were investigated and reported in the findings.

Although 503 people were originally nominated for the study by educators located in all parts of the country, only 125 of those nominated and who replied had sponsored secondary group service projects. It would seem that 125 service-to-community projects are a very limited sampling from all of the hundreds of secondary classrooms of the nation. However, nominations were invited from educators in every state, and the lowest return on any inquiry sent was 53 per cent and one inquiry had a return of 68 per cent. Many of the people who replied indicated that either they had sponsored no such project or their projects would not meet the criteria of the study.

It is recognized that there were probably many service-to-community projects which had been or were being conducted in the secondary schools which were not reported for this study. This might have been due either to the fact that the sponsors were not nominated by the educators who were asked to suggest people, or that the sponsor of the project made no reply to the inquiry sent to him for one reason or another. However, it would seem that the relatively small number of usable reports is indicative of the meager

amount of community service work being done in the secondary schools of America.

Extra- or Co-Curricular?

Service-to-community projects can be either curricular or extra-curricular in nature. In many institutions the service activities are thought of as extra-curricular until they prove to be educationally sound. After the "trial" period they are often moved over into regular curricular status.

Those community projects which grow out of the regular classroom work and become an integral part of the group's experience and learning appeared to be most successful in terms of student growth and ultimate material outcomes for the community. When students are given an opportunity to face their own problems and the problems of those around them, they invariably do so with enthusiasm and intelligence if given proper adult help and guidance.

During the recent war period many communities were faced with serious youth delinquency problems. The young people themselves recognized the need for constructive, preventative action in many towns and cities. In many schools where opportunity and encouragement were given them to examine and discuss their vital problems in student councils, English classes, or similar group situations, the students themselves raised the problem of directed recreation, analyzed the need, and suggested ways of working it out. Most of these youth canteens which were initiated, organized, and controlled by the students participating were astonishingly successful. Interest and

participation remained high. The problem was of immediate concern to these young people. The situation was genuine; it was not a trumped-up or an imposed activity. The responsibility was theirs and the consequences likewise were theirs. No one individual had conceived and planned the project, but all of the group directly concerned had a part in the plans and the execution. The youth canteen was their own.

In those schools where the youth canteen was regarded as part of the curriculum, time was allowed to plan during the regular school day under adequate, interested teacher supervision. The quality of the adult leadership furnished young people has proved to be of the utmost importance. If the sponsoring teacher believes in the activity and understands learning and democratic processes, a great deal of growth in knowledges, skills, and value concepts takes place in the individuals participating. On the other hand, if little or unwise direction is given, the project may be a disintegrating experience for those involved.

In contrast to these successful student-directed recreation centers, several youth canteens were reported from schools where the adults in the situation had not only recognized the problem, but had also made all of the plans, and assigned the specific jobs to be done to the students whom the teachers felt best fitted to assume responsibility. All of the canteens of this kind were entirely extra-curricular in nature. All of those reported serious difficulties in getting students to assume responsibility for the assigned job. A few sponsors found that student participation was sporadic and unenthusiastic.

Thus, too much adult direction can be as harmful as no guidance at all.

The projects reported for this study were related to almost any and every subject area or organization in the modern high school. However, teachers in the social studies, science, and home-making subject fields tended to sponsor more projects than teachers from other subject fields. The reasons for that were not evident. Perhaps the people teaching in those areas are more aware of the need and opportunity for socially useful work by students, or they may feel more keenly the need for citizenship education and firsthand learning experience for their students. On the other hand, perhaps the materials in those particular subject fields lend themselves more readily to service-to-community projects. Larger community problems may link themselves more obviously to these three areas than to some others such as mathematics or foreign language. That does not mean, however, that there are not good community problems related to those other areas. Teachers who believe in community activities will be able to help their students find worthwhile services related to any area.

What Are Youth's Concerns?

One of the reasons for the small number of service-to-community activities in some subject areas especially, and in secondary schools in general, may be the difficulty which many people have in recognizing social needs and translating those needs into significant community problems for high school students to help solve. Those concerned about providing good experiences of a problem-solving nature for young peo-

ple in the community may be helped in locating them through community agencies other than the school. Through cooperating with youth organizations, better housing committees, settlement houses, and similar community groups the school can become a more integral part of the community, and through such cooperation students can learn to work with other social agencies.

Teachers who work in the community as members of civic and social organizations are probably in the most favorable position for recognizing community problems upon which high school people can work profitably. Those teachers know firsthand the community's problems and their students' needs. They are in an excellent position to take advantage of community situations in which students can serve and learn at the same time.

Students, with only a nominal amount of encouragement, will often recognize community needs which are real concerns of young people. Usually upon intelligent examination of the problem which must also include some study of the background and ramifications of the problem, some plan of action suitable to a group of young people and sufficiently in harmony with the spirit of the other agencies in the community can be worked out. Problems have a way of becoming unfinished business. A youth canteen may lead to a playground recreation plan for the summer, the summer program may lead to a larger recreational year-round community program. The young people themselves cannot always do the entire job and neither is it desirable that they do so. One of the values accruing from community service by groups of students is

the ability to work with other community groups, usually adults, on common problems. Each group learns respect for the abilities and fine qualities of the other when they are able to meet on equal ground about a real concern to all.

Although the school as a social institution is not charged with the responsibility for reconstructing the community, it is responsible in large part for educating the community's youth for citizenship. One of the duties of citizenship is to recognize common problems of society and to work cooperatively with others to solve those problems. If students are to learn to become participating responsible citizens they must be given an opportunity for such participation under supervision while still in school.

Where Are the Dangers?

A caution needs to be mentioned at this point. A few adults in every community are apt to become overly enthusiastic at the prospect of the material benefits to be derived for the town or city through the service of the potential labor of the students. As a consequence of this outlook, requests may be made for groups of students to conduct drives, make routine surveys, or clean up a city park without regard to the educational values for the students involved. These may be worthy services and worthwhile from all points of view if properly directed. However, if the activity is purposeless for the group doing the work, if those participating have had no part in planning the work, and if they have no understanding of the value of the outcomes, it would seem that it would not

be a constructive piece of work for a school group.

It is the educator's responsibility to *protect* young people from exploitation by the community. It is also his obligation to *enlarge* any such requests into educational opportunities for students whenever possible. If a group of students accepts a phase of a community problem to work on, helps plan the method of attack, carries it through to its conclusion, and evaluates the outcomes in terms of its purposes and plans, the service can be an excellent learning experience for all concerned.

What Are Some Guidelines?

The writer believes it is often unwise, if not dangerous, to suggest a set of procedures for engaging in an educational enterprise. Curricular changes and methods should be indigenous to the school in which the changes are made. Situations differ, the needs of youth differ, communities are different; and teachers work in different ways. On the other hand, to fail to indicate improved ways of working, if some of these are known, is to delay educational progress. It is with a full awareness of the needs and dangers involved that the following guidelines for conducting a service-to-community project are set down. Some of these procedures have been discussed at greater length above, others can only be outlined here. They are not the only or the best methods and procedures, nor are they the only factors to be considered. Primarily, on the basis of the analysis of the data received from the study of service-to-community projects, the following suggestions are offered merely as one set of procedures designed to improve this

phase of general education in secondary schools.

¶ To facilitate the identification of possible suitable service-to-community projects, teachers should be encouraged to become more aware of community problems by working in adult groups in the community, students should be given an opportunity to suggest service problems, and community agencies should be encouraged to call on school groups to help solve community problems.

¶ Students should be involved in an important way in the selection of the project; for optimum results the problem must be acceptable to them.

¶ Projects which have some continuity over a period of at least several months should be favored over those of a shorter duration.

¶ The project should be capable of at least a partial solution by the students who are to participate in the process.

¶ The student group should be brought into the planning and organizing of the project at the earliest possible moment in order that the greatest educational values will accrue from the activity.

¶ The total student group should be kept informed on all plans made by student committees or adults and should be able to approve, reject, or amend any such plans.

¶ The whole student group concerned in the service activity should consider and accept solutions to organizational problems. This tends to insure each individual accepting his responsibility more readily and to result in the work proceeding more smoothly.

¶ To promote community understanding of service-to-community projects carried on by class groups appropriate school officials should consult with officers of public spirited organizations or with any individual or group directly concerned with a proposed project, and should give sufficient information to the general public so as to allay any doubts or suspicions regarding the enterprise.

¶ The size of student groups should not

much exceed twenty-five in number for best results.

¶ A flexible school schedule should be set up to provide longer periods of time (two class periods or more) during a given school day for working on community projects.

¶ Service-to-community projects should be considered part of the school curriculum and conducted as part of the regular class work.

¶ For many activities, such as surveys and food preservation, small committees working together is the most efficient form of organization.

¶ The organization form should be shifted

during the execution of the project to facilitate the working out of the problem and to increase the growth of the participants.

¶ Tangible results should be sought as soon as possible in at least a few phases of the project.

¶ Educators should guard students against the exploitation sometimes involved in the use of their services in community projects.

¶ Evaluation techniques should be worked out in terms of individual and group objectives agreed upon by the participants and utilized in process as well as at the completion of the service-to-community activity.

Social Cement for Group Unity

HAROLD R. BOTTRELL

A college which is an integral part of community life in contrast to one which merely exists within the confines of a community is the goal of many institutions today. Harold Bottrell, director, Burrall Community Service Projects, Stephens College, Columbia, Mo. writes here on group projects and community service based on his own research and experience.

THE COMMUNITY as a learning laboratory implies ways in which the community may be used to this end. Ways of providing community experience for youth develop in practice into organized patterns of activities and experiences. They are cooperative patterns and, at their best, are jointly supported by a school and the community. Group projects are considered here as one such pattern of student participation in service to the community in junior colleges.

Community service can be seen clearly only in terms of field experience and field data, for the activities and experiences have sharpest meaning and greatest reality where they happen and where they visibly connect with the life of the community. It is to be

understood, in this connection, that this article is based on the professional experience and research of the writer in the field of community service in junior colleges.

Community service is defined here as responsible, directed student participation in the services and activities of local community agencies, organizations, and groups, organized and supervised by the college through the medium of cooperative working arrangements between the college and the community. Group activity, as considered here, has social structure and operating design within which the functions of community service are related and its processes are carried on.

Community service efforts using the medium of group projects provide or-

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