

# When Schools Reach Out

C. O. FITZWATER

Great things will happen when community and school discover they can work together to meet common needs. C. O. Fitzwater, Assistant Director of Rural Service, NEA, gives examples of situations in which such cooperative efforts are meeting with success.

"IT reaches out everywhere around here and helps with things that count," the farmer said as he looked across green fields toward the red brick school. "But that's what we want and learned how to get when we all started pulling together to make our school better. Don't know how much further we will go with our program or will need to. The main point is, we know how to get things done that need doing. And we'll never go back to the old ways of pulling in separate directions."

In a very real sense this earthy appraisal, made in reply to questions from a visitor to the community, captures the spirit of extended school programs. It reveals both the breadth of the field of action in rural communities and the processes involved in getting action under way.

For in rural communities the opportunities for schools to "reach out" are almost unlimited. How far and in what directions they move is dependent on a number of factors—the leadership qualities of school policy makers, the processes employed in school-community interaction and the kinds of community problems on which local people need and want help.

## ENTERPRISE IN GOOD LIVING

But when people of a community marshal their forces for action through

their school on problems of concern to them, significant things begin to happen. In a small village-centered community nestled in the Catskill Mountains, school and community affairs are regarded as inseparable parts of an enterprise in good living, with cooperation and service the keystone of the structure.

Lights gleam at night from schoolhouse windows. Any community group or organization can use the school building for "educational or community purposes," say school officials. And the citizens do use it. In one year nineteen of the thirty-five youth and adult organizations in the community used the school building 170 times. Five of the adult groups held all their meetings there.

But bare figures reveal little of the full story. The cafeteria provides the setting for dinners by community groups. The combination auditorium-gymnasium is a beehive of activity every week-day evening with adult basketball, PTA and other community group meetings, plays presented by adult groups, an art exhibit or flower show.

The music room is used by the community choir; the library by the adult reading club; classrooms are used for farmers' meetings, play rehearsals and small group discussions.

## Library Serves Entire Community

The library is a school-community undertaking. Both the school district and the township provide funds for its support, including the librarian's salary. Adults may borrow books whenever the library is open. For their convenience the library is kept open two nights weekly throughout the year and during the summer vacation months every week-day afternoon as well.

In fact, summer is a busy time. The school band then becomes a school-community organization and everyone has a chance to tootle. So many old folks and recent graduates take part that additional instruments have to be rented. Village businessmen say the Saturday afternoon concerts on the school lawn attract and hold trade so they donate funds to help pay the bandmaster's salary; community leaders say the program promotes community solidarity, culture and pride.

The summer recreation program is a cooperative venture also. Local organizations, school district and township all support it financially. Trained personnel instruct in hobbies, crafts, sports and play activities for all age groups. A school bus is used to transport swimming parties to a nearby lake. A five-team softball league plays three nights weekly.

### SWIFT STREAM OF COMMUNITY LIFE

A hundred miles to the north in the Adirondacks is another community almost identical in size but with different problems, many of which richly flavor the school program in a highly distinctive way. The community is isolated and off the beaten track. It does

not have a doctor but the school physician after his weekly visits to the school holds "office hours" for community people in the school health suite. The community has no movie theater, so the school shows 16-millimeter pictures in the auditorium every Wednesday evening the year around except when deep snow makes travel difficult.

No newspaper is published in the community but the school turns out a school-community multigraphed weekly which provides community-wide coverage and which is circulated to every home. Every pupil can become a newshawk, defend the newsworthiness of his scoop, and practice his skills in written expression in a real-life situation. Every fourth issue of the paper contains a community calendar, listing all meetings of community groups and agencies for the coming month. Local organizations eagerly cooperate because the calendar prevents duplication in their meeting dates and keeps the people informed on all scheduled activities.

### Adult Program Geared to Needs

The adult education program is closely geared to pressing community needs. Housewives learn how to make clothing and keep it in good repair. Mothers come to the school for assistance in adjusting a dress pattern, making a boy's coat, selecting furniture slipcovers or trying out a new cooking recipe. Every fall after the crops are in, a "tractor school" is held for repair and overhaul of farm tractors so they will be in top shape for keeping lanes to the highway open during snow season.

However, the lighter side of community living is not neglected. The program of recreational activities is

planned for pupils, older youths and parents. Folk games and square dancing are highly favored. After each movie, adult class session, or community group meeting the chairs are pushed back from the center of the auditorium floor, the musicians tune up and the whirl of figures and stamp of feet begin.

As one views this simply structured community it is easy to see that life would be more difficult and would lack much of its zest if the school did not reach out boldly beyond the confines of the so-called conventional program. Undoubtedly, the job of reaching out is not complete. Could it ever be so in a dynamic cultural pattern? The important thing is that the people have launched their school in the swift stream of community life and know how to guide its course.

#### ADVENTURE IN CERAMICS

One bold new venture accomplished makes the next one easier to tackle. And boldness is necessary—a kind of boldness that stems from the realities of life in the community. An elementary school in the arid mountains of New Mexico, where the fight to save the land is always a close battle, faced its issues in this courageous way.

A many-pronged campaign was carried on to convince skeptical farmers that it would pay them and the community to join their farms to the soil conservation district. The pupils produced a play, filled with facts and figures and loaded with nuances of Latin American reaction to problems and issues of cultural change. This play was presented with such telling effect that it was subsequently in demand in other communities.

Using their natural resources wisely is only part of the total picture. The real issue is human resources and in enhancing these health is a persistent and ever-pressing problem. A relatively wide range of conventional practices and measures are in operation. But inquire at the school about the health program, and the reply is, "First, we want you to see the boys' and the girls' shower rooms. Every pupil takes a bath once a week here and we furnish the towels. Water is scarce in this community. The average distance our Spanish-speaking families have to carry their *drinking* water is more than a mile."

The school capitalizes on its opportunities. For years the pupils made marbles from clay dug near the old school building. Someone got the idea this clay might make good pottery. Samples were sent away for testing—it was high-grade stuff and would glaze beautifully. Here was opportunity knocking! Grown-ups had more time than anything else. Perhaps they would enjoy ceramics and the making of useful things for the home. Perhaps some day they could even supplement their meager incomes.

The old schoolhouse became the center of activities. School officials encouraged and promoted; a trained ceramist was employed. The people came and the project was set up.

#### Dishes for Each Family

The first major goal was a set of dishes for each family—for dishes were much needed. Here was opportunity to create, to give free expression to notions of beauty. The result was a wide range and variety of bold original designs vividly splashed with brilliant

colors. And in due time when teachers visiting homes saw no new dishes and made inquiry, they were surprised to see shoe boxes or grocery cartons dragged from under beds and the new creations carefully unwrapped and proudly exhibited. "They are so pretty we want to save them," mothers explained.

Later, production accumulated and the idea that beautiful things could be enjoyed and used every day took hold. Visitors to the center wanted to buy and did so when they could. But even today an occasional prospective sale of an item is nipped as the seller hesitates and apologizes, "I do not believe I can sell that today."

Once an order of several thousand incense burners was produced and shipped to a dealer who made an enormous profit. News of it stirred the people. School leaders saw growth in attitudes toward establishing a sales cooperative. But they will wait until the people are ready for such a step. And if the sure progress of the past continues, some day the people will be ready.

#### POULTRY FARMS AND PEACH ORCHARDS

Processes that bring lasting results are matters of human growth and development and are deeply rooted in human values. The farmer quoted above knew this, as well he should after years of experience in helping shape his community school program. In his community, located in the Piedmont foothills of South Carolina, the shackles of a one-crop economy have been broken. Fields once producing low yields of short staple cotton are lush with alfalfa and green pastures where pure-bred beef and dairy cattle

graze. "Fifteen years back," said a housewife, "there was nothing but cotton. Now from my front porch I can count seven poultry farms and I don't know how many peach orchards."

The school is different too. Grown-ups come and go all day long—to get half a bushel of sweet potatoes from their supply in the storage house, to butcher a pig and store the meat for curing, to can fruit or vegetables, to get help from the homemaking teacher on making a fruit cake for Christmas, to buy groceries or chicken feed at the cooperative store, or to get a packet of strawberries and a beef-roast from the cooperative freezer locker plant.

#### Family Units Participate

Over 90 per cent of the families participate, the records show. Teachers think and plan and work in terms of family units—ask the superintendent or any teacher how large the community is, and the answer will be: "We have 562 families."

Formal adult education classes have given way to informal family group instruction when the need arises. A father and son repair a broken machine in the school shop; a family group prepares fruit or vegetables for canning or deep-freezing; or a mother and daughter redecorate the home.

All this development in school and community has not been a bed of roses. A small beginning was made at first, proceeding on the conviction that if people are given full information they can solve their problems. And there was healthy skepticism in the early days. Said one teacher: "Some folks didn't believe fruit preserved in a canner would be as good as the store-

bought variety so we got some of both kinds and gave a tasting test. Then, they wanted to build the cannery."

Vision can be highly contagious. School and community leaders saw the interrelationships of poor soil, one-crop economy, low income and inadequate diets on the one hand and the quality of home, school and community living on the other. As the program got under way, understanding spread and support and participation followed.

What about the leadership? Many of

the teachers have moved on and the superintendent has now moved to near-by community which is already forging ahead. But the people in the old community continue their progress—a legacy any educational leader should be proud to leave behind.

Then, was there ever a big man out in front? The people seem puzzled when asked. Could such a thing be in a situation like this? "Why, mister, so many people helped it's hard to tell who did the most."

---

## *Bases for Integration of School-Community Effort*

MILOSH MUNTYAN

In a time of mobilization, what are major purposes of school-community effort? What are possible approaches to integration of this effort? These timely questions are treated by Milosh Muntyan, chairman, Department of Higher Education, Michigan State College, East Lansing.

ONCE more the schools throughout the country are finding themselves in a position to become truly community-serving institutions. This apparent opportunity stems, of course, from the nation's having embarked upon a serious effort at rearmament. Obviously, a nation rearms itself because it feels it is threatened by an external force—another nation or group of nations—which is challenging its way of life. Consequently the schools can now expect to have opportunity to serve a genuine community function principally because the community, to use the term in its broadest sense, considers itself seriously threatened by ideologies propounded by other nations.

To put the matter directly, it is clear that schools in our democracy have traditionally had to wait until the society is seriously threatened by external power before they could readily assume the semblance of full-fledged partners in a community effort. It is a sad commentary that the school, an institution created and supported by the community in order to further the common ends of the group, can become a genuine partner to community effort only when external forces threaten the community with disruption or destruction.

The situation just referred to is not really too surprising, however. In a society such as ours, characterized as it is by conflicting interest groups, the

Copyright © 1951 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.