

Baltimore's Community Study Program

HARRY BARD

Teachers in Baltimore derive many benefits from a three-year, in-service study of their community. Harry Bard, assistant director, Curriculum Bureau, Baltimore City Public Schools, Baltimore, Maryland, describes this on-going program.

BALTIMORE, like many other American cities, is a community of contrasts. To understand fully the environment in which its people live, you must of necessity go *inside* the houses that boast the traditional white marble steps; you must go *south* and *east* of suburban Roland Park, which chamber of commerce guides extol; and your itinerary must take you through the hundreds of alley-ways and slums that *were not described* in *Holiday's* treatment of the city.

Before 1946, when the Community Study program came into being, many Baltimore teachers were as unaware of the neighborhood in which they taught as were visitors who thought natives exist on a diet of fried hard crabs. About ninety per cent of all Baltimore teachers live in the middle class residential areas of northeast and northwest Baltimore, but over fifty per cent of the children attend schools in the older eastern and southern sections.

Before our program started, Baltimore had many "streetcar teachers" who recognized the route from the trolley stop to their school, but knew little else about the neighborhood in which they taught. A striking illustration of this lack of background became evident some years ago during a conducted tour of blighted areas.

During the tour, as some of us turned a corner into an alley-way, a well-fed rat scurried across our path. (This was one of a million rodents that infest our city. The rat population is slightly higher than the human one.) One of the teachers was so upset by the incident that she was unnerved the rest of the afternoon. We asked whether she had ever been in this neighborhood before. "No," she answered, "but I teach only four blocks from here." That same afternoon we saw an outside toilet which had to serve seventeen people. We also observed conditions in which as many as thirty-five persons were living in a house suited for eight.

Conditions such as these which we observed are not unusual in our city. A study made by the Housing Authority in 1949 showed that over 200,000 Baltimoreans lived in substandard housing situations; that 25,000 dwelling units lacked private inside toilets and that 30,000 units had no private baths. Moreover, the children in blighted areas were the same ones who lacked recreational facilities of any kind and who attended schools whose plants were sometimes a hundred years old and whose facilities were woefully barren.

Not so long ago, the teacher previously quoted spoke to a group of us who have shared experiences in the

community study program. "You know," she said, "the one thing I have tried to give these youngsters in the classroom environment is *color*. There is so little of it where they live—everything in their existence seems so drab!"

Objectives of the Community Study Program

Since 1946, this lack of community understanding on the part of teachers has changed. Nearly eight hundred teachers are currently enrolled in the Baltimore Community Study in-service workshop and about two hundred have graduated from the three-year program. The participants represent teachers, principals and supervisors from all educational levels and numerous subject fields.

The program underscores three *C's* in its objectives:

- *Child acculturation*—understanding the environmental and cultural influences that affect the child in his relation to the school and to learning.
- *Curriculum revision*—working with students, community leaders, parents and others to bring about learning that has meaning and purpose in terms of the child's developmental tasks and his societal needs.
- *Community action*—working with community agencies for the improvement of the child's environment and toward social progress.

These three goals are sought through four progressive levels of community study—each of increasing complexity and significant returns: (1) understanding the community, (2) using the community's resources, (3) contribut-

ing to the community, and (4) working with community agencies toward common goals. It is significant to recognize that while the community study workshop is a teachers' in-service program the emphasis is on changes in the learning situation and in students.

UNDERSTANDING THE COMMUNITY

During the first year of community study emphasis is placed on understanding the school neighborhood and the city in which participants teach. Members of the community study program have a choice of two alternatives. They may join a *school group* of ten to fifteen teachers who concentrate on understanding their own neighborhood, or they may join a larger *city-wide group* (usually with a number of sections) which concentrates on understanding Baltimore. Each of these groups has fifteen two-hour sessions, which are scheduled on one afternoon every other week.

Teachers in the city-wide group take directed trips to churches of different faiths, to civic and governmental agencies, to substandard housing areas and public housing projects, and to other places of interest.

Participants in school groups are encouraged to make surveys of their own school-neighborhood areas. For example, a group of teachers in one school, working cooperatively on such a survey, divided its study into areas such as traffic conditions, agencies serving the neighborhood, ethnic groups and their mores, socio-economic groups and their values, religious affiliations and their beliefs, and housing conditions. Teachers in this school are preparing a sociological study which



Courtesy, Dept. of Ed., Baltimore, Md.

High school students study housing conditions in Baltimore

should be of great value in helping them to understand and appreciate the children they are teaching.

In another school a group of teachers are making a study of the problems and tensions in the school-neighborhood area. They have already found that a lack of recreational facilities creates numerous problems of delinquency. They have discovered tensions resulting from the large number of taverns in the neighborhood. In this particular part of Baltimore, the prevalence of many "broken homes" adds to already trying conditions.

As a result of this conscious attempt to understand the child's environment with its accompanying social, cultural and economic patterns, teachers are becoming more understanding in their relationships with pupils.

A study of the folk-ways of a large group of students who had come to Baltimore from the hills of West Virginia and Kentucky brought new understanding and appreciation for the regional mores of this group. Teachers in one school wondered if they had made the best possible use of the background these children had brought with them to Baltimore, or whether, unfortunately, they had tried to get these rural pupils to conform overnight to urban ideas, including some which could be challenged in terms of values.

In addition to these non-material resources, *e.g.* culture patterns, numerous material resources are explored, such as parks, museums, industrial plants, and civic and governmental agencies which determine how the

people of the city make their living and how they live out their lives.

Perhaps the most important development in this area of community study is the fact that this is getting down to the pupil level. Stimulated by their own studies, teachers are encouraging their pupils to understand the environment in which their school is located. Students conduct traffic surveys, population studies and historical research dealing with their school communities.

USING COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Understanding the community must precede the use of its resources, but effective use does not always follow automatically. Long before the Baltimore Community Study Program came into being, the excursion and field trip movement in language arts, fine arts, and in the physical and social science fields encouraged teachers and pupils to get out of the classroom for much direct learning. The Baltimore program, however, has effectively broadened the bases for the use of community resources.

In the past, trips to the City Council, historical museums, local filtration plants, and other civic and governmental agencies and establishments were fairly characteristic of good learning procedures. However, the community study program has encouraged the use of heretofore untapped resources. For example, one teacher of English had her students visit a local public housing project and invited the director of the Citizens Planning and Housing Committee to talk to her students and advise them in their research unit dealing with living conditions in Baltimore.

Another teacher invited a parent to talk to her pupils and to illustrate the "lost art" of landscape painting on window screens—a culture pattern characteristic of homes in the Czech neighborhood of Baltimore. A history teacher had her students, who were studying immigration, visit the International Center and observe the arts and dances of various ethnic groups. These contacts, incidentally, not only helped to enrich the studies going on but created a deep appreciation for people too often neglected in school-community relations. Then, too, the contacts gave the pupils of these ethnic backgrounds a feeling that their parents and grandparents had something unique and important to contribute to American culture. Too often history teaching has served to divide first and second generation students from their parents rather than to bring them closer together in mutual respect and understanding.

One of the most important publications to come from the community study program is a "Guide to the Use of Community Resources in Baltimore." This pamphlet was prepared by a group of teachers as part of their experiences in the second year community study program. The booklet contains suggestions dealing with places to visit and persons to contact, how to conduct an excursion, teacher-pupil planning, and ways by which trips may make learning more meaningful and significant.

CONTRIBUTING TO THE COMMUNITY

In the second year of the community study program, participants again have the choice of operating in *school groups*

or in *city-wide interest groups*. During this second year the groups concentrate largely on the use of school-neighborhood resources and on contributing to the community in which the participants teach. Membership of some of the school groups includes parents as well as teachers.

The city-wide interest groups are organized in terms of areas such as housing, recreation, government, human relations, social welfare, city planning, historical resources and health. Each interest group has eight to thirty members, with a few composed of larger numbers and operating in sections. Each interest group also includes a resource person who is an authority in a special field. For example, the director of city planning, the executive secretary of the Baltimore Citizens' Planning and Housing Association and the field worker of the National Conference of Christians and Jews are resource persons for groups related to their interests.

In addition to the specialized resource persons, the community study program has general consultants who are members of the University of Maryland education department and who help with the three general meetings when all groups are brought together to deal with objectives, with techniques of group processes and community study, and with evaluation. The general consultants at times also meet with school and city-wide interest groups during their sessions.

Learning the Ways of Democracy, published by the Educational Policies Commission before the war, indicated that students understand the privileges of democracy but do not have clear-cut

ideas about its corresponding responsibilities. In the Baltimore community, as elsewhere, practically all the civic and voluntary work which is carried on takes place through the contributions of a small group of people who can be found on the same lay boards whether they deal with housing, religion, social welfare, or civic matters. This is certainly not democracy at its best. It is necessary for us to broaden the base of civic participation so that all citizens may recognize that they have contributions to make to our democracy.

Teachers in the community study program are encouraged to contribute their efforts to the community as a whole. A number of important contributions have already been made by the teacher participants. For example, one group of teachers working in the area of housing wrote a booklet on "Tenant and Landlord Responsibilities." It contains so many practical and valuable guides that the City of Baltimore is planning to publish it and give it wide distribution.

A community study group concentrating on recreational needs made a survey of facilities in four regions of Baltimore. This study is being used by numerous recreational agencies in the city. Members of the human relations group have participated in inter-faith and inter-racial meetings and have helped to build greater respect for all individuals in the classroom and in the community.

School groups in community study have made some very important contributions to the neighborhoods in which they are located. For example, one school group made a special study

of the effects of smog on the health of the industrial community in which this group is located. This study helped to influence the state legislature to vote a \$100,000 appropriation for smog elimination. The same school group made a study of recreational needs in the community and as a result initiated child-parent Friday night programs which have brought family entertainment and relaxation to thousands weekly.

Again, however, the most important returns have come when this concept of contributing to the community has gotten down to the student level. One illustration of the value of such experiences for students is the *civic participation project* introduced in two of our high schools by teachers active in the community study program. In this project seniors in modern problems courses spend part of the school day and a good amount of time after school hours performing civic and voluntary work for agencies such as the Red Cross, Community Chest, Pratt Free Library, District Health Center and the Baltimore Safety Council. Book circulation studies, especially as they refer to young people, are made for the local libraries. Students help Red Cross workers during recreational periods in the state mental hospitals. Traffic and accident surveys are made for the Baltimore Safety Council. Social studies teaching promotes active citizenship in these two schools.

WORKING WITH THE COMMUNITY

In the third year of the program, participants remain with their school or city-wide interest groups. This time, however, the emphasis is on working

with community agencies for the purpose of improving individual and group living.

The Baltimore Community Study Program encourages development of school-community councils but sees such organs as integrating, not as divisive, forces. The problem of integrating the contributions of the school and outside agencies might be symbolized through a wheel. The *hub* of the wheel would be the individual citizen who is of greatest importance and whose capacities and abilities we wish to develop to the utmost. The *outer rim* would be the community which we aim to improve. The *spokes* would represent many agencies, which exist solely for improving the individuals and the community. Perhaps at one time the school would be the key agency, especially if it were an educational problem. At another time, the local library might be the key spoke. The problem at hand would decide on which spokes the greatest burden of weight must be borne at a specific time. But always every spoke would bear some weight.

A number of the participants in the Baltimore Community Study Workshop have helped to organize school-community councils such as the one symbolized by the wheel. In one case such a council was instrumental in beautifying and landscaping a long-neglected city-owned lot. Another council had a group of landlords in a slum area give up their back yard properties to form a badly needed playground which was equipped by the local Kiwanis, staffed by the department of recreation and directed by the schools.

Recently the Twentieth Century Fund, through NBC, broadcast the story, *Crusade in Baltimore*, which showed how one of our school groups, in cooperation with the health department, sanitation bureau, police division, citizens' association, and other agencies, helped bring better housing to a large part of Baltimore.

EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAM

Greatest gains have come to those in school groups, who have worked with problems identified by themselves. Here the results have been clearly evident in changes in school facilities, grounds and classrooms. Here, too, the accompanying curricular changes have been closely related to the local situation.

Participants in city-wide groups, on the other hand, have had opportunities to look at problems more broadly and to meet more often with teachers in

other situations. Moreover, during their second- and third-year participation they have concentrated on an interest area with opportunities to see interrelationships among numerous agencies.

Informal and objective evaluation data are at present being analyzed to determine progress. It is already evident that those who have been members of the community study program have a better understanding of environmental and cultural forces affecting the students they teach. Tabulations of objective data indicate that classes taught by these teachers make greater use of community resources and tend to work more often than other classes for community betterment. It is also clear that many participants in the program are continually revising their own teaching practices and the curriculum in terms of the school-community outlook.

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