

plumbed by the pooling of ignorance in no matter how free an atmosphere, and there is no reason to believe that what goes into the making of a man is any less complex.

The learning process, profoundly conceived, is a challenge to the universities, as is the problem of helping

institutions shape themselves to their appropriate uses. The dissemination of what is now known must go on, but without a background of sustaining skepticism and eternal quest for more inclusive answers it is more than likely to degenerate into a new formalism, no matter how undidactic its approach.

Our Schools Need a Partner— the Whole Community

VIOLET EDWARDS

To carry out the responsibilities of freedom, school and community must become inseparable in striving for improved living and learning. Violet Edwards is executive director, Connecticut Fact-Finding Commission on Education.

THE TROUBLE WITH OUR schools is that our communities are in trouble. By and large, we in our home towns and cities are not working together on the basic task of our times: redefining the role of our communities and of our schools in relation to the challenge of history that confronts us as Americans in the world today.

Instead of the pooling of knowledge and resources at the local community level, we have compartmentalization—a plethora of skilled organizations with laudable aims, but with each working separately within its own framework and upon its own specialized problem. Instead of truly representative community-wide participation in behalf of better public schools we find segmented and oftentimes abortive efforts, or "sets of pressures" on our public schools which go unanalyzed and un-

challenged by any representative, overall community body.

SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY ARE INSEPARABLE

In preparing ourselves and our young people to be practicing freedom-loving citizens who deeply understand the human values at the heart of democracy, the challenge to the American community and to American education are inseparable. The development of the ability to carry out the responsibilities of freedom must take place in our local communities and their schools all over the U.S.A. For, it is in our home towns and cities that we have, or must carve out, the opportunity to learn how to work together on our common problems. Here it is that we can develop new approaches and new ways of reaching agreement in the in-

terests of all—and thus can share with others throughout the world the effort of building a world community that offers reasonable hope for the application and hence the survival of democratic values. In this regard it is important to remind ourselves of what Norman Cousins has so truly said: "No community neighborhood has ever been smaller than the world neighborhood is today, in the sense that every man's welfare and destiny is interlocked with everyone else's."

Mobilizing Community Resources

The real challenge to our American communities and to their public schools is to get together. This means reshaping older patterns of community organization and the welding together of all these skills and resources. It also means searching out new ways to cooperate more fully and to persuade every citizen to take a more active part—not just in working out single problems, *but in bettering community life as a whole.* We are realizing that world leadership involves the responsibility of even the smallest American community to prove that democracy really works.

The ability of American communities to mobilize their own resources and thus to contribute to the solution of common problems is a basic strength that many believe should be shared with communities everywhere, in all countries.

Sharing Community Cooperation as We Build It

The recent New York Herald Tribune Forum successfully experimented with this hypothesis. The Forum set up

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a pilot project for a community-exchange program to find out whether democratic American techniques of cooperation at the local level could be usefully exported. In an attempt to find an answer, the people of Carroll County, Georgia invited a Hindu villager, Amar Singh, to live with them for two months, and find out, if possible, what it is that makes them work together so effectively. Now Carroll County has elected one of its rural leaders, Paul Patten, to return to India with Singh to see what aspects of American community organization can be applied to his village, and to learn from Singh's country.

The Forum throws out the challenge that if other communities should want to follow Carroll County's example, the result might be an exchange program at the community level which would be a useful companion piece to the Point Four Program.

This is merely one example of the creative ways in which we can share with other countries our community building experiences while we our-

selves are still pounding out teamwork principles and practices for total community goals. But it's a vividly practical example; and our gain will be two-fold . . . if we share as we build self-reliant local over-all machinery equal to tomorrow's needs, and if, at the same time, we learn from our neighbors in other countries.

Seeing Our Community as a Whole

To translate successfully this kind of thinking into appropriate action we need, of course, to see our community as a whole. We would need to take stock—a business man's inventory—of what our town actually is, and what makes it tick. And in this thorough-going inventory it would be important to make sure we call into the endeavor a true cross section of the multiple interest groups and points of view representative of our whole community.

When a Community Looks at Its Schools

For example, if we are helping to call a community meeting to initiate study of public school problems and needs, *now—and ten years hence*, we will make sure that the group is truly representative of all the citizens who live in the community. We would do this because we would know from the very beginning that the success of our undertaking would depend on the all-out understanding and cooperation of *all* segments of the population. This might mean asking people we ourselves might happen to disagree with, for one or another reason. But we would do it if we are sensible because as Americans we know that it is through cooperative effort and the clash of opposing points

of view in attempting to solve our mutual problems and to reach our common goals that we develop new and satisfactory ways of working together.

It is thus that we build the bridge—the ways of communicating with each other and of working fruitfully together—over which the traffic of ideas and of actual achievement commences to flow.

Many people think of communication as being words. But this is not necessarily so. Complete communication, which is prerequisite to effective action, calls for mutual understanding between the communicating parties. Understanding comes from shared exposures, shared experience and shared effort.

How, then, to close the appalling gap between the whole community and the school which most of us are ready to admit exists today in most American towns and cities? In no other way can we fully explain the spectacle of our crisis-ridden public schools: "Double" and even "triple" sessions; lack of buildings and equipment; low teachers' salaries, and not enough teachers "good," "bad," or "indifferent"; the need for vital school administrators instead of harassed penny-pinchers or glorified janitors—which is precisely what we are making of many heads of our school systems; the need in America today for free colleges, etc. And ahead of all these needs, pressing as they are, is the *need for hardheaded thinking about education itself*.

A FACT-FINDING COMMISSION ON EDUCATION

This was precisely what the Connecticut Commission, in partnership with

the people of an entire state attempted to demonstrate. With the leadership of the Connecticut Commission and its Advisory Committee of over 50 state-wide civic, educational, business, labor, cultural and church groups, nearly two years ago, close to 100 Connecticut towns and cities began a state-wide debate over education—free and lively discussion about the purposes of education for our time and its meaning to the world in which we live. This debate, with roots in each of the local towns and cities, still continues. In most of the communities it is concerned with values (townspeople saying what it is they want the schools to do for their girls and boys), with substance, with content.

Many Connecticut towns and cities have built a strong, enduring community-school organization through which parents and other taxpayers and citizens can continue to speak—and to work constructively with public school personnel to strengthen their public school programs. All the successful continuing community-school groups in the state are careful to maintain strong cross-sectional community membership. They need no one to tell them that it is their job to see to it that their public schools are closely linked to neighborhood and to total community. For they started their fact-finding, in cooperation with school officials, with community study and analysis.

Lay citizens in these Connecticut town groups have learned to take personal responsibility for the linking of their educational system more closely to community needs and interests. They say, "Education is everybody's business."

And as school and community pool resources, school people have discovered that laymen have no desire to dictate educational method, to throw out of the window the body of system and method that sound professional educators have worked over the years to create.

In their turn, laymen have lost their fear of educators, as they have worked across the table—planning together for the young people of their community who are their joint responsibility. Furthermore, as the taxpaying community works with school personnel, the community gains practical insight into school needs, and is consequently better prepared to pay for these needs. This does not mean that the community can be led to support appropriations for items it does not consider useful. It does mean that the community needs opportunity to see what use is made of the educational dollar—and to understand what it means to their children—and that in Connecticut where many have had that opportunity they have responded by supporting school officials' requests for specific appropriations.¹

In Connecticut and increasingly in other states across the country, professional and non-professional are finding that they need each other to define the purposes of education and to set about strengthening our schools and our communities to meet the prodigious challenge to help prepare ourselves for new and awesome responsibilities in the world.

¹ Reference is made to the work of community-school study groups of 85 Connecticut committees, as they reported their work and made their recommendations to the Connecticut Fact-Finding Commission On Education in *Do Citizens And Education Mix?* (1950).

Questions We Need To Ask Ourselves

What is an educated person? Is the definition the same as it was in 1920? Is there any real conflict between the traditional concept of the Three R's and some of the newer courses of study? How actually do we teach the Three R's today—and why do our sound schools teach them as they do? What is the difference between "discipline" and "self-discipline"? Which do we want? What are the common needs and basic similarities that can bring people together? What are some of the "roads to agreement" that can bring people together in fruitful effort? Are we aiming high enough, realistically enough, in the kind of education we are offering our children in our home, our communities, our public schools? Will our citizens of tomorrow be at home in many lands and among many peoples? (In Connecticut two years ago we talked about the handicaps of some American business men in Europe and in Asia who did not know the languages and the psychologies of the people with whom they were working daily. How much more grim our dilemma even two years later—and tomorrow—if we do not chart new approaches and develop new content in American education.)

How do we go about building an active, working partnership between community and school? How actually can we become responsible contributing, participating citizens in our communities? And in the life of our public schools?

What are the effects of our community life upon the boys and girls growing up in our home towns? Do

they have opportunity in community—and in school—to participate with us, according to age level and ability, in community affairs—in gaining understanding of the purposes of education and a voice in building the school of tomorrow? (Some Parent-Teacher Associations are finding that their most meaningful and best-attended programs are those jointly planned with students from the seventh grade on up through high school.)

Connecticut—Cooperation, Participation

The foregoing is but a sample of the probing questions Connecticut citizens, school and non-school people alike, asked themselves and their neighbors during the course of the Commission-sponsored educational fact-finding program in the state. But they not only asked questions and searched for answers; they studied their own schools in relation to the needs of their community, or area—and of our times. Community-wise they were chiefly concerned with: (a) Whether there are enough school buildings, well enough equipped, and in an adequate state of repair, to house children and teaching personnel; and (b) Whether what is being taught in these buildings is adequately preparing young people to be competent citizens, "capable of living useful, happy and intelligent lives."

They were concerned about—and studied: school building needs and repairs; curriculum and instruction; teaching personnel (the major interest was whether there were enough teachers); health education and recreation; opportunity; guidance; school transportation; administration; and com-

munity influences. Nearly all of the 100 community-school study groups considered one or more of the following factors in relation to their study of the schools: housing, town government, occupations and employment, relationships between and among groups of various national, racial and religious backgrounds, activity of civic organizations, and population trends.

Moreover, several hundred representative citizens from all walks of life in Connecticut participated in the state-wide study committee sponsored by the Commission and concerned with general areas of professional inquiry. They assayed state needs and educational provisions to meet those needs in such significant areas as: Teacher preparation and personnel; early childhood and secondary and vocational education; higher education, including adult; state organization, administration and financing of education; and socioeconomic trends in the state of Connecticut.

Connecticut citizens are among the pioneers in the development of a process of school-community relationships which they are continuing to use, and which others in many states are using

to meet their needs. The process itself, to be sure, is not new. It is the process of applied democracy. What does seem new is their creative use of it . . . with the cutting of the cloth to fit the distinctive character and elements of each individual community. For here we deal with *people*; with ideas and human aspirations, as well as with fact-finding and recommendations and community action programs.

There is much development of the same process today in many towns and cities in our 48 states. In Pasadena, there are 1,000 citizens demonstrating the usefulness of the process . . . in their particular situation. Camden, New Jersey's "Citizens' Action Committee for Better Schools," working cooperatively with the superintendent and a steering committee of outstanding and representative public school teachers, is off to an excellent start in coping with exceptionally severe school-community problems. The list runs on and on . . . all over the United States. And it is up to "we, the people," in our Home Towns, U. S. A. Without our vision, skill and hard work there will not be a rich and continuing story to tell.

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