Teamwork and Social Change

Slowly, sometimes painfully, school people have been learning effective methods of cooperative teamwork. Such coordinated approaches seem to offer greatest promise in solving urgent problems of social change and adjustment.

That there will be great social changes in the near future is not questioned by any alert rational person. Vision often fails us, however, when it comes to meaningful perceptions. Limitless power which is as available as bottled air or ocean water piped to the consumer is a strange concept. A nation of high school or college graduates is as yet inconceivable—so is an industry with virtually no unskilled labor—or an army sans infantry—or a flight beyond earth’s gravity. Chain cities and cooperatively administered metropolitan areas are scarcely imaginable. Densely populated countrysides are rarely contemplated.

Actually the problem is much more mundane than this. The problem is often merely that of marshaling a team attack on the problems of today. This attack on problems must be made with all of the resources available. This implies quick mobilization and disposition of the resources needed to attack a given problem. This implies teamwork at the community level and at the successively more remote or higher levels.

Experience shows that the germs of beginning and of decay are always present. Both types of germs are present today. How may they be identified? What approaches have been fruitful in the past that may prove even more successful in the future?

The thesis here presented is that unilateral, individualistic approaches have been proved adequate to our yesterday, but will prove far less effective methods for our successors than will cooperative team approaches. This thesis is based on solid substance.

Possibly an examination of a few examples of cooperation will throw light on the practicality of creative team approaches. These examples are from the field of education but they could as well be taken from engineering, from research in nuclear physics or from the research and development laboratories of modern industry. In fact, industry has achieved outstanding results through the engineerscientist team and other forms of teamwork.

Cooperation at the National Level

Gradually educators have perceived the necessity of national cooperation. So they have sought cooperative action. The Topsy-like growth of national leadership has been succeeded by more rational processes. The National Education Association, seeing the need of cooperation, early turned its attention to team approaches. These are illustrated by the work of the Educational Policies Commission, of the National Commission for the Defense of...
Democracy Through Education and by the current reorganization designed to enhance cooperation within the NEA family. The first two moves have already borne fruit. The newest move is of the utmost importance if carried out expeditiously.

These examples indicate the possibility of wider cooperation at the national level. Possibly the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the American Federation of Teachers and other such organizations may band together at the national level to further the cause of education.

Another example of national cooperation is the new educational research program made possible by a congressional appropriation to the Office of Education. This program provides a basis for cooperation of the researchers in local schools, colleges, state departments of education and the Office of Education. It provides for planning long-range research projects and the systematic collating, interpretation and utilization of research results.

The community as the practical all-purpose unit of social organization has been studied from many angles by many specialists, but multi-disciplinary teamwork has been noticeably missing. The American Academy of Political and Social Science has prepared an issue of the Annals which demonstrates the effectiveness of teamwork. In this issue, "The Public School and Other Community Services," the experts on housing, planning, government, library, health, recreation, social welfare and education establish the fundamentals of community planning and coordination in the field of education. The limits and possibilities of coordination are thoroughly plumbed.

In like manner, the booklet, My Town, grew out of a cooperative effort of a multi-disciplinary team. Both the theory and practices of the community school are dealt with. As amanuensis and interpreter of a cooperative group the writer of this article found a firm, common ground existing between specialists in engineering, recreation, psychiatry, sociology, anthropology, social work, city planning, architecture and education.

One can only wonder why practitioners in the separate fields are ordinarily so much out of communication and agreement when agreement is so easily reached on so many issues.

Cooperation at the State Level

Statewide cooperation is better explored than is cooperation at the national level. Cooperative programs for the improvement of local and state education programs are well into the experimental stage. In some states such cooperation has brought about considerable progress. There are many uncharted expanses in state level cooperation, however. In few states are the institutions of higher education in cooperation, either vis-a-vis themselves or vis-a-vis departments of education. Competition at the state level is often more prevalent than cooperation. Future tests to which education is to be put may require much more teamwork than that provided by loosely organized

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state curriculum programs. The research talents of sociologists, psychologists and political scientists must be blended with those of teachers and administrators if the state's leadership needs are to be met. In many states in-service workshops bring teachers and specialists together to exchange ideas and solve perplexing problems. Such teamwork is important even though it is discontinuous in nature.

Another example at the state level is the cooperation that exists within a certain interest group. The recently organized state associations of school board members are excellent examples. These associations show clearly their potential for facing the changing future. Their influence on public opinion, their activity in promoting legislation and their capacity in in-service education of lay board members highlight the importance of teamwork.

More cooperative than intra-associational teamwork is the inter-associational teamwork exemplified by state councils. In one state a study showed that about 80 organizations were interested in secondary education. From among these, 16 agencies organized a council for the improvement of secondary education and set about the task of increasing cooperation.

**Cooperation at the Community Level**

Teamwork at the community level is a well-known phenomenon. Hundreds of examples could be cited but a few will do. A listing might help:

1. United Community Fund—This multi-agency effort represents a vital community activity involving nearly everyone. Cooperation in budget making, interpretation and operations is prodigious.

2. City Planning—This difficult field is gaining slow acceptance but has great implications for a changing community.

3. Citizens Committees for Educational Planning—This activity is virtually exploding. Plant planning, curriculum planning, financial support activities, school district reorganization and "White House Conferences on Education" activities have opened up a new era.

4. Individual Parent-Teacher Conferences—On a different scale than the group efforts, the individual parent-teacher conferences do present an excellent example of teamwork of great social and educational significance.

5. Cooperative Utilization of Community Facilities—This new trend of sharing physical facilities for recreation and education has tremendous implications. It will be imperative in the future as educational and creative recreational activities increase. The parks, schools and cultural centers will not be reserved for use by a restricted clientele in a cooperative community. Sharing facilities leads to program planning and coordination.

**The Community School and Community Education Theories**

The community school movement, now 20 or 30 years old, represents a synthesis of teamwork methods. This original idea has had a great influence on teaching and on educational administrators. As it expands into the full-blown community education movement still more teams are brought into action. These teams center around children and their education and welfare, about adult education, about civil defense and community survival, about business, industrial and agricultural pursuits, and about government.

Recent social changes have highlighted the need for more highly educated personnel—the result is a team of people including parents, children, corporation executives and teachers all working toward a common end.
Of times the teamwork becomes routinized into such forms as a continuing advisory committee to the board of education, a council of social agencies or a planning commission with legal status. This is desirable, but flexibility demands that the possibility of teamwork done through informal groups and ad hoc task forces must increasingly be present.

During the past four years the problem of educational administration has been studied extensively. Administrative structure, staffing and functioning have been given attention. Some assumptions have been put forward. More and more the possibilities of some other mode of operation than heirarchical line and staff operation has been sought. Little progress has been made because citizens, teachers and administrators are in general unready and unwilling to change. But teamwork implies a change—a change to some form of circular organization, to democratic operations, to colleague relationships throughout, to more citizen participation, to more self-government in schools, to better human relations. It seems strange that individual schools and school systems do not blaze a trail for other groups instead of waiting to be forced into democratic administration as happens in many cases.

Many Faces Toward the Future

To survive in the future people cannot depend upon fossilized institutions of the past. These have had two weaknesses. They have been too inflexible in purpose and scope and also too restrictive to individual initiative. People will find it necessary to face problems and crises quickly and in quick succession. Flexibility, viability and swift mobilization of resources will be requirements for survival. Learning will be the medium and balanced teams of cooperative individuals will be the actors. Due to the increment to productivity attributable to specialization, cooperative action by teams of people will probably increase the power of individuals to the tenth or even to the hundredth power.

Glimmerings of the nature of the solution have appeared for some time—but progress has been retarded by the failure of those concerned with the school curriculum to prepare a generation of people for participation in cooperative effort. Educators can make a major contribution by preparing young people for participation in community affairs. Education for better human relations should be a must. Education in the skills unique to teamwork should be stressed. Individualism will remain in the picture as much as ever before because the concept of “team” is based upon differences in experience, perception and skill as between members of teams. Expertness will be expressed in an ever-increasing list of specialists—but the process will stress always the importance of unity, integrity and mutual effort and the end-product of social adjustment.