

School, Home, Community Are Not Institutions Apart

Maturity and a commitment to democratic society are fostered in youth when school, home and community combine resources and understandings in an effort to meet the needs of boys and girls of this age.

THE CONCERN of the school, home and community for adolescent welfare has increased in recent years. Currently newspapers, news magazines, radio and television emphasize what adolescents are doing in the community. Magazines designed for parent use present features dealing with the life of adolescent youth, and parent groups frequently choose the adolescent and his life as a focal point of study. Many church, recreation, and other community agencies have extended their teen age programs. A glance at the titles listed in the *Education Index* reveals the intense interest of school staffs in these boys and girls.

American society recognizes that the present cultural milieu may be increasing the difficulties of adolescents. However, a disheartening note in this concern is that the home, school, and community organizations often take the position of "letting George do it" or assume that each should play a solo role in the work with adolescents. This at times appears to constitute a competitive and distrustful view of the other fellow's work.

Such an attitude is unfortunate. For one reason, a close cooperative approach by parents, teachers, and community youth leaders to the education of youth

is needed if the adolescent is to have a warm and secure environment for complete maturation and the development of a commitment to the values of our democratic society and institutions. Furthermore, responsibility assumed in isolation is wasteful of energies and facilities and is unrealistic in terms of what is known about adolescent growth and development. "Letting George do it" is almost totally unproductive.

How *can* parents, school staffs, and community youth leaders work together for the most wholesome development of junior high age boys and girls? Effective cooperative effort in this depends, as in other partnerships where human welfare is the concern, upon the values and understandings of the partners. Each individual must believe in the transcendent worth of the task and each must understand and accept his own unique role and that of his partners.

Partners in "Junior High School, Inc." will understand and appreciate the growth and behavior of this age group. They will value sharing in the growing pains of early adolescents as their interests and abilities fan out in new directions. Each will be concerned with the other's responsibility knowing full well

that what happens to the preadolescent while he is with others influences his attitudes and behavior in all situations.

A Cooperative Approach

Throughout the country in communities when parents, teachers and community leaders understand and hold highly the task of providing the best learning and living environments for the early adolescent, many cooperative projects are under way. Mothers and fathers, teachers and counselors, scout leaders and ministers are planning and working together in providing school, recreation, religious, and fine arts activities and areas. However, the continuing problems and difficulties, and the failure of adolescent behavior to improve become disheartening. What specifically might be done to improve educational experiences and facilities offered junior high youth? The following questions may suggest ways of evaluating current practices and may point toward continued efforts:

1. Should cooperative educational effort be a four-way parent, teacher, youth leader, and preadolescent partnership? And, if so, how can such a partnership be developed?

The fact that boys and girls of junior high age are intent on breaking away from adult authority and yet are insecure and dependent seems to indicate the answer. The community-wide recognition of young teen agers in a four way partnership would give them a feeling of dignity and worth. At the same time, the partnership would provide adult guidance which is kindly, unobtrusive, and does not threaten the young person's need for security.

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Since much of the time of the young adolescent is spent with his own age mates, this partnership would help the adults find out what he values and what he thinks of adult society. At the same time, this partnership has an opportunity to provide experiences that give teens insight into society's values and rules. Where conflicts exist about such problems as dating, using family cars, and party hours, agreement can be reached and feelings of rebellion and frustration of all the participants lessened.

The country over, such cooperative action is going on. Visiting teachers bring parents, teachers, boys and girls, and social and legal agencies together. In Prince George's County, Maryland, curriculum planning involves parents, teachers, and the junior high pupils. In junior high schools having unified or core programs and in many subject matter classes, teachers and pupils seek the help of parents and community groups in planning learning experiences.

Community agencies assume leadership, also, in cooperative effort. Many recreation boards, church boards, and community councils have both adult and youth representation. In Oyster Bay, New York, for example, the enthusiasm and energy of preadolescent youth have been marshaled by the community in planning and decorating the community Christmas tree and in organizing a Santa Claus telephone service.

2. Should more emphasis be given to community aspects of early adolescent education? And if so, how might this be done?

The interests of the early adolescent boy and girl and the demands of society take them beyond the home, school and neighborhood for play, school and work. As they go they can make substantial contributions to community life. In an

experiment at Petersburg, West Virginia, participants worked with elementary school children and high school youth to improve community health. In other communities early teens give their services as hospital aides, in nurseries, on playgrounds, on farms during emergency situations, as pollsters, and as workers in Civil Defense situations. These experiences help teens by giving them adult status, and the opportunity to develop citizenship skills and to explore the world of work. However, if they are to have such opportunities, educational guidance from many community groups is needed.

The advantages of exploratory vocational experiences and the desire of the young person to earn money suggest a need for business leaders to participate in educational planning. They are uniquely fitted to determine the kinds of work the adolescent can do and to plan with junior high staffs ways such work can be brought into the school day.

The 4-H organization offers rural junior high youth many exploratory vocational experiences. In a few cities a number of trade projects have been very successful in helping youth explore. Careers Unlimited, for example, gives young people under the guidance of business leaders a chance to incorporate their own companies, sell stock, market a product, and divide profits among stockholders. Parents, school staffs, and civic leaders might provide opportunities for boys and girls to observe doctors, machinists, stenographers, and nurses, and to discuss with them the nature of their work. Interviewing workers and having them visit informally in schools can help develop a real understanding of the world of work.

Boys and girls need to understand and participate in governmental agencies. Too often the only contacts youth

have with government workers are in their brushes with the law. Youth sometimes take over the various city or state offices for a day but all too often this results in newspaper publicity rather than real learning and service to the community. Constructive contacts that give a true picture of government at work need to be provided.

3. Should the junior high school staff assume more leadership in developing cooperative effort? And if so, how?

Since society uses schools to further the ideals, knowledge, and social goals of education, it appears axiomatic that the initiative lies with the schools. School staffs must assume the kind of leadership that makes it possible for all the teachers of youth—church, school, home, government, and community—to plan together.

Junior high school staffs especially need to tackle the problem because the natural growth and development of early adolescents extend their loyalties, interests, and sphere of activity from the home and neighborhood to the wider community. In doing this junior high youth need the support of both the near and the wider community. They need to plan and to participate in home and school activities and in the larger community to feel that their contributions are worth while; that they are effective citizens *now*.

What can junior high school staffs do? They can bring youth leaders face to face more often and under more favorable circumstances. Some contacts should be casual and others concerned with projects centered on school or civic services. Social activities designed for fun, to help families make new friends, and to extend children's friendship not only with peers but with adults are also worth while. Whenever librarians, church workers, recreation leaders, teachers, parents, and

youth are together under favorable circumstances they come to understand each other, to gain respect for human personality and to acquire skill in human relationships. All these bring more effective community action in education as well as other areas.

Junior high school staffs can improve communication between groups. Bulletin boards, display cases, assemblies and sections of the school paper are now used to reasonable advantage. However, in many places, newspapers, magazines, radio, and television are not being used advantageously. The educational opportunities in mass media are limitless, and, as yet, are hardly explored. In the effective use of these media all groups interested in the education of youth can tell others what they are doing and what needs to be done.

Newspapers, magazines, and radio and television stations need to have qualified preadolescents, parents, school people, and youth leaders on their staff who can express the viewpoints and activities of the group they represent. The "Mickey Mouse Show," for example, has a youth reporter who does a constructive job reporting the activities of children here and in other lands. Television and radio need the educator's help to improve the type of program in which youth problems are discussed. New techniques can and should be found for capturing an audience.

Since the teacher appears to be in a key position to assume leadership in cooperative efforts to improve education for the adolescent, his program, schedule, and work load must be designed so he can do the job. Time must be provided the teacher for home visits, census taking, meetings with parents, field trips, ascertaining community resources, and a legion of other classroom activities that

can bring the school and community together. If for no other reason the block plan or core program has merit since it keeps the number of pupil contacts low.

In-service education programs need to provide teachers far more knowledge about class and community structure. Teachers in community centered schools need a great variety of skills often neglected in their preservice training. Skills in interviewing, discussion, problem solving, planning and human relations are but a few. They need to be skilled in using the human resources of the community in bringing the community into the school as well as taking children into the community. These skills the teacher should have as well as computation skills. They are not developed by chance but must be taught and learned. In-service programs have this task.

School administrators have a major responsibility for bringing the junior high school and the community together for educational effort. As one drives through small towns and cities in the early evening he sees many school buildings bright with lights as school facilities are used by the entire community, both children and adults, for recreation and study. In many schools, school administrators make offices available to scout and recreation leaders. Branch libraries are sometimes housed in school buildings in smaller towns and sometimes congregations meet there on Sundays. It is natural for a community to gravitate toward the school for most educational undertakings and a cooperative administration will bring this to reality.

For the junior high school child, nothing is more devastating than the conflict in values that is evident all about him. He obtains values by contagion but he builds values by thoughtful action in many varied life situations.

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