

Needed: A Superboard for Resource Use

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IN SPITE of decades of much urging that schools relate better to the homes and communities they serve, their programs typically remain school-bound—or even worse, classroom-bound. The situation is so bad that some writers, regarded by many persons as extremists, urge the abolition of conventional schools. So we read about “schools without walls,” “free schools,” “open schools,” and the like, as proposals to enable learners to utilize the away-from-school environment.

The unresolved dilemma in broadening the learning environment arises from inadequate planning, rigidity in conventional educational programs, and lack of information about and coordination of the opportunities for learning that the away-from-school settings can provide. The proposals in this article aim to resolve those difficulties.

Home and Community Use

What I urge is not new. The roots of the ideas are of long standing. However, some of the educational changes which I and others have proposed for schools in recent years make it easier to develop this broadened concept of the learning environment in a systematically coordinated and administered program.

Thirty years ago, Paul R. Pierce, then

principal of Wells High School, in the near-north side of Chicago, described a comprehensive program of home and community use that the staff, students, and community had developed in the late 1930's.¹ In an environment which Pierce described as “blighted areas and buoyant youth,” in a time of extreme poverty and depression, the staff extended education into home and community in a remarkably comprehensive manner.

The “division” (homeroom) teacher, working with his students, helped each one to develop a “Record of Daily Activities” that was maintained by each pupil for analysis and discussion. “Before-school activities” included home duties, working for pay, and walking to school. The school day listed a comprehensive program. Activities between school dismissal and 6 p.m. included school sports, school library, working with pay, hobbies, church activities, and visiting a neighborhood house. Activities listed for “after 6 p.m.” as evening opportunities included home duties, working for pay, studying, en-

¹Paul R. Pierce, *Developing a High-School Curriculum*. New York: American Book Company, 1942.

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tertaining friends, and movies (before TV!).

Similarly, students made extensive plans for vacation periods, with provisions for stock-taking. Such activities as the following, plus many more, were on the form: cycling, pleasure reading, visiting doctor, home study, summer school, museums, galleries, lectures, musical events, forums, clubs, part-time or full-time jobs, home chores, saving and spending, religious activities, and camping. Bulletins were provided by the school that described and located all sorts of opportunities in the Wells neighborhood and the Chicago area.

Teachers and pupils spent much time in the area interviewing people, collecting data, making plans, and evaluating results. The book tells a fascinating story. However, the Wells program did not spread widely among American secondary schools during the past three decades. It might have been a victim of World War II. Perhaps, like many other good ideas, it was a casualty of the Sputnik-hysteria that overemphasized mathematics, science, and modern foreign languages in a school-bound setting.

Certainly, there is no lack of urging in educational literature that schools should utilize community resources. Take a few minutes in a library to note the yearbooks of various organizations on this topic in the past 30 years or the articles listed under appropriate headings in *Education Index* or the card catalogue. Also, there is no lack of educational activities on the part of numerous agencies in most communities. One needs only to remind readers of the extensive programs of religious groups, museums, youth organizations, and industries to emphasize what is now going on. The question is, are these efforts coordinated? A corollary is, what gaps exist? And a third question is, where does organized education—public and private—fit into the total picture?

Superboard of Learning Resources

My thesis is that none of the foregoing questions will be answered satisfactorily until a community or city creates a Superboard of Learning Resources, with an appropriate

staff to carry on coordinated planning, development, and evaluative functions.

Let us lay aside, first of all, the concerns that some persons may express immediately about the lack of initiative and responsibility that might result when presently-constituted public and private agencies share control with someone else. The charter legislation of the elected Superboard will need to spell out responsibilities and relationships under which the various agencies will operate to serve the residents of the area. Each organization, presently tax-supported or privately funded by voluntary contributions, will develop programs and budgets as in the past. However, the Community Educational Staff will work with the various agencies to help them avoid needless repetitions, establish policies to serve all of the people better, develop sounder fiscal practices, and provide general data to help evaluate programs with feedback and guidance for continuous improvement.

There is no reason that the Superboard of Learning Resources and its supervisory staff must make the mistakes that many city and county school systems have made in the past several decades as they have exercised strong central, uniform controls over the individual schools that make up the system. The fetish of uniformity that often dominates the "administrative mind" and makes the system less responsive to local needs because "everyone must be treated alike" plagues these large school systems. Such a situation did not exist years ago when the principal and staff of each local school rightly had much control over the program for the neighborhood. Fortunately, there appears to be a turning away from traditional school-system uniformity, so that the professional employees in each local school, working with the local community, have responsibility for their program. Of course, some local persons enjoy the opportunity to blame the central office for their ineffective programs—but many of these persons scarcely deserve the title of professionals. Thus the Superboard of Learning Resources and its staff would need to play a different role than the conventional Board of Education and central office staff play today.

Selected Changes

Before concluding this statement, in order to cast further light on the Superboard idea, I want to point out some changes in school programs that we are seeking to implement in a group of schools.² These selected changes may help to illustrate the need for better coordination of the three learning/teaching environments: home, school, and community.

A basic goal in this project is to schedule each student into the best learning environment for a given task. For example, if a museum, office, shop, or library is better than the school has or can reasonably provide, the school schedules the student in that locale rather than in the simulated environment of the school. Of course, someone in that location needs to report to the student's teacher-adviser about the student's attendance, his attitudes, and achievements. The same principle applies to learning at home. Both community-resource personnel and the home have regular contacts with the school through the teacher-adviser system.

Each student has a teacher-adviser who arranges his schedule and monitors his progress by receiving reports in all of the subject areas. Every student is known as a total human being educationally, by someone at the school, his teacher-adviser.

A curriculum goal in this model is extremely important. The aim is to reduce the requirements in the cognitive and skills areas to the minimum essentials that everyone needs to know by current definitions in the various subject areas. The purpose is to provide each student with more time and energy to discover and develop his own interests and talents, again under the supervision of his teacher-adviser. A departmental responsibility is to encourage the students to learn more in the subject area than they think they want to do. There are two basic reasons: first, if you learn more, the field opens up to you a number of hobbies, special interests,

²J. Lloyd Trump and William Georgiades, "Doing Better with What You Have," and "The NASSP Model Schools Action Program," *NASSP Bulletin* 54 (346): 106-33; May 1970; and 56 (364): 116-26; May 1972 respectively.

and a fuller life; second, if you learn even more, careers are open to you.

These changes in schools, and other alternatives related to them, make possible the fuller use of home and community resources by students and teachers in schools and tie all of these resources together more closely. Both groups are freer to participate in the community by means of more open schedules and concepts of teaching and learning roles.

A quarter-century ago, Floyd Wesley Reeves at the University of Chicago urged the abolition of the position of Superintendent of Schools. He wanted the head to be called Superintendent of Education. His proposal makes sense. We would add the Superboard of Learning Resources in addition to the Board of School Supervisors or of Education. We would not abolish the Theatre boards, the Music Center boards, the various boards for vocational rehabilitation, work experience, welfare, and the rest. We would seek more efficient use of resources and coordination under a Superboard and a staff that would help all the others. Again, the aim is to make more efficient uses of their resources, develop new ones, and most important, provide better services to the persons of all ages who need better opportunities to enrich their lives than the present system provides.

The foregoing ideas were urged earlier this year by the writer at a Conference on Total Community Library Service, sponsored jointly by the National Education Association and the American Library Association, in the NEA Center in Washington. I raised such questions as these: If school libraries and community libraries have similar goals, why waste money on separate schools and libraries, separately trained personnel, separate boards, separate taxing bodies, and the like? Where does one stop and the other start? Who owns 4:30 p.m., Saturday, Sunday, or July?

The need for better community coordination is obvious. Until we have a community Director of Learning Resources and a staff, and one Superboard of Learning Resources, we will not have truly a community program of continuing education. □

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