

THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY— WHAT IS IT?

THE CONCEPTS of the schools' relationship to the community, and vice versa, are many. In this issue we have tried to provide as many definitions of these concepts as are feasible within our limitations of space.

Every School Is a Community

HENRY HARAP

We lead with an article by Henry Harap, associate director, Division of Surveys and Field Services, George Peabody College for Teachers, Nashville, Tenn. who outlines many activities basic to nurturing citizens who can go from the school community to the larger one with the security of having learned the true fundamentals of good citizenship.

WITHIN THE WALLS in which any school exists, there exists a community. Individuals have to get along together; they play together; they work together; they use a place in common; they share materials; they care for their rooms, buildings, and grounds; and they have practically all the institutions that exist in the larger outside community.

A school has its problems of house-keeping, preparation of food, and sanitation. It has its own channels of communication and its peculiar problems of traffic control. It has its program of recreation and its organized group life. It has a rudimentary system of production and consumption. It has its distributive organization, its facilities for exchange, and its banking services. It levies taxes for community enterprises, and maintains its own political system. It makes its own laws and elects its own governmental representatives. It carries on transactions with other school communities. It is through participation in these practical activities that young people have an opportunity to learn their responsibilities to their com-

munity. These real and purposeful experiences have great educative value and, therefore, should become a part of the school's learning program.

Educative Value of School Activities

What we are discussing is not a way of getting work done which would otherwise be done by janitors, carpenters, and other workers. There is the possibility, of course, that menial work without educative value will be justified by some. However, the learning opportunities are too plentiful to give one too much concern on this score. Learning situations in the immediate school environment offer many challenging problems for inquiry and investigation which should deepen the understanding of the pupil and contribute directly toward the improvement of living in his home and locality.

There is, of course, the danger that the practical activities of the school economy will be held to the manipulative level. This condition is not inherent in the activities; it is due to teachers' insensibility to the facts, principles, and

social implications that are related to the simplest and most common tasks in the everyday life of the school. It is a real challenge to the teacher to deepen the meaning of common things; to probe into their social and scientific explanations. Merely to paint a desk or shelf is to stay on the level of hand-work; to know that the ingredients include pigments, linseed oil, and a drier is to go a little farther. From this point, one may pursue the inquiry into progressively deeper reservoirs of knowledge such as, distinguishing paint, varnish, and stain; knowing that paint has a protective quality; knowing that the color of paint affects the lighting of a room; knowing what removes paint and why; and so on to wider limits of human knowledge and experience.

To extend the illustration into the field of social insight, let us assume that a class is studying the source and purity of the school's water supply. This inquiry may carry the children into successively deeper and more significant understandings of collective effort. Thus the study of water supply may be pursued to include how water is polluted and why; what the community does to protect water supply; how the local sanitary department inspects the water supply; and how these services are paid for by all the people.

Opportunities for Sharing

The group life of the school community offers many opportunities for lifelike learning which are commonly overlooked. Along the Lafourche Bayou in Louisiana, I once had occasion to visit a beautiful one-story school building. It was a rather good school as

schools go; yet it did not fit entirely into the social and economic setting of the people whom it was designed to serve. It gave no opportunity to the pupils to beautify it and to make it into a home. The building had no provision for home economics, no provision for shop work. The landscaping which was incomplete was being done by the principal during his spare time. To have asked the pupils to share the work was unthinkable! Here an obvious opportunity was lost to teach pupils to contribute to the upkeep of the school and to learn how to beautify their home surroundings.

A short time ago, during a visit to a small twelve-grade school, I met the elementary principal at the doorway checking and distributing milk bottles while his class was left idle. A sixth grade group of children could have done this just as effectively with much profit to themselves. It would have given them a sense of common ownership and opportunity for practical arithmetic.

I once saw a well being sunk and a pump being installed on the school grounds at the very time when the pupils were studying water supply. I stopped to interview the craftsman who cheerfully explained the procedure and demonstrated the operation of the pump. Here was an opportunity for learning which no book or laboratory study could approach in clarity and reality. Yet the teacher allowed it to slip through her fingers.

Activity—Real, Not Dramatized

The most comprehensive plan of learning through participation in productive enterprises in the school economy was put into operation by Thomas

Alexander, at Springdale Farms, North Carolina. This institution was founded about ten years ago to provide purposeful and constructive living in a place where the activities were real, not dramatized. The program of the school was built around the many responsibilities which living in the school community demanded, rather than around subjects. The boys and girls learned by solving the problems which arose in living together in a rural setting. They were confronted with such needs and responsibilities as maintaining their health; producing and securing proper food; obtaining proper recreation and achieving friendly relationships with those with whom they lived.

In the fall of the current academic year, seniors of the New School, a division of Evanston Township High School, volunteered to contribute a definite service to the school community. It offered an opportunity to learn as well as to serve. The responsibilities they assumed are varied. One boy is the auto shop foreman, another is librarian for the music department; two assist with the audio-visual program; three girls take care of the costume chest for the director of dramatics; four are employed by the college library; four students aid in the testing and guidance program. Several serve as assistants to the director of intramurals, mathematics, biology, art departments, and some students are doing actual teaching.

Improved Living Involves Learning

Sometime ago I visited a six-teacher elementary school in northern Alabama in which the children organized themselves into a self-governing council and

assumed their share of the work of school improvement. The children made a survey of the grounds and prepared a map in which the existing conditions and proposed improvements were shown. The first grade helped to plant flowers and kept the school grounds clean. The second grade prepared flower beds in the court. The third grade removed all rubbish from school grounds and helped with the flower beds. The fourth grade enriched, plowed, and re-seeded the lawn and helped to paint the walls of the toilets. The fifth grade took charge of planting shrubbery and also helped in painting. The sixth grade made concrete walks and built new floors in the toilets. There was much sharing and cooperating among the various groups. The parents and other persons in the community were called upon to help in the project. The entire enterprise developed a finer spirit of cooperation and pride among the children.

In the school community each room is the home of a group of individuals. The classroom environment should set an example of pleasant and cheerful surroundings which the child may come to associate with all places in which people live. Room beautification has been more widely accepted as a learning experience than any other phase of the school's economy. Consequently it is not uncommon to find children and youth organizing themselves into learning groups for painting of woodwork and walls; making of chair backs, centerpieces, and curtains; building of dress-up centers and library corners; and many other decorative projects. Instruction in beautification in this way is included in every

grade as it relates to the needs of the classroom, the building, and the grounds.

To the children and teachers of the rural school, the disposal of sewage is a problem with which they have daily contact. In the main, it is the same problem which confronts the child and his family in the rural home. The school has its septic tank and periodical tasks of disinfecting privies and commodes. The school has access to the sanitary official in the county health department. The pamphlets on sewage disposal distributed by various governmental agencies are available to school and home alike. On occasion, the school may actually be in the process of building and installing a septic tank. The pupils may have an opportunity to have an actual part in the building of side walls, bottom, sides, partitions, and the top of the tank. It would be a simple matter for them to make tests of the relative effectiveness of quick lime, caustic potash, or chlorinated lime as disinfectants. Opportunities often exist for extending these experiences to the home.

Economic Enterprises Promote Growth

For one of the best illustrations of using the economy of the school community for educational purposes, we go back twenty odd years, to the Moraine Park School where the economic activities were one division of a fourfold program. The other main divisions were academic, governmental, and physical. These business or economic activities in the parlance of the school were known as projects. No person was allowed to operate a project in the school without a franchise from the school council.

A construction company organized

by pupils especially interested in mechanical work did the repair work around the school. The library was conducted by a corps of students interested in library work. The printing company did the printing for the school. The luncheon company conducted the cafeteria. The merchandising projects consisted of enterprises engaged in supplying the school community with needed articles. The maintenance projects had to do with maintenance, repair, and construction of school equipment. The service projects included secretarial work, delivery of packages, musical entertainment, and the like.

The retail store enterprise bought merchandise from outside wholesale merchants, gauged the demands of customers, kept accounts, and rendered real service. There was a constant interchange of services. The Supply Company depended upon the Delivery Company; the Delivery Company made daily deliveries for the Lunch Company; the Lunch Company received checks on the Bank; and the Bank ordered deposit slips from the Printing Company.

A more recent illustration of economic enterprises operating as an integral part of the curriculum was developed at the Skokie Junior High School under the guidance of S. R. Logan, the principal. "Our school," wrote Mr. Logan, "considers itself a community in which are found the rudiments of the institutions and problems of the times." Organized services arise naturally from the needs of the individuals that make up the community. The children in the Skokie School needed pencils, paper, and other school supplies which gave some of the chil-

dren the idea that they would like to own and operate a supply store. They secured a charter from the School Council, sold shares of stock, and with the proceeds they purchased a small supply of goods and opened shop in a large storage closet. Later the store was converted into a public enterprise and the profits were used to buy equipment which the school needed.

A mutual insurance company was organized to write policies for both teachers and students to cover the loss of dishes broken in the school cafeteria. A credit union was organized on the initiative of a thirteen-year-old son of a member of a local cooperative. It makes small loans to members and operates on the same principles as the many credit unions chartered by state and federal government. Other economic enterprises include a company engaged in raising and selling rabbits, mice, and chicks, renting pets and cages, selling feed and giving instruction to small children in the care of pets; operating an exchange of used skates, football suits, and other personal belongings; stamping pens and articles with names of owners; operating a publicly owned print shop, and an apiary.

Citizenship Education Needs Attention

It is in the field of citizenship education that the school misses its greatest opportunities to use its *body politic* for educative purposes. On a smaller scale, the school community reproduces all of the conditions of politics and government which obtain in the adult world. The young people have their pressure groups, party politics, election campaigns, political patronage, and independent reform groups. In the

conduct of their own affairs, the students have an opportunity to learn to choose efficient public servants and to check on their integrity.

At the Parker District High School the pupils share in the cost of school operation and improvement. Each pupil has a part in paying for supplies used by the whole school, such as materials for the improvement of classrooms, magazines, charts, art materials, and other supplies and equipment. Most pupils pay in money but some pay in work which contributes to the improvement of the school. This, according to the school report, helps the pupils to realize that many things used in common are financed through common funds, to which every citizen contributes. We do not know from the report whether the pupils had an opportunity to vote to tax themselves and whether they handle these public funds, which would be important considerations in the complete process of self-government and purposeful learning.

The self-governing activities are the most effective means of education for citizenship which the school can offer. They give the pupils an opportunity to share in making decisions which affect the welfare of the whole group. Students can assume a larger responsibility for control of their group activities and student organizations. School assemblies can be conducted by student officials. The practice of democracy can be learned in all groups in which young people assemble, the most important of which is the class. It is in the classroom that the pupil learns to disagree courteously; to give honest and constructive criticism; to cooperate with others for the common good. Here,

the young citizen begins to learn how the rights of free men are safeguarded by keeping the channels of free discussion open.

The school is a society. It resembles the larger community in the sense that it consists of people living within definite boundaries and using many services in common. Just as every community has an individuality which is the result

of its customs and institutions, so every school has a character which is the result of its traditions and ways of living as a group. Both the school and the community reach their highest level when there is a widespread awareness of the common interest and a high degree of cooperation among individuals and groups for the common good of the total community.



Experiences for Understanding_____

LOUISE C. McCUE

Keeping minds open as well as ears is suggested by Louise C. McCue, formerly assistant editor, *EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP*, as a guide to developing better and much more thorough understanding in community relationships. Mrs. McCue underlines the significance of providing experiences for children which will lead to straight thinking in adulthood.

LARRY MASTERS *might* have understood Woody White. And Woody *might* have understood Larry. But they didn't. And least of all did either of them understand Henry Smith.

Larry owned and operated a lumber mill in Riverside. Woody was one of Larry's most faithful workers, or had been up until a week ago. Since then Larry wasn't so sure. Trouble was brewing among the lumber mill employees, and Larry had it pretty straight that Woody was one of the ringleaders. Woody had been heard talking to the men about new safety installations, even pointing out how they might have prevented the "accidental" death a few months back of one of their fellow-workers. The men were airing their views on wages and hours, too. Larry couldn't understand what was happening. He took the defensive when local reporters came to interview him, falling back on pat statements about "the value

of his lumber mill to the community" and "the need for individual initiative in our modern economy."

The reporters talked with Woody, too, and he took the defensive. He talked about what happens to a man and his family when sick leave is only two weeks a year and an injury sustained on the job keeps the man idle for two months. He talked about how hard it is to make a weekly wage cover the needs of a wife and three children. Grappling with personal problems of daily living hadn't left Woody much time to ponder the importance of Larry's lumber mill to Riverside or "the need for individual initiative in our modern economy."

Larry and Woody seemed to live in different worlds. That they could have understood each other was perhaps too much to hope. So far as could be determined they agreed on only one thing—their distaste for Henry Smith. Like

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