



The Challenge of Change: Roles and Relationships

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NO ISSUE in recent years has stirred as much controversy as the demand for community control of schools. Control of the schools would hopefully alleviate the sense of powerlessness among minority groups as they made those decisions which would improve the quality of education and bring about accountability on the part of those who provide educational services to the schools. These demands spearheaded in black inner city communities have brought about some degree of decentralization in certain cities, giving communities more opportunity to participate in decision-making processes. The change has not been without conflict and confrontation. This should hardly be surprising.

Communities participating in local control or participation projects through decentralization have failed to question the adequacy of the hierarchical structure embedded in the very institution they wish to change. To rebuild and revitalize the type of institutions needed to stamp out racism and oppression, minority groups must go beyond this demand for control. As products of a system of oppression and racism which have been institutionalized, we must avoid the ever present danger of perpetuating the very system we wish to change. Nowhere is this more evident than in the roles and relationships of those most intimately and significantly affected by the schools.

To Restructure the Schools

The Woodlawn Experimental Schools Project is a Title III project involved in community participation. The objectives of the project emanate from the needs of highest priority—to restructure the social system in terms of its community through mutuality of effort by subsequent interventions having two foci: (a) roles and relationships of persons acting within the schools, and (b) roles and relationships of persons acting in the home and community. WESP considers change in terms of how people work together as well as which people work together.¹

The conceptual framework translated into a social process in restructuring the social system in WESP is CAPTS. CAPTS is an aggregation of individuals representing C-community, A-administrators, P-parents, T-teachers, and S-students. The CAPTS conceptual model is a method of collective decision making. Concentrated power does not reside within any component. The power of CAPTS lies in the quality of the relation-

¹ Willard Congreve. *Institutional Collaboration To Improve Urban Public Education with Special Reference to the City of Chicago*. U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Bureau of Research, Project Number 7-0346; March 15, 1968.

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ships among the components.² Therein lie the promise and the threat to bringing about institutional change.

One must bear in mind that institutions are not made of brick and mortar, but of people whose habituated behavior patterns perpetuate the aims of institutions.³ If the schools as one of the institutions of society have perpetuated racism, then one must examine the relationships within the social system of the schools and the assumptions underlying these habituated interaction patterns which operate to sustain racist patterns of behavior. If institutions are to change, these old patterns of behavior must be dismantled and consciously restructured. Racism and oppression remain in the realm of rhetoric unless one understands what action he can take in his existential situation that can transform this reality.

Minority parents, as such, do not need to participate in the schools for reasons which denote their roles as being merely recipients of, supporters of, agents of, or consumers of. Rather, it is their obligation toward the liberation of their people vis-à-vis education to participate in the schools because every school is a social system whose parts are interdependent and interrelated. Parents must participate because they are an indispensable part of the collective (CAPTS), of which each group must rethink its own assumptions, as they collectively seek a new reality which calls for a redefinition of goals based on new values. These new values will emerge as the collective discovers and analyzes the interrelationships of the social system and the nature of the interaction between any of its components.

As members of the collective begin to define new goals and discover new values, they must be able to see what the new institution should be. How would students, parents, teachers, administrators, and members of the community relate to self and to others? What

types of activities could the students engage in which would enable them to gain skills while reinforcing the values of the new institution? Such questions objectify new thoughts and new actions.

New Values, New Forms

New patterns of behavior based on new values call for new institutional forms. Patterns of interaction are locked in through the way an institution is structured. A hierarchal structure demands certain dominant and subordinate behaviors dependent upon one's position in the structure. To attempt to maintain this structure today when all factions of the social system of the schools, parents, community, teachers, and students, are becoming increasingly militant in their demands is to be crisis oriented. Moreover, the hierarchal structure has the ability to accommodate changes without changing the institution itself. It is the structure which maintains relationships and it is the relationships which perpetuate racism, oppression, alienation, and conformity. Likewise the demands upon the public schools made by militant groups or teachers unions have done little to affect significantly the educational achievement or the quality of the relationships in poor and minority communities. This condition will continue as long as demands are made within the terms of the existing system.

A collective (CAPTS) involved in learning together and teaching each other in an atmosphere of mutual respect will have far-reaching consequences. New goals and new values will call for a complete reevaluation of child-rearing practices on the part of parents. New types of parent-child relationships will be entered which reinforce and reaffirm the goals and values defined, and those which perpetuate false values will be denied.

Teachers likewise must examine the underlying assumptions upon which they think and act. Few teachers fully understand the system in which they were educated, or the assumptions underlying the horizontal and vertical structures of school organization, the imposed curriculum, the nature of the child,

² Clara K. Holton. "CAPTS: A Cooperative Model for In-Service Training." In: "Mind." *Instructor Development*, Vol. 2, No. 5; February 1971. New York: General Learning Corporation.

³ Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1967.

or punishment and rewards. It is only through such reevaluation that the teachers can begin to define the new interactions called for, based on the collectively defined goals and values.

Administrators must rid themselves of the authoritarian stance. This stance is inherent in the hierarchical structure, which cannot serve a new institution based on new roles and relationships. To continue this stance is to continue to perpetuate oppression, conformity, and alienation, whereas what is needed are new relationships which are committed to liberation, diversity, and meaning.

Students must be reared from birth under those conditions which foster relationships which advocate liberation, diversity, and meaning. The school as an extension of the home provides the institutional setting whereby the child reinforces the values of his home, not through rote learning but through practice. For example, if the student is to become a decision maker, then decision making should be an integral part of his behavior in kindergarten, with his rights as a person duly protected. The assumption that the young are unable to make decisions is completely unfounded.

Involvement in Programs

Among the vehicles created for CAPTS decision making in the experimental elementary schools, to ensure participation of all groups, were CAPTS Evaluation, The Senate (CAPTS decision-making vehicle for the school), and Goal Setting and Evaluation in K-1. Institutional evaluation and accountability are assured through CAPTS evaluation process. This vehicle provides an opportunity for all components to define and negotiate for themselves criteria for role performance. Each group would then be accountable to itself and to all other components for performance, according to mutually agreed criteria. The objectives outlined for teacher evaluation in the elementary schools were to promote teacher growth and further relationships among teachers and other components of WESP.

Another promising vehicle is an aspect of CAPTS involvement in programs. This process is called Goal Setting and Evaluation through a Mutuality of Effort of Parents, Students, and Teachers. A goal setting conference is scheduled in which behavioral objectives are jointly agreed upon, with the student demonstrating to his parents and teacher the degree of mastery of agreed upon objectives. Diagnosis and new goal setting through a parent-student-teacher conference are provided whenever indicated.

One of the underlying assumptions tested in the primary grades which was implicit and explicit in the behavior patterns of teachers was that black children did not have a language. Discarding this assumption led to the implementation of the Ethno-Linguistic Oral Language Program. This program assumes that any ethnic group, as opposed to the larger society in the United States, possesses in its language system phonological, structural, syntactical, morphological, and conceptual items which are peculiar to that ethnic culture. The program further assumes that these language items are valid for that particular culture and that the language that the children bring to school should serve as an ideal point of departure for other learning.⁴

Not all of the organizational vehicles designed for the CAPTS conceptual model were fully implemented nor were all the assumptions tested. This was due to the rigidity of the structure WESP hoped to change, and to the fact that the organizational structure of WESP itself was never clearly delineated.

However, in spite of this, in those instances where new forms emerged out of new roles and relationships, marked progress was made in achieving the secondary goals of the project.

The success of the project is that this model for decision making was able to emerge out of conflict. Within this fact lies some measure of hope for a high quality of education that is also relevant. □

⁴ Renee Edmonds. "Goals, Objectives, and Programs in the Primary Grades in the Wadsworth Elementary Schools." (Unpublished paper.)

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