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Community Education: Global Perspectives for Developing Comprehensive Integrated Human and Community Services

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Abstract

In this article, the authors present an overview of Community Education, explaining that it is an educational philosophy that links together leisure, social, cultural, educational, and health initiatives together with community development and other human and lifelong learning needs in the planning and delivery of services at the local level. They stress the fact that Community Education is different from traditional western education and argue that although the philosophy is practised globally, it should not be perceived as globalisation. Community Education practitioners' focus is local – on individual communities in whatever stage they are in their development, and their role is working in partnership with the community's residents, businesses, agencies and organisations in problem-solving initiatives and the delivery of services. The authors point out the similarity between the desired outcomes of Community Education and Leisure/Recreation initiatives. The article also includes a short review of how the Community Education process works in different parts of the world.

Keywords: *Community Education, community development, community values, Community Schools, civic responsibility, lifelong learning, citizen involvement, interagency cooperation, partnerships*

* * *

The Community Education Concept and Identifying Labels

Community Education is an educational philosophy that is linked directly to the Community School concept because the implementation and practice of the philosophy is often at local school sites. Worldwide, various labels are identified with components related to Community Education, such as informal

education, popular education, community development, community learning, non-credit education, and types of educational partnerships. The exact label used usually depends on the historical context of each country or region, but in each there is the implied linking and merging of what is meant by the term "community" and the term "education." The development stage of a country

influences the focus of Community Education initiatives.

Community. In the global context, "community" can be a difficult term to define. In a historical sense, "community" refers to belonging to an identifiable homogeneous group, inhabiting a contiguous area, having a sense of security, and having a set of basic service institutions (Decker and Decker, 2003). In today's global context, people relate to their communities through both geographic and non-geographic substructures. From a sociological perspective, the concept of community refers to a group of people united by at least one common characteristic, such as geography, shared interests, values, experiences, or traditions (Centers for Disease Control, 1994).

Communities can also be viewed as systems composed of individual members and sectors that have a variety of distinct characteristics and interrelationships, with each sector populated by groups of individuals who represent specialised functions, activities, or interests within a community system (Centers for Disease Control, 1994). For example, schools focus on student education; the leisure sector on parks, recreational pursuits, and tourism; the transportation sector on moving people and products; the economic sector on enterprise and employment; the religious sector on the spiritual well-being of people; the health care sector on prevention and treatment of diseases and injuries, etc.

With new technologies and the complexities of today's society, an individual can be a member of a number of different communities. For example, almost everyone is a member of the local community and the neighborhood in which s/he lives, and at the same time a member of an ethnic and cultural community on local and international levels, a member of a professional community, and increasingly a member of a variety of virtual communities. Whatever the community, in the true "sense of community" there are generally accepted rules and social norms that protect, respect, and help address the basic needs of members of that community (Decker and Decker, 2003).

Education. The simple definition of education "as the knowledge and development resulting from an educational process" (Merriam-Webster Online, 2005) does not indicate its importance in terms of human growth or the acquisition of principles and values. In April 2004, the United Nation's Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) kicked off a Global Campaign for Education (www.campaignforeducation.org) intended to focus attention on the importance of education. The following are the summary points of why education is so important worldwide.

- Education impacts on human development and economic growth, and it is a fundamental requirement for democracy.

- Education provides people with the tools and knowledge they need to understand and participate in today's world.

- Education enhances the ability of families to manage health problems, improve nutrition and childcare, use leisure wisely, and better plan for the future.

- Education is essential for economic development and eradicating poverty. It allows people to be more productive, to play a greater role in economic life, and to earn a better living.

- Education makes it possible for people to be responsible and informed citizens, and to have a voice in politics and society, which is essential for sustaining democracy. It also provides individuals with the knowledge and awareness needed to promote tolerance and understanding among people.

Education is related to values, because the educational process takes place within a cultural construct. Therefore, it should be remembered that what counts as being a positive value in one part of the world may not be as well supported in others. This caution is particularly the case when one considers the differences between the underlying value systems that encourage the perception that education aims to make people productive consumers – typical of many western countries – and those value systems that encourage people to become skilled for subsistence and community living – typical of many third world or

developing countries. The Community Education philosophy acknowledges the necessity for respect of a particular community's value system. In short, Community Education must respond to the needs of the local community rather than having any absolute purpose at its base.

Development Stage. Porter (2005) argues that "The Era of Globalization" is fast becoming the preferred term for describing the political, economic, and cultural atmosphere of today because "the same forces that allow businesses to operate as if national borders did not exist also allow social activists, labour organisers, journalists, academics, and many others to work on a global stage." Ritzer (2003) views globalisation as a movement away from "something" that is indigenously conceived, locally controlled, and rich in distinctive content toward "nothing" that is centrally controlled and relatively devoid of distinctive substance. There is active debate of whether globalisation is a good or bad thing. Although the term globalisation itself is neutral, it can be perceived as a positive or negative depending on the circumstances and outcomes it generates. Thus, a globalised movement towards a cure for AIDS can be seen as positive, whereas much of the debate related to globalisation and economic development has been characterised as the wealthy all over the world making decisions that benefit themselves at the expense of the poor. Rumford (2005) emphasises that complicating the debate is the fact that the terms "globalization and Americanization (and Westernization) are seen virtually as synonymous."

Advocacy of Community Education is worldwide, but it should not be perceived as globalisation. Although the philosophy is practised globally, its focus is local. The Community Education concept stresses that each community has unique factors that must be taken into account, including the community organising and economic development of that particular community.

In developed countries, Community Education is focused more on lifelong learning and efficient use of resources. It is almost always identified with a local neighbourhood in which

people live. In developing countries, Community Education is focused more on social engineering, community organisation, and civic development. In underdeveloped countries, Community Education's emphasis tends to be on community development, building the community's infrastructure, and increasing economic development, and it is greatly influenced by ethnic/religious norms and cultural domination issues.

Basic Components

The Community Education philosophy acknowledges the mutual interdependence of the family, school, and community in the education of the community's residents. In the global context, it can be practised in what are labeled (a) school-based models, (b) community-based or (c) agency-specific models. It has three basic components (Decker and Boo, 2001):

1. Lifelong Learning
 - Implementing the principle that learning continues throughout life.
 - Providing formal and informal learning opportunities.
 - Offering programmes and services for all community members, often in an intergenerational setting.
2. Community Involvement
 - Promoting a sense of civic responsibility.
 - Providing leadership opportunities for community members.
 - Including diverse populations in all aspects of community life.
 - Encouraging democratic procedures in local decision making.
3. Efficient Use of Resources
 - Using the school's and the community's physical, financial, and human resources to address community needs.
 - Reducing duplication of services by promoting collaborative effort.

Principles of Community Education

Community Educators can be found in schools, in community agencies, in hospitals, and in the wider community, doing different things, but using the same set of principles. These principles – and the strategies designed

to implement them – have a positive impact on a school's traditional academic programme and the well-being of the community-at-large. The principles of Community Education (Decker and Decker, 2003) are:

- *Lifelong Learning.* Education is viewed as a birth-to-death process and everyone in the community – individuals, businesses, public and private agencies – shares responsibility for educating all members of the community and providing learning opportunities for residents of all ages, backgrounds, and needs.

- *Self-Determination.* Local people have a right and a responsibility to be involved in determining community needs and identifying community resources that can be used to address those needs.

- *Self-Help.* People are best served when their capacity to help themselves is acknowledged and developed. When people assume responsibility for their own well-being, they build independence and become part of the solution.

- *Leadership Development.* The training of local leaders in such skills as problem solving, decision making, and group process is an essential component of successful self-help and improvement efforts.

- *Institutional Responsiveness.* Public institutions exist to serve the public and are obliged to develop programmes and services that address continuously changing public needs and interests.

- *Maximum Use of Resources.* The physical, financial, and human resources in every community should be interconnected and used to their fullest to meet the diverse needs and interests of all community members.

- *Integrated Delivery of Services.* Organisations and agencies that operate for the public good can better meet their own goals and serve the public by collaborating with organisations and agencies with similar goals.

- *Decentralization.* Services, programmes, and other community involvement opportunities that are close to people's homes have the greatest potential for high levels of public participation. Whenever possible, these activi-

ties should be available in locations with easy public access.

- *Inclusiveness.* Community services, programmes, and other community involvement opportunities should be designed to involve the broadest possible cross-section of community members and eliminate the segregation or isolation of people by age, income, sex, race, ethnicity, religion, or other factors that impede participation.

- *Access to Public Information.* Public information is shared across agency and organisational lines. Community members know more than just the facts; they know what the facts mean in the lives of the diverse people who make up the community.

Contributions of the Global Leisure/Recreation Field

The preface to the publication *Benefits of Parks and Recreation* (1992) emphatically states that "to those involved in the delivery of leisure services, recreation has always been seen as a means to a bigger end." Community Educators would agree with Allen and Smith (2005) that leisure should be an integral part of education and that:

There needs to be recognition of the cultural importance of leisure education regarding its significance and use...[and] the schools have a responsibility to the student and to every citizen of the community (1) to place emphasis on the avocational aspects of all school subjects for leisure time use, (2) to provide a variety of leisure opportunities for children and adults of all ages, and (3) to make available public owned areas and facilities for community use.

The 1997 update to the *Benefits Catalogue* points out that the term "recreation" is used "as a broad concept relating to physical recreation, sports, fitness, social recreation, arts, culture and therapeutic recreation" and summarises the benefits in terms of eight marketing statements. These emphasised outcomes are among the intended outcomes when a comprehensive, integrated Community Education programme is successfully implemented in a community:

1. Recreation and active living are *essential to personal health*.
2. Recreation is a key to balanced *human development*.
3. Recreation and parks are essential to *quality of life*.
4. Recreation reduces *self-destructive and anti-social behaviour*.
5. Recreation and parks build *strong families and health communities*.
6. Recreation reduces health care, social service, and police/justice *costs*.
7. Recreation and parks are significant *economic generators* in a community.
8. Parks, open spaces and natural areas are *essential to ecological survival*.

Community Education in Practice

There is wide diversity among Community Education programmes because each programme is based on a specific community's needs and desires. When there is an emphasis on a particular need or focus, the Community Education programme may be identified by that need or focus, such as extended day programme, after-school programme, leisure and recreation programme, health and human service programme, or adult and continuing education programmes. When Community Education is used as an intervention strategy, it may be identified by the targeted population or by problems, such as at-risk youth and families, drug and substance abuse, coping skills, basic job skills, health care, or rehabilitation.

When the focus is on civic or community development, Community Education initiatives may be linked to community organisational efforts such as building a school, promoting community sanitation, or improving environmental qualities. When the focus is economic development, Community Education strategies may be used to encourage the development and implementation of self-help efforts or micro and entrepreneurial enterprises.

Community Education's basic philosophy is grounded in the dynamics of outreach and involvement. The implementation process is designed to reach out and identify what

members of a particular community need and want and then to help find the resources – financial, physical, and human – to meet their needs or desires. The process's emphasis is on having as broad and diverse community *involvement* and *participation* as possible and developing self-reliance in individuals and groups. The Community Educator's role is one of a partner; a member of a partnership working along with community residents, businesses, agencies, and organisations in problem-solving initiatives and the delivery of services.

Using Community Education principles, the Community Educator's work begins at whatever stage a community is at in its development. The Community Educator does not assume that his or her value system is the right one, but helps the community to clarify and develop collective values and acquire the skills and resources needed to maintain its viability. A Community Educator does not try to be the centre of attention or maintain a powerful position, but instead tries to develop others in the community to take leadership roles and to accept responsibility for long term development.

Community Education Differs from Traditional Western Education

Traditional western education carries with it a series of underlying assumptions about the value of certain knowledge and the way in which this knowledge should be developed, transmitted, and assessed. The United States' focus on the basic skills – as assessed by the demanding and sometimes vindictive accountability systems now present in many western countries – assumes that certain knowledge is more important than other knowledge. If this "basic" knowledge is not addressed first, foremost, and last, then students, teachers, and schools can be somehow vilified for any lack of success in this area. However, this focus on success is not something that all countries treat in the same way. Although all countries might wish their children to be literate and numerate, not all countries have a policy of "shame and blame" if students or schools do not reach

this objective (Steinitz, 1999). Some systems enable a broader range of measures of success to exist.

Traditional western education has also made the assumption that it can support other parts of the world by delivering education to other (underdeveloped) countries in the same way that education is delivered in western countries. What is not recognised is the fact that an acceptance of western education traditions involves the implicit acceptance of a series of values that may not be accepted in other parts of the world.

Viewed in this context, the difference between traditional western education and Community Education becomes clear. The operating frameworks are completely different. Whereas, western education brings with it a series of embedded values that will change the life as well as the learning of people it involves (often without the people even knowing this change is happening), Community Education starts from a different beginning point. For a Community Educator, preserving the community's values is a prime objective. Community Educators work with community members to help find out what the community needs. If values are to be changed, then the change must be with the full knowledge and acceptance of the community. A short review of Community Education in different parts of the world shows how the process works.

Community Education in the United States

Decker and Brown (2005) highlight milestones in the evolution of Community Education in the United States. Community Education has deep roots that can be traced to ideas expressed by John Dewey regarding education for the whole child and the role of family and community in shaping the experiential learning opportunities for all learners. The philosophy is usually implemented through Community Schools. Early 1900 models with related links to the concept of a Community School were the "lighted school" in Milwaukee, the "settlement house" "community centers" in Chicago, and the Kentucky and West Virginia

Community Schools spearheaded by Elsie Clapp.

The modern Community School movement stems from the motivation and actions of Frank J. Manley in Flint, Michigan. However, its evolution in Flint would not have been possible without the philanthropy of Charles Stewart Mott and a long-lasting creative partnership between Mott and Manley. The initial concept was that schools were facilities owned by the entire community that were commonly under-utilised. The idea behind Community Schools was simple. Open up what the community already owned and extend the use of the properties and facilities to serve a variety of community needs. The concept kept growing and broadening until the entire community, not just students, became involved in health, educational, and recreational programmes. Adults from all walks of life were involved in the planning of programmes and serving on advisory councils.

Manley's early experiences in Community Education became the basis for his "Four Is" theory. He believed that if he could get people *in*, they would get *interested*, could not help but become *informed*, and that would lead toward community *involvement*. He felt that these four Is would combat four negative Is: ignorance, indifference, inertia, and intolerance (Procurier, 1999).

Today's Community Education movement is more diverse than when it first emerged nearly 100 years ago. Because each Community Education programme is implemented reflecting individual communities, there is no one model. The web site of the National Center for Community Education in Flint, Michigan (www.nccenet.org) has descriptions of exemplary models and case studies of Community Education programmes. It highlights programmes in three model settings – school, district, and agency – that are making a difference in their communities. The web site of the National Community School Coalition in Washington, DC (www.communityschool.org) has descriptions of both school- and non-school-based models. The web site of the National Community Education Association

(www.ncea.com) has articles and resource information.

Highlights of Community Education in Other Countries

The International Community Education Association (ICEA) has a web site (www.icea.de) and an online journal. The July 2003 issue of the *Community Education International Journal* contains highlights of Community Education in a number of regions.

Angelika Krueger, a former ICEA Associate Regional Director, commented on Europe, particularly Germany. She explains that in Germany the Community School concept is a transforming strategy for the traditional German school. Especially after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, it relates to community empowerment and contributes to the empowerment of children and young people.

Ekundaydo Thompson, a former member of the ICEA Board of Directors, points out that, in Africa, community development provides the rationale and context for the practice of Community Education. Increasing levels of poverty, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and political violence determine to a large extent the agenda for Community Education in Africa.

In Latin America, Juergen Zimmer, former President of ICEA, highlights a powerful popular education movement inspired by Paulo Freire's paradigm of education which is contrary to the authoritarian vision principally sustained by authoritarian governments and based on participatory teaching and the combining of community development with local and regional social change. In this context Community Education defends the organisation of grassroots teaching and the connection between instruction and the socio-political organisation of the poor. In efforts to make learning in the community, with the community, and for the community, schools become less closed, less elitist, less authoritarian, and less distant from the general population. This is, for community education, a question of fundamental importance. ...We should not accept the world the way it is, we have to be different to create something different in this world.

Charles McConnell, formerly Chief Executive of the Scottish Community Education Centre, reporting on Scotland, points out that since the mid-1970s, all municipal education councils have adopted the term Community Education to describe their informal education services and it is now called community learning and development.

It is an approach for promoting social inclusion and development, lifelong learning and active citizenship.... [There is] also a significant growth in the number of other public service disciplines, from teacher to health worker, environmentalist to community planner keen to adopt this approach as they engage with local communities. (ICEA, 2003)

Building for the Future

Effective Community Education programmes are sensitive to a particular community's changing needs. To make sure a programme is responsive, leaders must engage in ongoing assessment and evaluation. Three important questions should be asked over and over: What is the programme accomplishing? Does it respond to community needs? Can it be made more responsive? In addition to assessing the programme regularly, advisory groups, task forces, and special committees should reassess community needs at least once a year. Surveys, interviews, community forums, and other techniques may be used to stay abreast of changing needs.

Developing a lasting Community Education programme takes time and the ongoing effort of committed people. It takes time to gain endorsement of the concept by community policy makers, education leaders, agency officials. It takes a concerted effort to gain the support of community leaders and residents. And it takes dedicated attention to many details to establish a process for involving community members in the identification of community needs and the mobilisation of community resources to address those needs.

But the rewards are clearly worth the time and effort. Community Education programmes work because:

- They involve parents and other community members in efforts to improve academic achievement and school climate.
- They provide places and programmes in which community members can educate themselves.
- They develop public knowledge about diverse interests and interrelationships that make up a community.
- They provide a setting for community members to meet, talk through issues, and work together to address problems.
- They provide opportunities to discover and nurture the public leadership needed to sustain a viable community.

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