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ABSTRACT

This guide is the fourth in a series of eleven generated in 1978 as the result of workshops that focused on peer training, a different approach to teaching. The workshops provided the opportunity for members of eleven identified role groups to work together with peers to examine the relationship between their specific role group and community education and the ways in which they could stimulate their peers to improve role performance and effectiveness. This booklet focuses on community education as see by principals of schools. Topics considered include the responsibilities of principals, problems and benefits derived from community education, as well as development and implementation of community education programs. (Author/LD)

PRINCIPALS AND COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Role Guide Series #4

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PREFACE

This booklet is a result of two three-day Role Training and Peer Interaction Academies which were held in 1978 and funded by a training grant from the U.S. Office of Education, Community Education Program. The format for both Academies was designed to focus upon peer training, a method which has proven to be a useful teaching and information sharing approach. The sessions provided the opportunity for members of eleven identified role groups to work together with peers to examine in-depth:

a) the relationship between their specific role group and community education, and

b) the ways in which they could stimulate their peers to improve role performance and effectiveness.

Material development phases were interwoven with both structured and unstructured problem-solving activities. The follow-up activities and publications of the Role Guide Series were made possible from grants by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.

Through a sharing of information, all participants gained knowledge. The information shared in this booklet is intended for use both by experienced individuals and those just entering the field. The booklet can help the experienced individual to become more aware of additional aspects of the role and of directions being taken by others. It can assist the novice in gaining an overview of the role as seen by those who have worked in this capacity. The information also can be used as a means for guiding others in the community to gain a better understanding of the role and its relationship to community education.

AS PRINCIPALS, WE BELIEVE

We believe that community education must be a process designed to meet human needs.

We believe that community education programs should not be limited to the school setting, specifically, but should be expanded to community locations.

We believe that principals should be involved in all steps of the planning process and have input into the hiring of school level community education coordinators and staff.

We believe that community education must address the "real" needs of people as they exist, with a written set of plans and policies developed to ensure that the needs of all community members are addressed.

We believe that community education programs should be developed on the basis of a set of specific community needs identified by a needs assessment.

We believe that agencies must be able to work cooperatively to provide services to meet human needs.

We believe that community education must provide evidence through hard data that school/community services have impacted the total culture.

We believe that people must know that the educational institution belongs to them.

INTRODUCTION

In an era characterized by a clamor for educational institutions to be accountable for providing programs and experiences relevant to present needs, most principals agree that the primary mission of the public school is the delivery of the traditional K-12 programs. The often heard phrases of "cut out the frills" and "back to the basics" seem to prove that many people agree with the principals. A principal generally will seek to expand a school's program only if he/she first believes that the expansion will benefit the K-12 program and then believes that he/she is able to convince the majority of the people affected by the expansion that it is beneficial to the public school.

For this reason, the role of the principal, both as a supporter and as an educational leader, becomes a major factor in achieving successful development and growth in community education.

Most principals view community education as a "common sense" idea, and one that is compatible with the history and substance of democratic community life. As a concept, it restates what was once taken for granted that a human problem is solved most effectively through grass roots participation in the problem-solving process. Thus, in order for a principal to support community education, he/she must believe that community participation and involvement are beneficial to the regular educational program. When a principal "opens the door," he/she opens the door not only to a building which provides services, but to school-community participation in a wide variety of problem-solving and decision-making activities.

Based on this assumption, the participants of the Principals Role Group used the following definition of community education in their examination of the principal's role in the process:

Community education encourages the development of a comprehensive and coordinated delivery system of interagency services for all people in a community and provides an opportunity for all people in a community to work together to achieve community and self improvement.

RESPONSIBILITIES

A principal has three major areas of responsibility in the administration of a school, whether it is a community school or traditional school. These areas are instructional leadership, administration and human relations.

As an instructional leader, a principal's responsibilities include: involvement of the community with school programs and vice versa, school programs with the community; staff development (inservice); and curriculum development which is closely linked with community involvement responsibilities.

Administrative responsibilities relate to the scheduling of instructional and community related programs, management of fiscal resources, completion of reports and school records, and assessment of the school staff and programs.

The third major area of responsibility, development of positive human relations between the school and the community, was stressed by participating principals. Positive relationships and the community support generated through them are major determinants of securing meaningful citizen involvement within the school and community. The principal's responsibility in this area is seen as that of a "promoter" of community education and a mobilizer of people. He/she also functions as a liaison between the various community groups and agencies.

DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF COMMUNITY EDUCATION

If the principal is to undertake a primary role in the initiation of community education, it is essential that he/she become well informed and knowledgeable in both the theoretical and practical aspects of community education. Information can be gained from a variety of sources and resources and from visits to other community education projects.

Correspondence with other principals and other community education personnel involved in projects or situations similar to the principal's can provide answers to specific questions. Additional suggested strategies for gathering information and gaining experience include attending community education training functions, such as seminars, workshops, conferences, and inservice activities. Assistance, information, and materials also are available from centers for community education located in universities, colleges, and state departments of education.

When a principal believes that he/she has an adequate knowledge base, the principal can begin developing an awareness in members of the community of the possible benefits which community education might bring to their school and community. Speaking formally and informally to civic groups, agency representatives, and concerned community groups often begins the awareness process. Once involved, the principal must maintain visibility in the community as well as in the school and must be available to answer questions, address concerns, and explain in detail aspects of the program.

When community members have an understanding of community education and have an interest in exploring its potential for their community, the next area of responsibility for the principal involves the convening of an advisory group or task force. This group should be representative of the total community

and should be convened for the purposes of:

1. determining community needs,

2. establishing process for continuous assessment of needs, and

3. identifying and obtaining resources to fulfill needs.

The principal should continue to react to and to provide information to the task force throughout the planning, development, and implementation phases.

Once community education has been implemented and is an on-going process in the community, the principal assumes a support role. The principal functions as a resource and support facilitator not as a professionally trained community education coordinator. This support role is one that the principal also should assume when community education is initiated outside the school and the school system is asked to serve in the role of one of several "partner" agencies in a community-based model.

A majority of support time should be spent on activities related to communication and public relations. By encouraging citizen involvement, serving as a facilitator with agency representatives, and sharing information with other principals, both "word-of-mouth" and written, the principal can be an extremely effective advocate for community education.

BENEFITS AND PROBLEMS

Realistically, before a principal actively supports community education, consideration must be given to how he/she assesses the personal benefits and problems that will be derived from its adoption and implementation. Most of the participants of the role group believed that community education can be of benefit to the principal, both in facilitation of work duties and administrative responsibilities and in personal/professional advancement.

Because the community has direct input into the programs offered at the school, the community usually feels an ownership for the programs, thus resulting in increased community support for those programs. This feeling of ownership often is reflected in a more positive approach to programs that did not prove effective and in an attitude which emphasizes "trying again." A feeling of ownership helps secure community commitment to maintaining the physical plant and a more positive outlook toward the school, thus resulting in decreased vandalism.

Community input, volunteer programs, and the resultant knowledge of the community are useful to the principal in performing day-to-day administrative duties and enhances his/her ability to function well as a principal. Increased community input also offers the principal more latitude in decision making and reduces the possibility of negative reactions from the community.

Volunteers provide "more hands" for administrative duties. They also serve as a constant source of information regarding the feelings and desires of the community.

Personal benefits often include increased community support and prestige of the professional role. Most of the participants of the role group also believed that there was direct personal/

professional benefit in terms of a greater sense of job security. Community support also is one of the indicators used in determining salary increases and recognition of merit or advancement in some of the educational systems involved in community education.

Support of community education, however, presents the possibility of problems as well as benefits. Two major problem areas were identified by role group participants. The participants were concerned with communication, specifically the aspects of:

a) Overcoming negative attitudes held by many superintendents, school boards, principals, and teachers concerning increased public involvement in the schools

b) Distributing information without taxing the time of the principal or fiscal resources of the school

c) Effectively communicating program benefits to the staff in such a way as to override negative aspects (i.e., re-arranged classroom furniture, multi-use of materials, and equipment, etc.)

d) Establishing positive communication among the various agencies that would lead to collaborative, non-duplicative efforts

A second area of concern centered around the difficulty of assembling an advisory council or task force that is truly representative of the community. The participants believed that the basic problem is identification of a representative group whose members have sufficient time to accomplish the task, are "sold" on the worth of community education, and can address effectively "turf rights" problems.

The possession of good human relations skills was viewed as essential to overcoming problems in any area. The participants agreed that the main strategy to be used by principals for overcoming

the problems in each area is that of enlisting general public support for community education via awareness meetings; talks to parent-teacher organizations, civic, and social clubs; conversations with concerned individuals; etc. They believed that if public support is generated, people, as well as agencies, are more apt to "respond in the public interest" (i.e., become committed to community education, make provisions for time, etc.) Strategies centering around elimination of the "turf rights" problem include: discussing the positive benefits of collaborations with partner agencies and the establishment of a cooperative, helping atmosphere.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Principals are concerned about the future of community education and are very outspoken as to the directions it must take for survival and expansion.

Role group participants believed that principals must help people to view community education as a total community process for solving community problems, not just an extension of the school program. Building the power base necessary for the survival and growth of community education is dependent upon establishing a collaborative decision-making mode of community involvement.

Principals agreed that a jointly-based program (school-community) is the strongest operational structure. Under this arrangement there would be a wider range of resources from which to draw for meeting community and educational needs as well as parity of decision making which would help eliminate duplication of efforts. "Turf rights" problems, which would arise, would be less of a problem with all role groups present to discuss and mediate. Principals also noted that a jointly-based program would require more time for decision making because all role groups would deliberate decisions.

Principals believed that a community-based

community education program is more advantageous than a school-based program because a community-based program may be more sensitive to the needs of the community due to inherent interest. The community-based program, however, is viewed as having less ability to meet needs since this type of program would lack control of the resources.

The desired direction for the future seems to include an overall plan for community education that would provide for the integration of the traditional school program into a comprehensive, service-oriented process. Schools would become primary sites for the delivery of services with the principals assuming the role of community instructional leaders. Advisory councils would become vehicles for assessing service needs and interagency councils would become vehicles for delivery of services.

Principals viewed as one of the most crucial elements or factors involved in achieving a successful future for community education the involvement of individuals who are not in community education so that members of the community can derive an understanding of community education as being an ongoing process rather than as a temporary means of meeting certain kinds of needs. They believed that the most essential thing for people to understand is that they are a part of the process and that the institutions are there to help them in meeting their needs, both individually and collectively.

Principals agreed that another crucial factor involves community education advocates making use of the political process. The national organizations, the regional organizations, and people who are involved in community education must put forth greater efforts at all levels of government. Involvement in the political process is necessary for both legislative and fiscal support.

Another factor for success which must be addressed is the working relationship among community education coordinators, directors, and principals. A positive "team" approach with a clear understanding of vital roles and functions of each position must be evident for community education projects

to have the desired impact upon the quality of community life.

The principals also agreed that refocusing the goals of community education and maintaining a positive climate with the instructional and support staff contribute to the development of a much stronger advocacy base for community education.

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