DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 411 115 RC 021 130

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TITLE Organizing Communities for Educational Improvement: The Brownsville Site Interim Report. Urban Education Annual Report 1993.
INSTITUTION Appalachia Educational Lab., Charleston, WV.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE 1993-00-00
NOTE 25p.
CONTRACT RP91002002
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Case Studies; *Community Action; *Community Involvement; Disadvantaged; *Educational Improvement; Elementary Secondary Education; *Empowerment; High Risk Students; Minority Groups; Models; Parent School Relationship; Partnerships in Education; Program Implementation; *School Community Relationship; Urban Areas
IDENTIFIERS Facilitators; Tennessee (Haywood County)

ABSTRACT

A collaborative parent-community-school (PCS) model facilitates the involvement of disadvantaged and minority parents, community leaders, and community organizations in educational improvement activities, with a focus on at-risk children and youth in high-risk communities. PCS has a more comprehensive agenda than parent participation, and addresses problems and issues not directly related to school personnel and property. An important feature is the "center of activity"--an accessible community place that serves as a neutral zone and "greenhouse" to nurture parent confidence and trust; equalize power; and allow full expression of parent, community, and school concerns. Case studies describe the informal and formal implementation of the PCS model in three minority disadvantaged neighborhoods in West Virginia and Virginia. Lessons learned from these projects relate to the implications of social and cultural differences, newfound leadership power and community conflicts, communication across barriers of difference, and lack of trust between school and community. The selection of Haywood County, Tennessee, as a demonstration site for the PCS model is described. A preliminary survey revealed that elementary teachers and parents differed significantly in attitudes about educational quality at the elementary school. To avoid the development of debilitating defense mechanisms between school staff and the community, the project was moved to an alternative high school--a "safer" environment for partnership formation. The survey also provided a tool for planning specific interventions as next steps in establishing a workable school-community partnership. Contains 21 references and a list of suggested readings. (SV)

URBAN EDUCATION ANNUAL REPORT 1993

Organizing Communities For Educational Improvement: The Brownsville Site Interim Report

by

Betty Harris James

Community Liaison To Urban Education Program

Appalachia Educational Laboratory
Charleston, West Virginia

The Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL), Inc., works with educators in ongoing R & D-based efforts to improve education and educational opportunity. AEL serves as the Regional Educational Laboratory for Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia and operates the Eisenhower Math/Science Consortium for these same four states. It also operates the ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools.

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This publication is based on work sponsored wholly or in part by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U. S. Department of Education, under contract number RP91002002. Its contents do not necessarily reflect the views of OERI, the Department, or any other agency of the U. S. Government.

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ABSTRACT

The Community Liaison for Urban Education (CLUE) program has, as one of its major activities at the Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL), the task of implementing and assessing the effectiveness of a collaborative Parent-Community-School (PCS) process model for educational improvement. The model was developed and designed to initiate and sustain the involvement of nonadvantaged parents, community leaders, and community organizations in educational improvement activities with an emphasis on at-risk children and youth in high-risk communities. The program's approach to achieving this end is that of establishing efforts in central city and urban-like neighborhoods where community leaders and large populations of nonadvantaged parents are willing to work collaboratively to improve the educational environments of their children.

The CLUE program staff identified a site in West Tennessee which had the potential for successful implementation of a collaborative effort among parents, community organizations, public schools, institutions of higher education, social service agencies, and the Community Liaison to Urban Education (CLUE) program at AEL. Using a "lessons learned" approach, garnered from earlier trial tests of the process model, project REACH—Restoring Excellence to Academics through Cultural Harmony—was put into motion at a non-school related "center of activity" as the first of three major phases of operationalizing the model. During this first phase, primary activities were directed towards training participants in the mechanics of building and sustaining collaboratives, mobilizing the community, and assessing needs and following through on meeting those expressed needs. The primary goal became the establishment of an academic/cultural center to meet the community's expressed priority and preparing a foundation for a formal partnership that had potential for success with the county school system.

This interim report on the Brownsville (TN) site describes the historical development of the process model, the general procedures used to engage the Brownsville community, the implementation of the model, the ongoing development of the demonstration site, and the assessment and monitoring of the interactions, within the community and between the community and Haywood County school personnel.

INTRODUCTION

The Community Liaison for Urban Education (CLUE) program has, as one of its major activities at the Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL), the task of implementing and assessing the effectiveness of a collaborative Parent-Community-School (PCS) model. The model was developed and designed to initiate and sustain the involvement of nonadvantaged parents, community leaders, and community organizations in the education of their children with a focus upon the needs of at-risk populations (See Figure 1).

Recent findings suggested that processes and interactions within the family structure are more strongly related to the success or failure of high-risk students in negotiating the school system than previously believed (White, 1982; Clark, 1983). Further, the literature is replete with evidence of failure of educational units and public schools to educate at-risk students, and to create productive working relations with their families and communities (Bates, 1990; Hacker, 1992; Trent & Articles, 1992). CLUE's work during the past several years has verified that unresolved negative relationships historically existing between schools and high-risk communities preclude changing patterns of participation or nonparticipation by parents and others who live in those communities (James, 1988, 1989).

SECTION I

"...In order to understand them we have to understand their way of life and approach. If we wish to convince them, we have to use their language as far as we can, not language in the narrow sense of the word, but language of the mind...not the appeal to logic and reason, but some kind of emotional awareness of other people."

Jawaharlal Nehru

WHY COMMUNITY SUPPORT IS CRUCIAL TO SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Much lip service is given to the idea of involving parents and communities in the business of schools. However, meaningful involvement of parents and communities in the decisionmaking regarding the education of their children is not widespread. Parent involvement programs rarely involve large numbers of parents of at-risk students, yet these are the parents most needed to create change in the academic environment of the school (Epstein & Becker, 1982; Epstein, 1987; McLaughlin & Shields, 1987; Pallas, 1989).

The knowledge base regarding parent and community involvement has been around for a long time. Perhaps the basic problem has been that the climate for parent-community involvement has not been a companion. Influence, control, and protection from outside criticism are not power bases that individuals, and particularly educators, are willing to give up easily. Therefore, the possibility of having to relinquish power is immediately disconcerting when the players are no longer one or two parents, but parents, community leaders, organizations, and members of the community in collaboration.

In addition, individuals in nonadvantaged and minority communities feel alienated from schools. As past students, they felt isolated and out of touch. Having themselves had less than positive experiences with schools, these adults are often parents, grandparents, and other caretakers of academically unsuccessful children. They frequently believe that they are not valued as parents, caretakers, or individuals and respond in kind with negative attitudes about the school personnel.

With expanded and improved community-based parent involvement, progress can be made to improve the relations between parents, members of the community, and schools; and subsequently to improve the educational environment and experiences of at-risk students. Strategies for creating support structures should be developed by utilizing leadership among parents and throughout the community, and increasing their capacity to respond to both their family and community needs and to the needs of the school.

Respect for Diversity

For centuries, people of differing color, religion, and economic status have lived in separate and distinct places. Because of segregated practices, the general development of these groups has been isolated and separate. These cultural, economic, etc., differences and their consequences (born

out of isolation) are critical in understanding the dynamics of building partnerships between school personnel and previously isolated communities (Wilson, 1982; Ogbu, 1986). It is not enough for planners to simply value these cultural differences; they must also be sensitive to attempts to alter the cultural characteristics with which many individuals are uncomfortable. Research fully supports the contention that minority and nonadvantaged parents and community members will become more involved when school personnel show a genuine respect for both individuals and the culture of the community.

Communication styles are particularly important in the valuing of cultural differences. It is vital that change agents, community leaders, and school personnel understand cultural differences in modes of communication. Self-assertion, self-expression, spiritual well-being, spontaneity, emotional expressiveness, and forthrightness are all identified as cultural speech patterns in minority communities (Baratz & Baratz, 1972; Kochman, 1981; Collier, Ribeau & Hecht, 1986). These patterns are in direct conflict with the majority culture's style of communicating, which is relatively low-keyed, dispassionate, impersonal, and without affect. This creates problems that can prevent open and honest discussions from occurring.

Developing Community Leadership

Leadership is key to the success of communities' efforts to improve educational experiences for their children. While outside experts can help with short-term problems or can serve as catalysts for change, they often fail to strengthen the organizational and problem-solving skills of parents and other community members. The unintended result is a feeling of deeper inadequacy on the part of the community. Educators and other professionals should not be identifying and defining the problem, but rather providing information and guiding appropriate solutions through skill development activities for the parents and members of the community (Nagle & Balderman, 1974; Crandall, 1982; James, 1986, 1988).

Finally, while it is essential to utilize the expertise and influence of community leaders, no one individual can effectively bring about improved educational change in the larger community. Leadership must be nurtured throughout the community to ensure the necessary broad-based support. Shared responsibility and opportunity to lead must be built into projects from the beginning. Leaders must be trustworthy and not perceived as having self-serving or hidden agendas that would detract from addressing the educational needs of the community.

SECTION II

"...a people do not break through their previous fatalism of submerged resentments and frustrations into open problems which can be faced and dealt with until they have a mechanism or formula for effectively coping with those problems."

Saul Alinsky

THE PARENT-COMMUNITY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP MODEL

Parent Involvement Versus Parent-Community Involvement

Looking at the historical perspective offers insight into the meaning of parent-community involvement. Several generations ago, parents were an integral part of the educational system. Parents in the community hired teachers and closely monitored their performance. As education became more complex with advanced industrialization, teachers and administrators assumed responsibility for the training of students and merely kept parents informed about the progress of their children. During the '60s and '70s, federal mandates and community demands caused a revival of attention to the parent as a "partner" in the educational experiences of children. The '80s and '90s have produced increasing acceptance of the role that parents can and should play in the academic performance of their children. Demographic projections of increasing numbers of minority and nonadvantaged students have signaled a need to pay attention to this issue of parent and community empowerment.

In understanding the Parent-Community-School (PCS) partnership model, a distinction must be made between parent involvement and parent-community involvement. **Parent involvement** in the educational processes of their children generally has a rather narrow focus centered on the school itself. The concept generally defines the role of the parent as adjunct to the school and its activities. Parent involvement is generally managed by school personnel, and the school building is the center of activity.

Parent-community involvement has a more comprehensive agenda. A broad and diverse set of stakeholders, e.g., parents, community members, and service providers, are involved. The school often serves only as the focal point of planning and coordinating resources to meet the needs of the total community. However, activities and programs may function apart from school personnel and school property. Parent-community involvement generally addresses problems and issues that are further removed from direct interaction with school personnel (James, 1986, 1988, 1989).

Development of the Model

The Parent-Community-School (PCS) partnership model was designed by a broad spectrum of minority educators, parents, and community leaders in a collaborative effort to have an impact on the families and students in a community (see Figure 1). The model includes a role for representatives who would be able to effectively deliver agency services, and allows for the political effort required to coordinate a delivery system where parents have a primary role to play. The expected

outcome of the model was increased capacity for different social subsystems to work together in a climate where meeting the full range of academic and nonacademic needs of students would be the only agenda item on the table.

The original PCS model grew out of a four-state (Kentucky, Virginia, Tennessee, and West Virginia) regional needs assessment/networking conference held in Charleston, West Virginia (1985). The networking efforts resulted in the identification of ten primary contacts in the Norfolk/Virginia Beach/Richmond/Petersburg (VA) areas representing such agencies and organizations as Virginia Union, Norfolk State University, St. Paul's College, the NAACP, the Urban League, the Norfolk Housing and Urban Development Department, etc. At the conclusion of the conference activities, staff elected to target the state of Virginia for a pilot community project study, primarily because of the number of historically Black institutions in the immediate areas.

Several meetings were held (in VA) where CLUE staff sponsored needs assessment activities, gave presentations on urban education issues, disseminated research information on urban education topics, explored strategies for cross group collaboration, and coordinated a two-day and three-day set of working sessions to develop processes for community application of an educational improvement model that placed parents central to its substance.

The "Greenhouse" Need

In the Parent-Community-School (PCS) partnership model, the concept of a "center of activity" (see Figure 1) replaces the actual school building and serves as neutral territory. This neutral zone functions to coordinate cooperative efforts from parents, community organizations, social service agencies, and school personnel to provide for the needs of the community.

The center of activity serves as a "greenhouse" to nurture confidence and trust in parents as they learn to become the primary educators of their children and to encourage full expression of the needs and concerns of individual parents, the community, and the school. Programs in the center of activity also provide parenting and group process skills, organizational skills, and offer student academic/skill-building activities.

It is expected that as parents grow in their understanding of the structure of the family and its impact on children, they will eventually feel confident enough to feed into established agencies and schools (Hill, 1971; Clark, 1983). In the meantime, parents and community members can operate on their own "turf" in the center of activity. This center might be a church, community center, recreation center, or other available space.

Finally, the "greenhouse" is a neutral zone where power is equalized and parents, educators, and other service providers can try new ways of interacting with each other in a nurturing environment; can learn to appreciate their cultural differences; and can become comfortable in discussing sensitive issues regarding the educational progress of children in the community.

Implementing the Model

Educational improvement activities were informally introduced into two large public housing communities. The activities as well as the participation of parents, community leaders, school personnel, and other service providers were monitored through field notes and taped followup interviews. Research data gathered from reviews of the literature, note taking, and community interview data were used to formulate assumptions and principles about how to effectively initiate educational improvement activities in high-risk communities (James, 1988). The final step in implementing the PCS model involved the proposed establishment of a community site in a

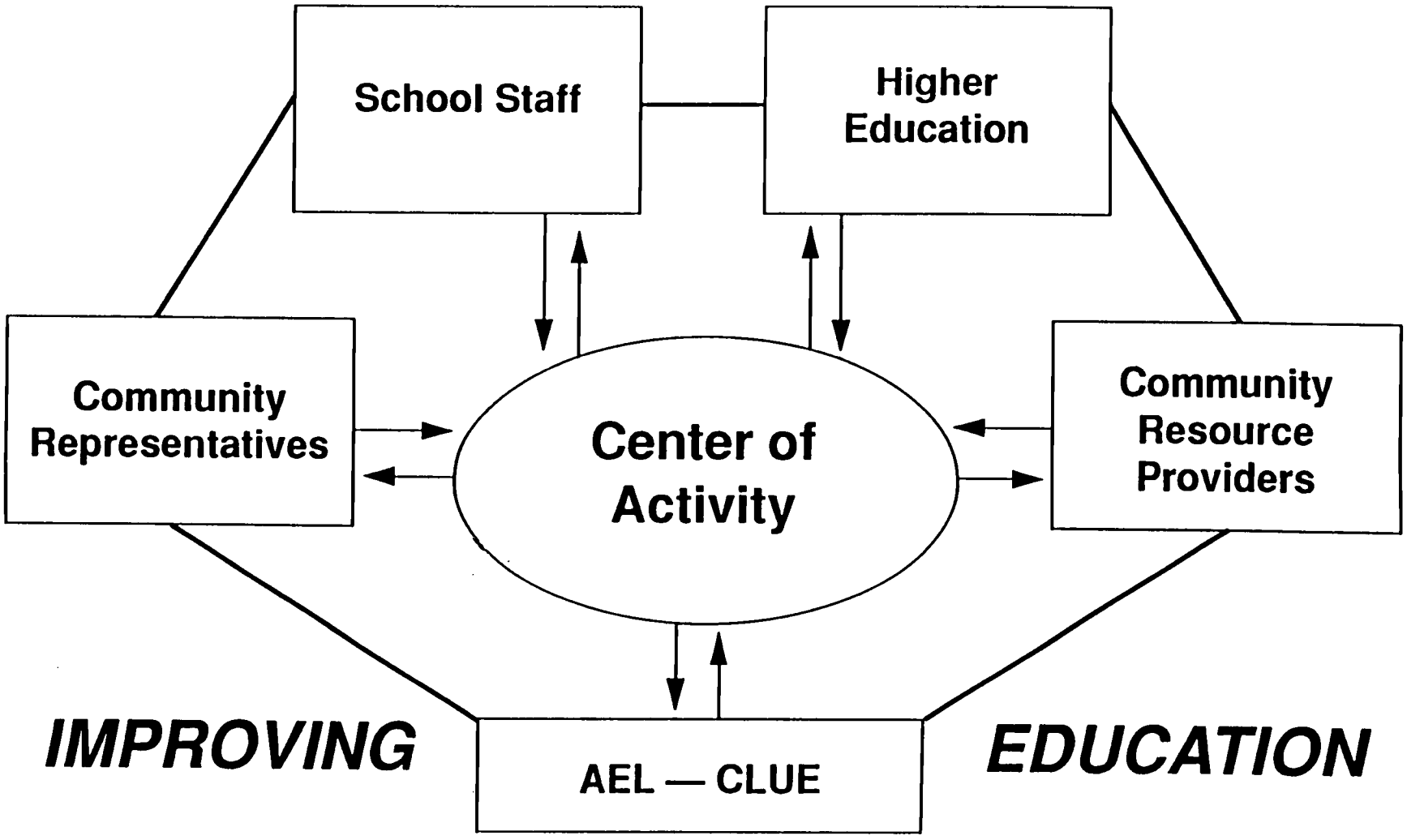

Figure 1. A Parent-Community-School Model

third community where parents, community members, and agency representatives could act in collaborative activities.

For this specific model, participants were to define community education needs, establish activities to improve educational outcomes, and outline strategies to sustain the model through on-going collaboration and involvement of parents, community leaders, and community organizations.

SECTION III

"...All men are caught in an inescapable network of destiny. Tide is a single garment of mutuality. What affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

Martin Luther King, Jr.

COMMUNITY CASE STUDIES

The following three case studies describe the circumstances under which both formal and informal educational improvement activities were implemented in housing complexes in minority, nonadvantaged communities. Much of what happens to collaborative efforts is peculiar to the particular makeup of a community's network and the events that occur during the process. However, there are distinctive similarities that can serve as "lessons learned" and examples of things to do and/or not to do when mobilizing community groups for school improvement efforts.

Community A

A series of informal educational improvement activities was initiated in Community A by the Community Liaison to Urban Education (CLUE) program staff, university personnel, key community leaders, parents, and school personnel in a major city in the Tidewater (VA) area. Needs assessments activities, parent training sessions, and community meetings were held at the activity center of a selected public housing complex in this city. Although expectations, strategies, and proposed outcomes of the planned activities were discussed with all key players, tutorial and parent training efforts did not continue after CLUE staff ceased active leadership roles. Followup interviews revealed that the program stopped for the following reasons: (1) many (not all) parents and residents attended meetings and sessions because there was food, and because they believed they would be sanctioned by the housing manager if they failed to show up; (2) the manager of the center in Community A was accustomed to outside funding with paid experts to do the work, and expected to serve as the coordinator of an already planned (and financed) program; and (3) neither the housing nor center managers were willing to recruit and/or involve the total community, but rather, they served those who were already involved or those who were willing to respond to the activity without being solicited.

Although the project had the approval of parents and community leaders in general, it did not have the full support of those who "controlled" access to the community center where tutorial activities were normally conducted in the community. There were personal agendas involved in supporting the project where individuals on the one hand had more to lose on a personal level if they rejected the effort, and on the other hand, viewed the activities as competitive with school-related parent programs. Most important, the grass roots parents and community members were viewed by external and internal leaders as recipients (often unwilling) rather than as partners. In addition, a rather volatile political issue loomed throughout the city with regard to a federal mandate to return to neighborhood schools. Compliance with the court order resulted in resegregation

and racial isolation of minority neighborhood schools, and regenerated extremely hostile feelings about the public school system in general, and feelings of betrayal in the community.

Community B

Community B (also in the Tidewater area and in a large public housing complex) was originally identified as a site for an educational improvement effort by a nationally renowned minority organization. After initial efforts by the organization proved nonproductive, its affiliate invited AEL staff to collaborate with the affiliate to implement the program(s) using the strategies and principles of the PCS model derived from the outcomes of Community A activities.

The proposed program was extremely well organized and more than adequately funded by the local affiliate. An advisory board for the minority organization supported and monitored progress during the completion of a timetable of events. Unlike Community A, Community B generated commitment from the appropriate players as depicted in the model, e.g., a university, a major minority civil rights group, a community church, and numerous volunteer professionals, who would serve as role models. However, in spite of seemingly thorough organizational planning, the community experienced continuous problems in implementing various program activities.

First, the project was unable to secure use of the community center with consistency and the external project director attempted to bypass the center manager. The minority person who headed the center in Community B was not trustful of "funded" programs, even though the organization sponsoring the project was minority based. The center manager expressed the belief that funded programs raise the expectations of communities but do not provide skills to assist people when the funding is depleted. The center manager also felt the program to be intrusive because of the large number of outside volunteers and the alleged lax supervision of the children in the program. The power implicit in this manager's role as the president of the combined public housing council presidents in the city made it nearly impossible to conduct any activities without this individual's approval. Eventually, a change in the principalship at the elementary school and the loss of the project director from the minority agency forced the conclusion of the program after the summer activities.

Community C

Community C was a public housing project in West Virginia serving a mixed 50 percent white/50 percent nonwhite population. The first formal implementation of the model was carried out in this environment by CLUE staff and selected community change agents. The community was selected because (1) the community school had been identified by the school system as a "focus" school needing improvement in school achievement measures, and school board support was readily available; and (2) a resident council did not exist in the public housing unit, therefore, leadership could be nurtured from base zero. A Subcommittee on Education was formed from four statewide minority groups and trained by CLUE staff to assist in implementing the PCS model. It is important to note that these individuals were selected because of their commitment to accepting and working with parents as equal partners. The PCS model was formally presented at three meetings to the superintendent, central office administrators, and the principal of the elementary school; to the faculty of the elementary school; and to the parents and leaders of Community C, in that order.

The project resulted in the establishment of a resident council in the public housing complex, sponsorship of community meetings, needs assessment activities, and educationally-oriented parent-community involvement activities. Volunteers from the housing resident council assisted

faculty in improving the physical plant at the elementary school, presented teaching strategies for non-reading students, and volunteered to manage a defunct after-school program for four months (on a daily basis). However, participant/observer activities documented that efforts initiated by the public school system and the resident council members (community) would receive little, if any, cooperation or active participation from school personnel beyond the "helping" activities of completing tasks in individual classrooms as assigned by individual teachers.

Maintaining the participation of key personnel was problematic in Community C. A key community leader resigned, the school system lost its superintendent, and the school curriculum specialist (project director for a reading program) transferred. Funding was also an issue in that teachers wanted to be paid for any time involved in this "extra" assignment.

However, unlike previous experiences in Communities A and B, CLUE staff guided formative decisions in Community C where alternate leaders were identified upfront; contingency plans related to efforts to form partnerships with the elementary school were activated as original plans became stagnated; and emphasis was redirected to community issues, problems, and solutions. This mobilization strategy shifted from collaborative efforts with school personnel to focus on self-help activities through collaboration with CLUE, community members, and related governmental agencies, e.g., HUD, the city housing authority. CLUE staff provided technical assistance and skill training in organizational skills, grant writing, group processes, parent training, etc. The results were astounding and resulted in $82,000 in grant and sub-contract monies from HUD and the city's housing authority. Community activities and projects noticeably reduced drug problems, and the community was cited as one of President Bush's "Points of Lights." However, the ability to mobilize faculty to participate and collaborate remained a major failure in the total process.

Lessons Learned

Preliminary understandings:

1. Project sponsors, directors, and field agents must understand the implications of community involvement.
    a. Social, cultural, linguistic, and educational differences can shade or distort the improvement efforts.
    b. Newfound leadership power may surface power struggles and personality conflicts within the community that are the same as those that have an impact on that community's relationships with the outside.
    c. It is not enough to understand and know the cultures of the community and the school.
        (1) It is necessary to know how to apply that knowledge.
        (2) It is important to know how to "talk" to people who operate in worlds with a different culture and different social expectations.
2. There is a possibility that collaborations with major federal and state agencies might result in loss of control of the original project because of funding requirements and/or restrictions.

Steps in Operationalizing the Parent-Community-School Model

Step 1: Establish a small group to explore how, when, and where to assess the needs of the school with regard to the educational performance of the students.

Step 2: Address and resolve in a non-threatening manner those antagonistic behaviors, attitudes, and statements expressed or exhibited by participants.

Comment: In working with groups that combine community residents and school personnel, the facilitator must be aware of sensitive issues that can cause friction. For example, most school personnel resist anything that seems to add to their duties without providing additional compensation. In contrast, parents and community leaders are expected to volunteer their time. These differing views of who should be compensated can stall attempts to discuss innovation and collaboration.

Further, teachers who believe that the school is operating successfully blame the "at riskness" of students and parents for student failure and are defensive and resistant to discussions of improving the educational environment.

Care must be taken not to allow such situations to polarize participants. At some sites in which the CLUE staff has worked, school personnel were adamant and vocal about the faults of children and parents and felt that they were being labeled as racists. Similarly, lack of prior positive contact with school personnel created an environment of suspicion among the grass roots people.

CLUE staff utilized processes that brought a positive resolution to these issues in an open environment.

Step 3: Elicit information from participants concerning their perceptions of the issue and the community/student needs created by the existing situation.

Comment: During this stage, the facilitator must allow for open, sometimes negative interaction, yet diffuse the anger so that the group process can continue.

Step 4: Transform needs statements into roles, mission statements, goals, and objectives that address the improvement of academic performance of students.

Comment: To facilitate this step, CLUE staff customized a rapid information processing technique that fosters the consideration of data generated within the group and provides for a quick turn-around time in publishing the data within the same meeting.

Step 5: Initiate a partnership between community and school personnel to design, implement, evaluate, and followup programs that meet the stated needs of the specific community.

Conclusions: Rather than utilizing ready-made patterns of professional/parental relationships, communities must go through the demanding tasks of identifying educational needs, clarifying problems, defining goals, and examining alternative solutions before they can begin to understand the needs and expectations of the school and the community. There is tremendous value in activities that allow parents and community leaders to recognize that they have the capacity to have a positive effect on the school's environment.

CLUE program staff observed that school administrators and faculty in the 1990-91 pilot test were uniformly suspicious of having community members work with them in "their" school. Similarly, community members, particularly parents, were suspicious and distrustful of school personnel whom they felt did not value the school, their community, or their children. The physical contact of working together to identify common needs helped to diffuse some of this suspicion.

To facilitate these working relationships, potential sites must have at least three criteria: (1) residents must express a clearly identifiable sense of community; (2) there must be a stable elementary school that students can walk to in the community; (3) within close proximity of the community, there must be a non-school related center where activities can take place.

SECTION IV

THE BROWNSVILLE SITE

The establishment of the Brownsville demonstration site through the project titled "Restoring Academic Excellence through Cultural Harmony" (REACH) was different from other efforts in two major aspects. First, several parents and community leaders had sustained involvement over time with CLUE program staff in parent-community leadership training conferences held each year in Jackson (TN). This regional conference grew out of a collaborative relationship between staff and the West Tennessee African-American Affairs Council (represented by several counties). Consequently, parents and community leaders who were eventually to become involved in the educational improvement project already understood and accepted the principles and assumptions inherent in the model. Secondly, an analysis of the results of a survey conducted at the pre-implementation stage, verified that widely differing perceptions existed among teachers, parents, and community leaders regarding the quality of educational practices and environs in Brownsville. Therefore, a conscious decision was made to delay attempts to form a partnership with the elementary school personnel.

Demonstration Site Selection

Initial explorations identified two central cities in Tipton and Haywood counties. The elementary school in Tipton County was 99 percent minority and poor, and served a major public housing complex in that area. A community complex of social services was already available to that community and was directed and supervised by members of the minority community. Two (out of four) elementary schools in Haywood County were in close proximity to and served three large public housing complexes. However, there was no immediate access to social or academic services in close proximity to the three public housing communities.

CLUE staff networked with leaders in Tipton and Haywood counties to set up community awareness and needs assessment meetings and to provide formal presentation/overviews about the possibility of the improvement project to the superintendents and board members of both school systems.

A few days prior to the scheduled meetings with school personnel in Tipton County, the superintendent of the city school system changed the date of the meeting for school personnel and established new ground rules. As a result the community leaders and organizations in Tipton County declined to participate in the project.

Having received the commitment from all participants in Haywood County, CLUE staff prepared materials and activities that would provide for:

1. development of research summaries and other targeted products informing parents, community leaders, and other interested parties of findings important to establishing a PCS model to improve the educational outcomes of urban youth;

2. convening of meetings with nonadvantaged parents and interested community members to inform them of urban education issues and opportunities, assess community education needs, and train participants in collaboration techniques;

3. convening of meetings with board members, superintendents, principals, and school faculty to inform them of urban education issues and opportunities, assess school personnel educational needs and train participants in collaboration techniques;

4. training participants in leadership skills, identification of community education needs, and development of community resources for meeting those educational needs; and

5. establishing a demonstration site to implement and assess findings related to engaging parents and educators in a collaborative parent-community-school model for educational school improvement.

Community participation. Local ministers, parents, and community leaders formed a community-based alliance known as the Haywood County Ministerial/Parents Association. This group cooperated with the CLUE program to draft and gain approval of a plan to pilot test the PCS model in Brownsville (TN). The school community identified educational needs during meetings held in the Jefferson Street Public Housing Complex. Parents and community leaders from the broader community assembled and discussed ways to initiate and sustain positive parent/community/school communications through the PCS model. The Associated Rural Development, International (ARDI) property (a former all-Black school building), which also houses the Haywood County Jobs program and the Haywood County NAACP offices, became the "center of activity" for the project. CLUE staff offered training activities and established a pilot test of the PCS model in this "neutral" space provided by ARDI. CLUE staff conducted needs sensing activities, assisted in the development of program goals, objectives, and project outcomes, provided training and technical assistance to establish a community support programs titled Restoring Academic Excellence through Cultural Harmony (REAÇH) at the old Carver High School site.

School community participation. Two meetings were held with the Haywood County superintendent of schools, the assistant superintendents for curriculum and public relations, and three Haywood County board members. The parent-community-school model concept was presented by visuals that outlined tentative goals, objectives, and expected outcomes. Board members approved the concept and recommended that the superintendent move forward on soliciting the cooperation of the faculty. The elementary school principals facilitated the formal presentation of the model processes and the administration of a teacher assessment survey to school personnel at two area elementary schools serving the majority of the nonadvantaged children in three adjacent public housing complexes.

Utilizing New Knowledge

A series of questions might best set the stage for describing how the implementation of the Brownsville site was different, and how that difference probably contributed to the project's overall success.

1. How do you implement an educational improvement project in a nonadvantaged community which has very little, if any, financial or professional resources available to them and, at the same time, expect the project to have any longevity to its existence.

Much can be said about activities that allow parents and community members to recognize that they have the capacity to have an effect on their environment. There appears to be consistency in verification of the assumption that identifying and clarifying educational issues and problems, defining problems and goals, and selecting alternative strategies for achieving these goals are extremely demanding tasks. However, the process prepares the community for coming

to grips with the needs and expectations of the school system. This seems particularly so when the participants feel that they themselves have improved educationally.

Based on the reality of people responding when they are paid, efforts were made to obtain state and federal funds to hire displaced workers to work in the project (through the Job Training Partnership Act) and to pay high school students for tutoring other students. Both project staff and students were able to document improvement in grades and student attitudes. The school system and Brownsville elected officials responded publicly to the value of the activities, further adding to a sense of accomplishment and success needed by those individuals who were making an effort to initiate change in their community. Finally, project REACH staff served as spokespersons for the project at a statewide conference of minority leaders thus realizing again the rewards of having succeeded in activities that were generated out of their wisdom and experience.

2. How do you garner support for cooperative partnerships between school personnel and community members where teachers do not believe that their actions will make any difference with the at-risk students, and past interactions with parents and community members have been clouded with charges of teacher incompetence, racism, parental negligence, absence of community values, etc.

A survey was conducted to assess the attitudes of elementary school teachers and parents regarding the quality of elementary education in the Brownsville School district. Separate instruments were developed for each group, with an overlap of twenty-eight items which were answerable by both parents and teachers. The internal consistency to these twenty-eight items was high, with a reliability coefficient of .93 (Cronbach's Alpha). The results indicated widely differing perceptions between teachers and parents regarding the quality of educational practices in Brownsville. There were statistically significant differences in responses to twenty-four of the twenty-eight items. In general, parents tended to have the more negative viewpoint regarding the quality of educational in the schools.

Rather than risk the outcomes of alienating elementary school personnel who did not accept the premise that their behavior had any relationship to the nonperformance of minority students, the project REACH director changed schools and negotiated with the school system to develop a partnership with the alternative high school. This was "safe" because the presence of students in the alternative school is a statement of failure no matter who has to accept the blame. The school system approved the role of project REACH participants as advocates for the minority students (particularly African-American males) and the establishment of a conflict resolution component in REACH's activities. The Alternative school, in turn, assigned a liaison teacher to work with the project and provided transportation to two major events planned for the project.

Consequently, as a result of this strategy, the presence of debilitating defense mechanisms between school personnel and the community did not occur. In this instance, a partnership was formed in a "safe environment" without being overwhelmed by new expectations of interaction.

Implications and Recommendations

Such widely divergent perceptions between teachers and parents have to have a negative impact on the educational experiences of students in this school district. It is also impossible at this point to say which perceptions are the most accurate reflection of reality. The negative impact is probably most critical at the primary and intermediate levels where basic skills are so vital to future school success. However, the results of the survey serve as a tool for planning specific intervention strategies based on the perceptions of the two groups.

The following intervention strategies are suggested as next steps in creating appropriate preconditions for establishing a workable partnership between elementary school personnel and members of the community:

(a) a series of parent workshops, teacher workshops, and parent/teacher workshops in which these issues can be can be addressed directly, and action can be taken;

(b) a survey of the perceptions of the administrators on these issues and a comparison of teacher perceptions with assessment data provided by administrators;

(c) a content specific set of workshops that reflect and provide solutions for the eleven issues on which the perceptions of parents and teachers differed most widely;

(d) the administration of a pre- and post-survey to assess the degree to which teacher and parental attitudes were affected by the workshops; and

(e) a more long-term study to assess the impact that greater correspondence between teacher and parent perceptions has on academic and behavioral measures of student performance.

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