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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the concept of the community school. A community school emphasizes wholehearted involvement by all living in the designated community area. The Porter Rural School, Missouri, established by Marie Turner Harvey with the help of Evelyn Dewey and her father John Dewey, was an outstanding example of the community school concept during the 1910s and 1920s. This small Missouri school was recognized throughout the United States for the community school principles espoused by John Dewey, many of which survive today. In developing a community school, participants in the school district must be willing to give of their talents and time to improve the social environment for all the community's inhabitants. The school is to attend to the needs of the whole community, and the curriculum should reflect what is important in society, especially the importance of problem solving. The community school functions as a place for active doing or working rather than a place of sedentary listening. (Contains 10 references.) (SLD)

# Evaluation of the Community School Concept

## Marlow Ediger

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## **EVALUATION OF THE COMMUNITY SCHOOL CONCEPT**

**A community school emphasizes wholehearted involvement by all living within the designated district. Generally, in degrees, a school district may stress the community school concept. Thus, a school within a district may emphasize the following, singularly or in a more plural manner, involving adults in the community:**

- 1. using the school hallways for exercise walking on Saturday mornings.**
- 2. using the basketball court facilities on Saturdays when not scheduled for students.**
- 3. using the school library on selected evenings.**
- 4. using the school cafeteria in recognizing leaders in the local community at a dinner whereby all who wish to come may do so. Reservations need to be made and the cost involved should be very reasonable in price.**
- 5. using the baseball field during weekends when there is no scheduled school game (See Ediger, 1996, 79- 90).**

### **Porter Rural School, John and Evelyn Dewey**

**As professor of education at Truman State University, Kirksville, Missouri, the author studied the former Porter Rural School District. Porter rural school, located approximately three and one half miles northwest of Kirksville, Missouri, was an outstanding example of the community school concept during the 1910s and 1920s. The school was located in a poverty area which was selected by Marie Turner Harvey to be a site for improving the school curriculum as well as to improve life and living for its entire district population. Ms. Harvey had been a teacher in an urban area in St. Louis, Missouri. She and Evelyn Dewey, along with her father John Dewey, transformed Porter School into a community school. The Porter School Curriculum was changed from a poverty, rural school to one in which numerous educators came to visit. Evelyn Dewey died in Kirksville, Missouri in 1965. Her father John Dewey was a frequent visitor to Porter school in its hey day. Evelyn Dewey (1919) wrote a book entitled New Schools for Old, the Regeneration of the Porter School. In this book, she told of her experiences as an aid to Marie Turner Harvey in the Porter School District. Marie Turner Harvey also taught in the Kirksville Normal School (now named Truman State University) from 1907 to 1912. She also was in charge of the Model Rural School on the campus. Here, she taught and did demonstration teaching for**

college students. Mrs. Harvey's major goal remained to upgrade Porter Rural School District. Leadership was needed to motivate people in a school district to work together to fulfill objectives of developing a community school in which all can benefit therefrom. The school should be the center of community activities. At the beginning of her tenure, Mrs. Harvey met with school patrons to explain that the three rs of reading, writing, and arithmetic were not adequate for children. A well rounded education was needed by all, including adults. Cooperation was necessary by all including patrons, pupils, and the teacher.

Mrs. Harvey did not believe in grade levels for elementary age pupils, but rather advocated and implemented a non-graded school in which each pupil achieved as much as individual abilities permitted. Additional modern ideas emphasized which Mrs. Harvey pioneered were the following (Evelyn Dewey, 1919):

1. experience charts whereby pupils presented ideas from their own experiences and these were printed on the chalkboard for learners to read; no basal readers were used.

2. learning centers in which pupils on a committee would make, for example, a model desert scene based on what was being studied in an ongoing unit.

3. correlation of subject matter such as when birds were being studied in a unit, pupils would make drawings and models of birds as well as read content on birds. In notebooks, pupils would also write prose and poetry on birds. School and society were not to be separated; pupils would then study and learn about birds in the out of doors.

4. in studying holidays, pupils read stories on the present holiday and made related decorations, as well as wrote invitations for parents to attend pupil presented programs in school on holidays. Beautifying the school and the environment was very important to Mrs. Harvey and to pupils, as well as the larger community.

5. attendance at school functions and programs was very important in integrating school and society. Parents then came to the school setting to watch pupils in a play or other school performance.

6. reality based teaching was strongly emphasized. For example, pupils participated directly in planting a garden. Measuring, seeding, and harvesting the garden crops was stressed with direct learner participation. Pupils also planned for and watched eggs hatch in the classroom.

7. useful learnings were in evidence such as visitors who came to the school house door were greeted by a pupil. Pupils were taught in functional settings how to introduce individuals to

each other and then actually participated in making these introductions.

8. problem solving was practiced in life like situations. For example, pupils with teacher guidance would plan hot lunches for sequential days in school. Pupils would then decide upon who brought what to school on a given day for the hot lunch. Pupils A and B might each bring a jar of home canned green beans to school for making a soup for all pupils in school on a given day of schooling. Pupils C and D each brought a jar of home canned carrots to mix with the green beans to make a soup for the hot lunch. The meals were delicious involving pupil planning and participation (Green, 1975).

9. a horse drawn enclosed wagon, in 1912, was the first school bus in Missouri. The bus service emphasized punctual and regular attendance of pupils in Porter School. Before this time pupils missed school rather frequently and also came late to school.

So that adults would feel integrated, not isolated, in a rural area, activities such as the following were planned and implemented:

1. a Shakespeare Reading Club.
2. a Farm Women's Club.
3. a Poultry and a Pig Club.
4. Parent Teacher Association.
5. Porter Junior and Senior Level Bands for Adults. The bands performed locally, at the 1919 Missouri State Teacher's Association convention in St. Louis, and at the 1920 Missouri State Fair. Mrs. Harvey addressed the National Education Association (NEA) convention in 1919. She also conducted workshops at teacher education normal schools and colleges in twenty-two states, sharing her travel experiences locally with pupils and the lay public. Mrs. Harvey became known nationally and internationally as an educator.
6. Porter Farm Clubs. At all of these club meetings, individuals talked about farming and also interacted socially.
7. cooperation between the University of Missouri Agricultural Extension Service and the local Porter School District in bringing farm specialists to the latter area for field days and for conferences.
8. Sunday School and Church Services, nondenominational in nature in the Porter School. Mrs. Harvey believed that school buildings were to be used by all, even on week ends.

Mary Turner Harvey was the leader of the Porter Community School. What was the role of Evelyn Dewey? She was an aide and

worked very closely with Mrs. Harvey. John Dewey, the father of Evelyn Dewey, visited Porter School frequently. His philosophy of teaching was strongly emphasized in the Porter community school setting. Another aide was Erma Darr, also a former pupil in Porter school, who had not only worked with Mrs. Harvey and Evelyn Dewey over the years, but was a very frequent guest in the author and his wife's home. Mrs. Darr played baritone horn in the Porter band and in speaking to the Monday Club on the Porter School (Boucher, February 27, 1980), she was quoted as saying the following, among other things:

... A band was organized having some members only eight years of age. The group practiced diligently and often played at county fairs and entertainment at Owenby Lake. Kirksville merchants, who wished to entice people down on Saturday evening when the stores were open, hired the band at \$5 a concert.

A red letter day came in 1920 when they were invited to play for Governor's Day at the State Fair in Sedalia, Missouri. These were happy times. But all was not smooth sailing for the district. There were times of stress, for instance, at some school elections there was such controversy that it was necessary to call the sheriff to resolve the problems.

The Porter School District was "put on the map" by the tireless enthusiasm of Marie Turner Harvey who was interested primarily in involvement of people and the American way of life. The small Missouri school was recognized from coast to coast as well as in foreign lands.

### **Developing the Community School**

In developing a community school, participants in the school district must be willing to give of their talents and time to improve the social environment for all its inhabitants.

Cooperation is necessary to achieve these objectives. The entire citizenry needs to realize the benefits for participating in the community school. Greater school use is then in evidence for all patrons. The public schools in the district need primary consideration to improve the curriculum for all pupils. However, the inherent benefits are for all to participate in different scheduled events. Dryfoos (2002) lists characteristics such as the following for community school operation:

1. a community school is open seven days a week before, during, and after school hours. A partnership is involved between the school and the surrounding community. All residents and school pupils need to work together in planning

and implementing the community school concept.

2. community service by school pupils is emphasized in the curriculum. This helps the pupil to expand his/her horizons beyond the school classroom walls.

3. leadership is necessary to coordinate community service activities with the local school administration. Support services involving health, education, family, and economic, need thorough planning and implementation.

4. disadvantaged pupils and parents need adequate assistance in a community school. Community schools can and are established in low socioeconomic areas where help is needed to overcome difficulties and problems.

5. democratic living is needed so that respect and care for all is in evidence.

6. change is a key concept to stress within the community school concept since changing situations mean that the school curriculum must change as well as what is done to improve society. School and society must meet changing needs.

7. concern is shown to remediate a harmful environment for young and old such as drug and alcohol addiction, as well as a violent environment of guns and killing. The welfare of citizens of a community school is paramount.

8. health and welfare needs receive much attention in a community school.

9. vocational, educational, recreational , and social services receive priority in helping to alleviate problematic situations.

10. universities must be involved through providing assistance in the development of community schools.

Community schools stress holism in that the school and community are not separated, but integrated entities. Community service is vital (Ediger, 1993, 24- 25).

### **Philosophy of the Community School Concept**

John Dewey (1859- 1952) was a leading advocate of the community school. Dewey (1916) in his book Democracy and Education laid out the educational framework with his philosophy of experimentalism. He also used his philosophical thinking when establishing his experimental school connected with the University of Chicago, in the latter 1890s and early 1900s. Key ideas, here, involved not separating school from society. Thus what is relevant in society should also be vital in the school curriculum. School is a miniature society. Problem



**solving was important in society and the school should also stress learnings problem solving for pupils. Thus, in context, pupils identify a problem, carefully defined, within an ongoing unit of study. The problem is of interest to pupils and indicates purpose in its solving. A variety of reference sources are used to gather needed information in attempts to solve the problem. The reference sources may be human, print materials, AV aids, and pupil discussion with teacher guidance. An hypothesis should result which is a tentative solution to the problem. The tentative solution is tested, not paper pencil testing, in a life like situation. The consequences of the hypothesis are undergone in the testing situation. As a result, the hypothesis may be revised, if necessary. New problems may be identified along the way within any problem solving activity. Dewey called problems solving the complete act of thought.**

**An inductive method of identifying a problem is involved. From the specific, pupils selecting a problem to developing the hypothesis, to the general whereby learners apply the hypothesis to solving a life-like problem is stressed.**

**Change is a major concept in experimentalist thinking. Situations in the natural and social environment are continually changing. With change, problems arise. These problems need identification and possible solutions found (Ediger, 1995, Chapter Two).**

**Atkinson and Maleska wrote the following:**

**To a follower of Dewey, education has two sides -- psychological and social, neither may be subordinated or neglected. The psychological nature of the child forms the basis for his education -- it is the teacher's responsibility to make full use of his natural, spontaneous activities. Describing original nature as being spontaneously impulsive rather than passive, Dewey divided impulses into four kinds: the social impulses of communication or conversation; the constructive impulse to make things; the impulse to investigate things; and the impulse of artistic creation or creative expression.**

**With these impulses in mind, said Dewey, the school must change from a place of sedentary listening to one for active doing or working. The teaching process must be planned to allow the child to learn whenever possible by his own experiences and, in that way, acquire the habit of thinking. A proper solution to the problem demands intelligent thinking, which becomes the principal factor in the ability to cope with new situations. Thinking, as Dewey defined it, is the use of past experiences in the interpretation of new situations.**



Dewey felt that when the psychological and social approaches to learning are separated, there is produced either a forced and external situation in which freedom of the individual is subordinated to a preconceived action of what society should be, or else a barren and formal development of the mental powers in which the learner has little idea of the use to be made of what is being learned. The school is primarily a social institution because its processes are social-in fact, educational processes are basically no different from those going on in life outside the classroom.

Experimentalism emphasizes input from all who are to be affected by a decision made. Committees and groups need to be involved in decision making. Thus, a broader base is making the decisions as compared to a single individual. The individual interacts with others, in school and in society, and thus needs to have input into these decisions. Experimentalists believe that one cannot know the real world as it truly is, but the individual can experience it. Pertaining to experiences, Eichelberger wrote:

The relationship between knowledge and reality (truth) that is used by researchers today is that of the pragmatist. John Dewey was a principal spokesman for this position, which states that all knowledge is produced by human beings and that we can never distinguish between knowledge and truth. In empirical research, this means that if something works in practice then it is true. A truth (knowledge) that is not supported by further empirical study will be modified or discarded.

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