The benefits of using "community" in the elementary classroom

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The benefits of using "community" in the elementary classroom

Abstract
The traditional teaching approach used in most American elementary schools, where the classroom teacher makes all the decisions and the conventional student is instructed to focus individual energies on assigned seatwork and ignore those who are around him or her, has become an ineffective model.

Researchers and certain educators believe that the use of "community" in the classroom will create environments where children care about one another and about learning, where students work harder, achieve more, where warm, supportive relationships are given birth -- enabling students to risk the new ideas and mistakes so critical to intellectual growth. As a result of using community in the classroom, students show positive outcomes that include higher academic performance, stronger motivation to learn, greater educational expectations and more.
THE BENEFITS OF USING "COMMUNITY"
IN THE ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM

A Graduate Research Paper
Submitted to the
Division of Elementary Education
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Education
University of Northern Iowa

by
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May, 1998
This Research Paper by: Rodney Edgerton Lyons

Entitled: THE BENEFITS OF USING "COMMUNITY" IN THE ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM

Has been approved as meeting the research paper requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts Education

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Abstract

The traditional teaching approach used in most American elementary schools, where the classroom teacher makes all the decisions and the conventional student is instructed to focus individual energies on assigned seatwork and ignore those who are around him or her, has become an ineffective model that doesn’t address the diverse needs of the learner. Times have changed and societal and student needs are different. This reality demands a modification in the educational paradigm since the traditional approach to education is outdated.

Researchers and certain educators believe that the use of “community” in the elementary classroom will serve as an innovative paradigm and will create environments where children care about one another and about learning, where students work harder, achieve more, where warm, supportive relationships are given birth — enabling students to risk the new ideas and mistakes so critical to intellectual growth (Lewis, Schaps, & Watson, 1996).

Child Development Project schools, located in eight school districts nationwide, use “community-building programs” and corroborate with research that as a result of using community in the classroom, students show positive outcomes that include higher academic performance, stronger motivation to learn, greater educational expectations and more.
INTRODUCTION

In our nation’s schools, young people learn about citizenship, in terms of relating to and existing among other people. Much of what they learn comes to them indirectly in public from the ways their teachers manage classroom life (Bricker, 1989). Teachers have been heard to make comments such as: “Bill, please keep quiet and don’t bother Jim while he is finishing his assignment.” “Yes, Mary, its ok to help Carla now that you have finished your work.” “Come on, Sam, find an idea of your own.” When teachers give directions, they usually regard themselves as promoting achievement in academic subjects like math, history, and literature, not as teaching students about citizenship (Bricker, 1989). But it is from comments like the ones above that students acquire an understanding of the rights and responsibilities they have as persons at work in a public place among other persons. The way students are directed to go about their studies is looked upon by some researchers as the “hidden curriculum” of the classroom, “hidden” because it is often not viewed, by either teachers or the public, as a significant source of insight into how people ought to conduct themselves in public (Bricker, 1989). On the other hand, a few researchers have grasped the importance of the hidden curriculum and have striven to make it known to others for whom it is pretty much invisible. For example, in On What Is Learned in Schools (1968), Robert Dreeben throws light on the way the idea of personal “merit” is made operational in classrooms, while Philip Jackson, in Life in Classrooms (1968), is attentive to the way immersion in the conventional role of “student” affects one’s expectations of others (Bricker, 1989).

Despite the contribution of researchers like Dreeben and Jackson, many teachers and others do not yet see the importance of the hidden curriculum and continue to regard studying in classrooms as no more than a means to a goal (Bricker, 1989).
Organized studying in classrooms is itself a source of messages to students about how they should live together. Schooling provides civic education even when its content is not explicitly civic.

One of the lessons Philip Jackson finds students receiving from their time in classrooms is the following (Jackson, 1968):

Another aspect of school life, related to the general phenomena of distractions and interruptions, is the recurring demand that the student ignore those who are around him. In elementary classrooms students are frequently assigned seatwork on which they are expected to focus their individual energies. During these seatwork periods, talking and other forms of communication between students are discouraged, if not openly forbidden. The general admonition in such situations is to do your own work and leave others alone (p. 16).

The information shared up to this point on how young people learn about citizenship through the ways their teachers manage classroom life, giving attention to what some researchers consider as a “hidden curriculum,” coupled up with the one primary lesson that researcher Philip Jackson finds students receiving from their time in classrooms which is: ignore those who are around you, all of the above paints the picture of the traditional model of how most teachers teach in our nation’s schools. This traditional model of simply doing one’s assigned seatwork without talking to other students does not provide room for the development of warm, supportive, stable relationships, nor does it encourage much interpersonal interaction. Also, since the teacher makes all the rules and doesn’t give students a voice in creating some rules, there is a lack of ownership and respect toward the rules. Also, since forms of communication between students is discouraged, if not openly forbidden, an environment of alienation is created. An environment of alienation, an atmosphere of
obeying rules without ownership, a surrounding that forces assigned seatwork without communication with others, establishes a climate of coercion which according to child psychologist William Glasser (1992) causes lower academic performance in students since coercion makes students remove schoolwork, teachers, and school, in general, from their quality world.

Times have changed and societal and student needs are different. This reality demands a modification in the educational paradigm because the traditional approach to education is now outdated. We need to transform our schools into institutes where students (and teachers) study the art and science of human relations (Andersen, 1995). Schools must adopt practices that help young people become good persons who possess effective problem-solving and human relations skills. Educators involved with Child Development Project (CDP) schools across the country believe that the use of “community” in the classroom creates a caring community of learners -- a community whose members feel valued, personally connected to one another, and committed to everyone’s growth and learning (Lewis, Schaps, & Watson, 1996). In fact, Child Development Project educators view the creation of community in the classroom as crucial to children’s learning and citizenship.

Social scientist Maria Montessori believed that given the conditions for adequate expression children would reveal new human truths that would literally save the world (Salkowski, 1994). She opposed the traditional teaching approach and embraced the concept of community. It was her view that the need for objective analysis of human development, placed the child in the center as the focal point, and given the opportunity to grow in an environment (classroom) of cooperation and mutual respect, and to make decisions and choices for themselves, children would become the pioneers of real and lasting peace in the world, (establishing a genuine concept of citizenship), (Salkowski, 1994). This was to be accomplished within the realm of education. “If education
recognizes the intrinsic value of the child’s personality and provides an environment suited to spiritual growth, we have the revelation of an entirely new child, whose astonishing characteristics can eventually contribute to the betterment of the world” (Wolf, 1989, p. 35).

**Purpose of Current Investigation**

Henry Adams once made the observation that “a teacher affects eternity, (s)he can never tell where his influence stops” (Hodgkin, 1985). American school teachers have the awesome responsibility of planting a foundational concept in the minds and hearts of American children regarding how to relate and exist among other people. This concept is generally categorized as citizenship. The task of the teacher, however, does not stop here. Today’s modern society mandates that teachers prepare children academically and socially by helping them make the necessary educational discoveries that will assist them in becoming critical thinkers, skilled, literate, problem-solving, caring, and responsible lifelong learners.

Schools that are high in community can be measured by the degree of students’ agreement with statements such as “My school is like a family” and “Students really care about each other” (Lewis, et al., 1996). Schools with community have warm, supportive, stable relationships that exist between students, teachers, staff and parents, but it begins in the classroom. Community in the classroom leads to “constructive learning” where children naturally try to make sense of the world, classroom teachers foster these efforts to understand by helping children become ever more skillful, reflective, and self-critical in their pursuit of knowledge (Lewis, et al.). Educators who practice community help in preparing an important, challenging curriculum that is
intrinsically motivating and is worth learning and a pedagogy that helps students see why it is worth learning.

The Context of Community

A community is often assumed to be a group of people, with shared interests, who interact with each other (Thayer-Bacon & Bacon, 1998). A newborn child could be a member of a community consisting of only one other person, his or her mother, or some other person functioning as a mother. The number in a community can be as small as two. It is also possible to imagine that the only shared interest between beings in a community is survival, as it is initially with any newborn child (Thayer-Bacon & Bacon, 1998).

Other than needing to have more than one being for a community to exist, the only other necessary ingredient appears to be some kind of shared interest (Thayer-Bacon & Bacon, 1998). One can imagine two people who share a common locality but not a common culture and who are unable to communicate through a common language. In our current pluralistic world, this kind of situation is not unusual that two people can be neighbors, and yet "without" any shared interest, one would not call them a community (Thayer-Bacon & Bacon, 1998). If they begin to try to communicate with each other and can establish a shared interest (e.g., maybe danger lurks and they try to help each other for survival's sake, or their children start playing together), then a community begins to develop. Community's root word is "common." Whereas a community may entail a social group having common interests, similar living conditions, and a shared language and culture, it does not necessarily entail anything more than sheer membership due to a common interest/experience/trait, which could be as basic as survival (Thayer-Bacon & Bacon, 1998). Applying this
philosophical understanding of community, it is conceivable how children in a classroom setting can connect with each other through common interests and goals and establish community under the guided direction of a teacher.

Salkowski (1994) indicates that another way to view community as referenced by Peck (1987) is “as a group of individuals who have learned how to communicate honestly with each other, whose relationships go deeper than the mask of their composure, and who have developed some significant commitment to rejoice together, mourn together, and to delight in each other and make (each) other’s conditions their own” (p. 59). M. Scott Peck asserts that if we can live together in community, then someday we shall be able to resolve our conflicts (Salkowski, 1994). If we accept this premise, then our job as classroom teachers, parents, or group leaders is to work toward achieving community. The belief here is if we instill community in the classroom as teachers, children will embrace the concept and spread it to the world outside of the classroom.

**Definition of Terms**

According to Dr. Jim Andersen, a nationally recognized specialist in human relations and collaborative education, there are themes that are transformed into sequential stages that facilitate personal growth that builds community in the classroom. The sequential stages are linked to the understanding of seven categories that make up the classification process. The categories can be defined as follows (Andersen, 1995):

1. Caring - In this capacity, caring means encouraging; one acquires the confidence to drop all pretense. One encourages others to be themselves, demonstrating faith in oneself and in others.
2. Sharing - In this sense, sharing involves self-disclosure. Self-disclosure is the precondition to self-awareness and it facilitates personal growth. Self-disclosure in itself, is a means to self-discovery.

3. Awareness - In this capacity, awareness refers to what one learns by directly listening and seeing with their own eyes and ears. In this sense, one makes discoveries that no teacher could teach them.

4. Self-Respect - In this category, self-respect is generated through one's discovery of what is good about "oneself" and through experiencing one's potential for doing that which is "good." It pertains to one's perception of values as a human being (e.g., goodness, truth, wholeness, etc.).

5. Faith - In this capacity, faith is the "living spirit," the source of energy from which people grow in knowledge, understanding, and competency. One's faith is an expression of one's inherent drive as a living being just as drive is a measure of one's faith in life.

6. Self-Responsibility - In this category, self-responsibility is a blending of self-determination and self-directed action. Self-responsibility comes with self-determination of what a person wants/needs to know, become, and do. However, one does not become self-responsible unless one also takes action for the fulfillment of what one wants to know, the kind of person one wants to become, and for the things one wants to do.
7. Purposefulness - In this context, purposefulness is individually discovered. It must be interpreted in terms of responsibleness. Becoming responsible is the key to purposeful existence. One is guided in the search for meaning by the values one embraces. Values cannot be taught, but must be uncovered and lived if one is to live with purpose (p. 6-12).

Methodology

Creating A Caring Community In The Classroom

The conceptual framework for creating a caring community in the classroom was a model developed by Dr. Andersen in response to requests made by educators for activities capable of stimulating student participation in small group activities. When he began his research in the late 1960's, little research was available regarding group process activities. Dr. Andersen began assembling activities into a certain order and maintained a record of activities that proved to be successful. Originally, his fundamental criteria for evaluating activities were the number of students who participated and their apparent degree of "enthusiasm" for the activity as observed by the teacher. As his research continued, he explained his observations (Andersen, 1995):

As I became more adept at selecting and creating activities, student participation increased. I recognized that an important key to my success was the synthesized curricula of activities I was developing. One of my primary insights concerned the certain order into which I was arranging the activities. I started to wonder why this order worked. To find the answer, I began to dissect the curricula by classifying the nature of each activity. I continued to
refine the classification process until I had seven categories: caring, sharing (self-disclosure), awareness, respect, faith, self-responsibility, and purposefulness. As I continued to read and experiment, three themes emerged that became the basis for this personal growth philosophy. I have identified these themes as (a) the experiential, (b) the developmental, and (c) the transcendental (p. 2).

Dr. Andersen defines and describes each theme in detail in the following manner (Andersen, 1995):

**The Experiential Theme**

The experiential theme is the foundation out of which the other two themes emerge. Unless you are aware of what you are experiencing, there is no opportunity for personal growth or intentional change. Through studying the literature pertaining to this theme, I discovered the characteristics necessary for creating activities that would establish experiential learning environments. Very few teaching models are concerned with the quality and nature of experience. Most focus on the posture of the teacher and the content of the curriculum. They do not specifically deal with what the student is experiencing during the lesson.

Carl Rogers (1969) was among the first to recognize the significance of the "experience" of the person with whom he was working. He found he was unable to really help someone when he relied solely on intellectual or training procedures. Approaches that rely on knowledge, on training, on the acceptance
of something that is taught, are of little use. Real understanding seems to come about only when we are aware of our experience in the relationship.

In experiential learning, there is a quality of personal involvement. The whole person -- both feelings and cognitive aspects -- is involved in the learning event. It is self-initiated. The learner evaluates the experience and determines whether it is meeting a need or leading in a meaningful direction. To Rogers, the very essence of the experience is meaning. When such learning takes place, the element of meaning to the learner is built into the whole experience.

Facilitating learning, then, in this context, comes to include creating conditions in which learners become aware of their experiences and the consequences of their experiences. The learning paradigm becomes one of helping individuals gain access to their personal and interpersonal experiences and to discover the structure and boundaries of these experiences. The learning process, then is "essentially controlled" by the learner, not by the facilitator or teacher.

The Developmental Theme

Through participating in experiential activities, students begin to develop and grow. They learn new and important things about themselves, others, and their capacity to become better persons.

Self-acceptance is an important ingredient. The movement toward personal growth "comes from the ability to express deep self-acceptance." By learning through our own experiences to accept and to be ourselves, we are taking an important step toward positive change and personal growth. We grow most when we learn to the degree that we are able. Learning, according
to Milton Mayeroff (1971), is primarily the re-creation of one's own person through the integration of new experiences and ideas, rather than the mere addition of information and technique.

Each of us has the capacity to discover and discontinue debilitative behavior and choose behavioral patterns that lead toward full development of our potential. Ultimately, we are responsible for what we become, whether we are conscious of doing so or not, whether we desire to do so or not. To a considerable extent, we can direct and regulate our becoming process.

The Transcendental Theme

Abraham Maslow (1971) believed the most important concern of the school should be to help young people to become good persons. Through activities that are experiential and developmental in nature, students can rise above that which they have been and become more of what they might be. This occurs when young people experience activities that are intentional, purposeful, and meaningful.

It is within this transcendental realm that a person sees what might be --- a hope for things to come. In this way, the transcendental level is concerned with the awakening and use of superconscious energies that have a regenerative influence on the personality.

To Maslow, it is in this realm that people come to appreciate universally prized values such as love, beauty, and truth more than money, power, and prestige. Through appreciation of the higher values, people rise above (transcend) their capacity for doing evil. Universally prized values provide the way to attain peak experiences, those transient moments of ecstasy.
It is the transcendental processes that lead individuals to attain something beyond themselves. Roberto Assagioli (1965) describes it as striving for a higher goal and thereby acquiring a personality integration at a higher level of development.

The transcendental theme is not substantively different than the experiential and developmental; it includes them. Transcendental processes are experiential and developmental. The experiential theme is the core theme. Unless you “experience,” you do not “develop” and “transcend” what you are and thereby become what you might. The themes are interrelated. The experiential theme is also a part of the developmental, and the two are blended with the transcendental. Each alone is insufficient for promoting and sustaining personal growth (p. 2-4).

**The Facilitative Process**

As referenced earlier, Dr. Carl Rogers developed an innovative approach to working with students over a period of 35 years (Andersen, 1995). His conceptions broadened into what might be called the “facilitative” realm, unfortunately, few educators have read about Roger’s ideas, methods, and theories of education. As a result of careful examination of Roger’s theories of education, Andersen (1995) shares:

An effective facilitator demonstrates profound respect and sensitivity for each person. The facilitator needs to resist impulses to control, force, direct, manipulate, or push the group -- because these behaviors are presumptuous and communicate that the facilitator knows best what others need to know, or how they should be, and what they should do. As the facilitator, it is more appropriate to invite participation and to use a facilitative process demonstrating
that each person has sufficient wisdom to figure things out for himself or herself as well as the capacity to make a positive contribution at any given moment. The facilitator must become the facilitative process. If the facilitator tries to do the process or to do the activity, it becomes mechanistic. To become congruent with the process, the facilitator must become completely knowledgeable of the facilitative process. To be successful as a facilitator, you must become an artist who cultivates purposeful action through processing discoveries, observations, and perceptions. The art lies in arranging the learning activities and questions in a respectful manner so that every student has the potential to contribute the next important step or question. The facilitator draws out the best each participant has to offer. Through creating a conducive learning environment, the facilitator assists students with becoming more aware, responsible, and competent (p. 16-19).

The facilitative process flows through the seven sequential and developmental stages of personal growth that have proven to have the capacity to enhance learning and transform lifestyles and relationships (Andersen, 1995). Andersen (1995) identifies these seven stages as caring, building community and a sense of belonging; sharing, cultivating active verbal participation; awareness, being attentive in the “here and now;” respect, for self and others; faith, developing confidence and a sense of optimism; responsibility, acquiring the ability to take appropriate action; and purposefulness, finding meaning, making connections, and engaging in meaningful relationships. Figure 1.1 displays the sequential and developmental stages and themes.
This facilitative group process approach allows individuals to experience who they are and then to re-create themselves as they want to be (Andersen, 1995). The emphasis is on self-discovery of what constitutes being a good person (or in the view of the writer of this paper: a good citizen) and the development of self-sufficiency and willpower for the actualization of potential. Through a facilitative approach, the program provides conditions that support the establishment of “community” and promotes healthy interpersonal relations (Andersen, 1995). The participants acquire interpersonal competence through their community interexperience. The process is synergetic, that is, it arranges relationships so that one person’s advantage is another person’s advantage (Andersen, 1995), thus the participants experience dependence and independence and find that they need not be blocked in either since they become aware of their own experiences and the consequences of these experiences.

According to Andersen (1995) the curriculum of sequenced, developmental activities involved in this program approach is based on the three psychological themes previously mentioned: (a) experiential, (b) developmental, and (c) transcendental. The group systematically passes through sequenced stages of “experiences” designed to facilitate (a) caring, (b) self-disclosure, (c) awareness of self and others, (d) self-respect, (e) faith, (f) self-responsibility, and (g) purposefulness.

A Sampling Of Procedures

Once a teacher understands the format outlined by Andersen’s research, the teacher can freely create his or her own combination of specific activities that involve all seven stages to achieve community in the classroom.

The following are only a few ideas and examples involving stages 1, 2, and 6 that basically suggest a format. Teachers generally create and design their own
curriculum of activities that suit their specific classroom needs. Here are the selected examples (Andersen, 1995):

Stage 1: Caring

Caring Is The Precondition To Self-Disclosure

Caring is the foundational stage for building a sense of community with any group. Not only should the activity be caring in nature, it is essential that the group facilitator clearly demonstrate caring for each member of the group. Moreover, this caring must be more than a verbal expression of "I care for you." There are a number of explicit ways in which the facilitator clearly demonstrates an understanding of what is being expressed. This involves communicating an awareness of feelings, thoughts, and behavior. It is a precious experience whenever someone demonstrates that he or she understands you.

When a group meets for the first time, most of the participants are somewhat anxious about how things will go. Until people become acquainted with one another and familiar with what is expected of them, they remain wary. All of us, but students in particular, are concerned about losing status. Consequently, it is important that the facilitator begin with activities in which there are no "right" or "wrong" answers and in which the participants don't even have to speak. They only have to raise their hands or show what they have written on paper to communicate with others. Here is an example of a number one caring activity:
Caring No. 1 - Forced choice: Cross-country vacation. (The following supplies are needed: paper and pencils.) Each participant is invited to choose between alternatives found in the seven different categories pertaining to a cross-country vacation. Which activity would they most prefer? Should some participants not care for any of the alternatives, they may be encouraged to choose the options they find least offensive. As the facilitator reveals the alternatives, category by category, the participants select an option from each of the seven categories and record their choices on a sheet of paper. When all seven categories have been covered, the facilitator invites the participants to move about the group, as if they were in a social setting, comparing lists. Their task is to find individuals with an identical or a completely different list of choices.

A. Mode of travel preferred:
   (1) car
   (2) train
   (3) plane
   (4) motorcycle

B. Preferred city to visit first:
   (1) Minneapolis
   (2) New York City
   (3) New Orleans
   (4) San Francisco

C. Preferred national park:
   (1) Everglades
   (2) Grand Canyon
   (3) Yellowstone
   (4) Yosemite

D. Preferred activity:
   (1) deep-sea fishing
   (2) backpacking
   (3) sailing
   (4) skiing

E. Type of entertainment:
   (1) comedy
   (2) magic show
   (3) musical
   (4) drama

F. Preferred attraction:
   (1) Disneyland
   (2) Statue of Liberty
   (3) Space Needle
   (4) The French Quarter

G. Preferred fruit:
   (1) apple
   (2) grapes
   (3) peaches
   (4) orange

After the participants have received sufficient time to compare lists, the facilitator processes the activity through asking if anyone noticed anything or found something surprising or interesting. In this way, awareness and

Stage 2: Sharing/Self-Disclosure

Self-Disclosure Is The Precondition to Self-Awareness

Without self-disclosure, there is little likelihood that learning or personal growth will take place. People remain alienated, from themselves and others, until they self-disclose. Self-disclosure is the process whereby we leave the state of alienation and move toward realizing more of our potential. This curriculum helps to eliminate feelings of alienation.

Sharing/self-disclosure activities are designed to be self-disclosing. Like caring, self-disclosure is more of a process than a specific kind of activity. The key to encouraging healthy self-disclosure is to begin with activities that are not very threatening and for the facilitator to gently and respectfully support the participants as they self-disclose (p. 39). Here’s such an activity:

Sharing No. 2 - Disclosing in pairs. The facilitator invites the group to participate in a process that randomly pairs them with another person. Each pair is seated in a manner conducive to rotating partners in an orderly fashion. A volunteer from each pair is invited to go first in this activity as well as to be the person who will move to a new partner when a new question is asked. A series of timed questions, listed below, are posed. Provision is made for reflection on each question.
The volunteer receives two minutes to speak on the topic in the manner and to the degree desired. The other partner listens. After the 2 minutes have elapsed, the individuals who were to listen demonstrate how well they were listening and comprehending. Then the process is reversed.

After both partners have shared and listened, the person who went first moves to a different partner. (The movement takes place in a clockwise movement, to facilitate orderly exchanges of partners.) After each topic has been covered, the facilitator debriefs the activity by processing awareness, surprises, and discoveries.

Topics:
1. What is your favorite recreational activity? Why?
2. What was your most memorable elementary school experience?
3. If you could change anything about the way you’ve been taught, what would it be?
4. Describe your favorite vacation.
5. Share an important dream, hope, or goal.
6. Which are the most important books for children to read? Why?

Stage 6: Responsibility
Responsibility Is The Precondition To Purposefulness

Andersen (1995) asserts that schools and other institutions in our society frequently deny young people the opportunity to assume appropriate levels of responsibility. This causes students to become more dependent and typically to look to others for direction. Each of us has the capacity to effectively manage our own life and it is appropriate for us to gradually assume this responsibility as we mature. The following activity is designed to cultivate self-responsibility:

Responsibility No. 4 - Acting out your citizenship. The facilitator invites the participants to identify the following:
- What are your dominant strengths, talents, and abilities?
• Which of these (strengths, talents, abilities) do you intuitively feel you are meant to do more with?
• Of what benefit are your talents to society? How should you act out your citizenship?

The participants are paired up and invited to share what they desire on the above. After 5 minutes have elapsed, their partner provides feedback. Then the process is reversed, followed by the processing of awareness. One of the requirements for successful group participation is that each person must come to take responsibility for his or her own actions. This leads to an actualizing orientation and makes it possible for students to understand the progression from dependence to independence to purposeful living (p. 31-75).

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Child Development Project (CDP) Schools

Prior to the extensive studies and work of Dr. Andersen in establishing the conceptual framework for creating a caring community in the classroom through group process activities, little research was available. However, Child Development Project schools which are located in eight school districts nationwide, use group activities and "community concepts" very similar to those described by Andersen. The approach in the Child Development Project is to take research findings about how children learn and develop --- ethically, socially, and intellectually --- and translate them into a comprehensive, practical program with three facets (Lewis et al.):

(1) a classroom program that concentrates on literature-based reading instruction, cooperative learning and a problem-solving approach to discipline;
(2) a schoolwide program of community building and service activities; and (3) a family involvement program. A growing body of research suggests that Child Development Project schools are correct in their belief that community is crucial to “children’s learning and citizenship” (p. 17).

Students who attend schools that are high in community show a host of positive outcomes, in fact, these outcomes include higher educational expectations and academic performance, stronger motivation to learn, greater liking for school, less absenteeism, greater social competence, fewer conduct problems, reduced drug use and delinquency, and greater commitment to democratic values (Battistich et al., 1996; Bryk and Driscoll, 1988; Hom and Battistich 1995).

What stands out about Child Development Project schools is that community is schoolwide as in the case of Hazelwood School, a CDP school, in Louisville, Kentucky. Children at Hazelwood School care about learning and about one another and it seems perfectly natural (Lewis et al.); but it didn’t just happen. The school’s staff worked hard over a five year period to create what they call “a caring community of learners” -- a community whose members feel valued, personally connected to one another, and committed to everyone’s growth and learning.

How Do CDP Schools Become “Caring Communities of Learners?”

CDP schools become “caring communities of learners” by adhering to five interdependent principles, striving for the following (Lewis et al.):

1. Warm, supportive, stable relationships. Teachers at CDP schools carefully examine their approaches, asking, “What kind of human relationships are we
fostering?" For example, at one CDP California elementary school, the competitive science fair has become a hands-on family science night that draws hundreds of parents. With awards eliminated, parents are free to focus on the pleasures of learning science with their children. Also a Dade County, Florida, CDP elementary school removed the competitive costume contest from its Halloween celebration so that children could enjoy the event without worrying about winners and losers. Other CDP schools took the competition out of PTA membership drives, refocusing them to emphasize participation and celebration of the school’s progress. (These changes were made after CDP teachers and staff reviewed the question: Do students view their classmates primarily as collaborators in learning, or as competitors in the quest for grades and recognition?

2. Constructive learning. How can teachers support and extend children’s natural efforts to learn? First, educators can provide a coherent curriculum, organized around important concepts, rather than a potpourri of isolated facts. Second, educators can connect the curriculum with children’s own natural efforts to make sense of the world. Third, lessons can be set up so that children must weigh new information against what they already know, work through discrepancies, and construct a new understanding.

3. An important, challenging curriculum. In an era of rapid technological change, certain skills and habits are likely to remain important -- thoughtful reading, self-critical reflection, clear communication, and asking productive questions. Numerous critiques of the curriculum in this country argue that it sells children short by presenting materials that are too simple and too easily
mastered -- for example, basal readers whose barren language and shallow ideas offer little reason to read. That a more challenging curriculum is more compelling to children, even so-called slow learners, is a tenet underlying some recent interventions (Hopfenberg 1993).

4. **Intrinsic motivation.** Awarding prizes for creating science projects, reading books, running laps, or a host of other worthwhile ends can diminish interest in the activity itself by focusing children’s attention on the reward, and by implying that the task is not inherently worthwhile (Alfie Kohn, 1993) (in which if it's worthwhile, it should be motivating enough.

5. **Attention to social and ethical dimensions of learning.** Everything about schooling -- curriculum, teaching method, discipline, interpersonal relationships -- teaches children about the human qualities we value (as a culture). CDP teachers engage children in shaping the norms of their class and school, so that they see that these norms are not arbitrary standards set by powerful adults, but necessary standards for the well-being of everyone (Lewis et al.).

CDP teachers are constantly engaged in coordinating activities into curriculum that nurture community. A teacher at Hazelwood School had members of her 2nd-3rd grade classroom pair off in twos as she gave them an assignment from the book *Wagon Wheels*. She instructed the pairs to write a dialogue between Johnnie and Willie Muldie, ages 11 and 8, who are left in charge of their 3-year-old brother (Lewis et al.). She sets the stage:

Let’s imagine that we’re Johnny and Willie. It’s the first night alone without Daddy. We’ve put little brother to bed, and we’re just sitting up talking to each other (p.16).
The teacher asks the class to discuss "ways we can help our partners" (Lewis et al.). The children demonstrate remarkable forethought about how to work together: "Disagree without being mean." "If your partner says something that don't fit, then work it into another part." "Let your partner say all they want to say". These answers that the children gave show a sense of community and as they continue to review the book *Wagon Wheels* they will pursue several other important issues such as: What experiences have shaped the lives of diverse Americans? How have acts of principle, courage, and responsibility shaped history, and how do they shape our own daily lives (Lewis et al.)? The answers to these questions will facilitate what Andersen might refer to as the processes that stimulate sharing (self-disclosure), caring, awareness, self-respect, faith, self-responsibility, and purposefulness.

Synergy Of Academic And Social Goals

It is common to think of the academic and social goals of schooling as a hydraulic -- to imagine that fostering one undermines the other (Lewis et al.). But when schools attend to all five elements (interdependent principles) described above, they create environments where children care about one another and about learning.

Lewis et al. believes that students work harder, achieve more, and attribute more importance to schoolwork in classes in which they feel liked, accepted, and respected by the teacher and fellow students. They believe schools that provide an important, challenging curriculum, and help children connect it to their own efforts to understand the world, become allies in children's quest for competence -- and teachers in those schools have a head start in being seen as supportive, valued adults.
Lewis et al. connotes that a "shift away from competition, rewards, and punishments" helps all students -- not just the high achievers -- feel like valued members of the classroom community. Faced with a competitive, skill-and-drill curriculum, educationally less-prepared children may preserve their self-esteem by reducing their efforts. They may psychologically withdraw from the classroom or school community, leaving it powerless to influence their social, ethical, or intellectual development (Nicholls, 1989).

Lewis et al. contend that the caring community of learners is not one that avoids criticism, challenge or mistakes. Parker J. Palmer (1983) has written:

A learning space needs to be hospitable not to make learning painless but to make the painful things possible... things like exposing ignorance, testing tentative hypotheses, challenging false or partial information, and mutual criticism of thought. [None of these] can happen in an atmosphere where people feel threatened and judged (Lewis et al., p. 21).

Like a family, the caring classroom provides a sense of belonging that allows lively, critical discussions and risk-taking. In fact, a classroom that practices community is a place where no one is to blame and everyone contributes to finding solutions (T. D. Evans, 1995). It is a place where the teacher encourages students and perhaps stresses six practices (Carlson, Sperry, & Dinkmeyer, 1992):

1. Making relationships a priority;
2. Carrying on respectful dialogue;
3. Practicing encouragement and affirmation daily;
4. Making decisions through shared involvement (for example, classroom meetings);
5. Resolving conflict; and
6. Having fun on a regular basis.
Psychologist Alfred Adler (1964) believed that an educator’s most important task -- perhaps his or her holy duty -- is to see to it that no child is discouraged at school and to influence any child who enters school discouraged. He believed that learning is only possible when children look hopefully and joyfully to the future (Evans, 1995).

Giving Children Rule-Creating Opportunities Adds To The Construction of “Community”

Challenging children to think about the rules that should govern the social life of the classroom is a basic way to stimulate their construction of moral knowledge (DeVries & Kohlberg, 1987). Constructivist teachers develop reciprocal relationships with children, express understanding of children’s feelings and desires, communicate ideals of fairness, emphasize logical consequences rather than punishment, and encourage children to develop their own solutions to interpersonal problems through peer negotiations (DeVries, Reese-Learned, & Morgan, 1991). DeVries et al. (1991) reports that rule-creating opportunities help children view themselves as creators of classroom rules. The children give broad reasons for the rules, including consideration of natural or logical consequences, respect for others’ feelings, preservation of friendships and general respect for rules (Castle and Rogers, 1994).

When children create rules, as they do when they invent their own games, they feel they are playing an important role in the democratic process (Castle & Wilson, 1992); they are more likely to want to create rules that peers will view as helpful and fair to all. Rule discussions provide opportunities for children to debate the fairness of rules within the meaningful context of the classroom community (Castle & Rogers, 1994). Teachers should guide these discussions without imposing adult authority.
Giving children choices for establishing their own classroom rules promotes their autonomy and ability to make decisions: "When children are allowed to make decisions, they often make the same rules that adults would make; however, they respect the rules that they themselves make much more than the same rules imposed by adults" (Kamii & Joseph, 1989, p. 51-52).

By engaging children in thinking about, discussing and agreeing on a set of classroom rules early in the school year can construct a sense of classroom community--"that we are all in this together and will help one another" (Castle & Rogers, 1994).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

What kind of effect does the use of the concept of "community" have on student achievement? Andersen's research and contributions developing the concept and understanding of "community" has enhanced the American school teacher's ability to assist children in perceiving significant ways of relating to and existing among other people. The Child Development Project schools have classroom programs that concentrate on literature-based reading instruction, a schoolwide program of "community building" and service activities, a family involvement program, projects and activities that foster important, challenging curriculum; warm, supportive, stable relationships; constructive learning that triggers intrinsic motivation; activities that give attention to social and ethical dimensions of learning (Lewis et al.). These programs and activities have created what they call "a caring community of learners" -- a community whose members feel valued, personally connected to one another, and committed to everyone's growth and learning (Lewis et al.). The CDP schools have expressed that it is their belief that community is crucial to children's learning and to their notion of citizenship -- existing among other people.
Surely these are not attestations that you would receive from students or teachers in the traditional classroom where children are given the perception that they are to ignore those who are around them. During seatwork periods, which is what their day primarily consists of in the traditional classroom, talking and other forms of communication between students are discouraged, if not openly forbidden (Jackson, 1968). This closed mouth environment doesn’t contribute to children caring about one another or challenging false or partial information. This is not a family or atmosphere where constructive learning is taking place or where warm, supportive, stable relationships exist among students. Community in the classroom permits dialogue and warmth between student and teacher, and students with other students.

In the traditional classroom, the teacher’s comment referred to earlier: “Come on, Sam, find an idea of your own” (Bricker, 1989) suggests that students should do their own work -- seemingly competing with other students, which is often the case. CDP schools show that when competition is removed from curriculum, projects, and activities, it helps students focus more on learning and foster more warm, stable relationships building community. The research of Lewis et al. connotes that a “shift away from competition, rewards, and punishments” helps all students -- not just the high achiever (which would be the case in traditional classrooms), but all students feel like valued members of the classroom community. In the traditional classroom, faced with a competitive skill-and-drill curriculum, educationally less-prepared children may preserve their self-esteem by reducing their efforts. They may psychologically withdraw from the classroom or school community, leaving it (school) powerless to influence their social, ethical, or intellectual development (Nicholls, 1989).

Today’s modern society mandates that teachers prepare children primarily academically and socially by helping them make the necessary educational discoveries that will assist them in becoming critical thinkers, skilled, literate, problem-solving,
caring, and responsible lifelong learners. Again, CDP schools corroborate with research that as a result of using community in their classrooms, students show positive outcomes that include higher educational expectations and academic performance, stronger motivation to learn, greater liking for school, less absenteeism, greater social competence, fewer conduct problems, reduced drug use and delinquency, and greater commitment to democratic values (Battistich et al., 1996, Bryk and Driscoll 1988; Hom and Battistich, 1995).

Andersen would credit a higher academic performance, stronger motivation to learn greater liking for school, fewer conduct problems, and all of the expressed positive outcomes mentioned above the combining effects of the seven categories from caring to purposefulness as students pass through the personal growth cycle making significant discoveries about themselves and others, developing trust in those around them and seeing the faith building in one another as the spirit of family and community permeates throughout the classroom, it would be inevitable, in the eyes of Andersen, that positive outcomes and expectations would emerge.

This report from CDP schools nationwide is reason for all the nation’s schools to establish community-building programs modeled after CDP’s five interdependent principles and three facets of comprehensive programming coupled with an understanding and use of activities that follow Researcher Andersen’s sequential and developmental themes and stages. However, it seems that the primary reports coming from schools using traditional teaching methods is centered around disciplinary problems, self-esteem concerns, and low academic performance. The concept of community addresses all three of these issues. In fact, CDP schools use a problem-solving approach to discipline but social scientists suggest that “community” can be used in different ways to address discipline. Social Scientist Maria Montessori raises an interesting approach regarding the use of community. She believed given the
opportunity to grow in an environment of cooperation and mutual respect, and to make
decisions and choices for themselves, children would become the pioneers of real and
lasting peace in the world (C. Salkowski, 1994). Conflict must be viewed as an
opportunity to explore new issues and old problems since the careful examination of
conflicts often expose the root of a particular problem. Teaching the basic process of
problem-solving is easily accomplished in the format of a class meeting (Salkowski,
1994). Salkowski (1994) believes that when children bring problems to the group, the
adult can guide them through the steps necessary for finding solutions. As the issue is
explored, all sides of the problem will emerge. It is helpful to record or restate the
problem so that everyone is clear about identifying the “real” problem or set of
problems.

When children have been encouraged to accept each other’s perspectives and to
seek a variety of ideas, they will show amazing creativity when brainstorming for
solutions (Salkowski, 1994). Slakowski (1994) maintains that because they (children)
experienced the reality of logical consequences, they are able to see cause and effect
when considering the consequences of solicited solutions. Once the group members
have decided on a solution, they must plan for its implementation. If the initial plan
does not work out then a different solution must be tried.

Experience with group problem-solving enables children to become proficient in
the process. As they see it modeled again and again, it is internalized and becomes a
“strategy” available to them when faced with the dilemma of dealing with personal
conflict (Salkowski, 1994). Hence, these students become critical thinkers and lifelong
problem-solvers which is not an attribute of students in the traditional classroom.

Community in the classroom promotes self-esteem and, as the CDP schools
indicate, one of the positive outcomes is higher academic performance. Researcher
Andersen (1995) believes that perception (one’s capacity to see reality) is the
precondition to awareness and is the source from which all behavior emanates. Self-esteem is grounded in one's perception. When one is stigmatized (e.g. labeled as a slow learner or low-achiever) and devalued as a human being, it is difficult to rebut depression and a decline in performance (Andersen, 1995). Maslow points out that one has a need for approval from and acceptance by others. The use of community breeds respect, trust, family, and more. Lewis et al. affirmed that students work harder, achieve more and attribute more importance to school work in classes in which they feel liked, accepted and respected by the teacher and fellow students.

Thayer-Bacon & Bacon (1998) said that classroom teachers share the same space with students (say, 30) for 5 to 6 hours, 5 days per week, for an average of 180 days per year (with proposals being offered to extend the school day and the school year, e.g., Sizer's (1994, 1993) (Coalition of Schools). An elementary teacher spends approximately 1,260 to 1,400 hours with the 30 children who walk in her or his classroom the first day of school, although some come and go, but many remain with the group the entire year (p.7). One could say elementary children spend 1,260 to 1,400 hours "living" in their particular classroom, within their school building (Thayer-Bacon & Bacon, 1998).

If teacher and students are going to spend approximately 1,400 hours together in the classroom, the classroom should be a harmonious, warm, and joyous place. A place where trust prevails through a sense of family. It should be an environment where there is mutual respect, a language of encouragement, a sense of belonging, a place of caring, sharing, self-disclosure, discovery, awareness, self-respect, and self-responsibility. It must be a place where one develops and finds meaning and purpose, discovers potential and self-worth. The classroom should be an environment that nourishes personal growth and aspects of human development. Lastly, the classroom should be an atmosphere where continuous and productive learning is exulted. These
components are not visible in the traditional classroom setting or teaching approach. However, these components are part of the benefits of using “community” in the elementary classroom.

Perhaps Researcher Claire Salkowski (1994) summed it up best by expressing when you see “community” in the genuine affection between children -- in the arm around a shoulder, a gentle pat on the back, a warm embrace, smiling faces and dancing eyes -- it touches you in the deepest recesses of your being. She added, “when you enter a real classroom community, you know you have entered a special place; a place of real joy; a place where the creative spirit is alive and well, growing deeper and richer each day.” While this is the type of environment that “community” can produce, more research needs to be done on perfecting community building programs. Additional data regarding the effectiveness of existing programs outside of Child Development Project Schools is necessary. Findings disclosing the approximate number of elementary schools in America that uses community building programs and the approximate population of students who benefit from these programs through assessed performance and/or social competence would encourage and benefit educators and parents.

If teachers are going to become effective community builders, school administrators must begin coordinating more human relations training for teachers.
REFERENCES


