

# THE EMERGING ROLE OF THE VOLUNTEER IN EDUCATION

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Once upon a time, there was a community that seemed to have everything going for it. The schools were good, the government was reasonable and fair, housing and employment able to meet the needs of the populace. The parks were large and beautiful, library and entertainment facilities were excellent. Citizens treated one another with respect and concern.

To the frightful consternation of the people, children began to get sick and a few died. The scientists in the community discovered that something had gone wrong with the milk that the children were drinking. They investigated further and discovered the governmental body in a nearby community, while it had milk inspection regulations, had not the funds to hire an inspector. This first fine community, in true enlightened self interest collected funds so than an inspector could be paid and soon no more children became ill. These intelligent citizens further concluded that it was not sufficient to maintain high standards of education, employment and housing in their own community but that it was equally necessary to examine less immediate influences that were significantly relevant to their lives and attempt to assist those influences in developing and maintaining high standards also.

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As our society grows, the bubble of space and freedom and quiet for each individual shrinks. Compounding the shrinkage is the mounting impact of knowledge and information which bombards the individual. We have much to learn about how to program intellectual stimulation. We recognize that human beings become inhuman at both extremes of the stimulation continuum. The infant ignored too long becomes disconnected with the pulsations of living--or perhaps it would be more accurate to say he never becomes plugged in; the constantly pressured seem to blow their fuses. Variety is a human essential but the tolerance for change is a human variable.

In order to become synchronized again with the changes in society, education is having to re-vamp. The pursuit of knowledge is not enough. Questions about the use of greatly extended leisure time, about identity of people crowded together, about the meanings to which the expanding knowledge will be applied, are being asked. As the objectives of education are redefined, these questions are taken into account.

It has become imperative for students to be educated in practical ways in the structure of our society, to understand the organizations that support and maintain the community, the extent to which they fail or succeed and why, the influences and power structures brought to bear on them, and above all, the access to influence. Not only is the school becoming a lighted school house with the community coming in, but in rare instances the school is beginning to move into the community.

Schools of the future are described as having fewer buildings, and classes, we are told, will be held in industrial settings, in courts and libraries, in museums and shops. The student will learn to prepare exhibits as well as look at them in the

museum. The visit to the newspaper will extend into a study of a myriad careers from how to keep the presses rolling to selling ads and reporting.

Even before Kindergarten is universal, Head Start and pre-Head-Start classes are spreading. Training for mothers to train their own children in the learning readiness skills, the really important ones, will be the significant career in the educational field in the immediate years ahead. The major preparation for learning, the first reinforcing, is the child's response to the mother's voice, the joyful response of the mother to the early chirps of discovery. The simple peek-a-boo of finding and losing and finding again that so many of us take for granted, is not always available to those of little hope, where a dropped toy symbolizes only tired effort and the uneaten crumb is only what it is.

The early interchange between parent and child relates closely to learning readiness, it is the very accessibility to knowledge and is the bridge between home and school. At the opposite end of the spectrum where attention is excessive and learning becomes part of the game, the return of the discovery to society is lost for the next generation. We have evidence of this in the various expressions of alienation of our youth from social responsibility. We must be concerned with building the bridge from school to the social structure.

As coordinators, the involvement of the student with society, in projects in school using volunteers or in projects that take the student out of the classroom, the relationships and meanings must be purposeful. For the student to have access to the structure of society, he needs to begin early to understand it, see it, study it, and have a role in it. We are learning to program

math from kindergarten through college but too often the visit to the fire station and the post office is the beginning and end of the program of community study. Participation in our social structures is still rare in the early school years. Education is a game that some play expertly and others dismally, depending on how the cards were dealt at an early age.

Many educators are convinced that practically any subject can be made appropriate for any age in school. What opportunities we have to involve older children in preparing younger ones for the educational opportunities ahead!

One gifted school coordinator designed a story telling project with the school librarian and a knowledgeable volunteer. Fifth grade students learned to tell stories to younger children. The advantages in confidence and communication skills for the older children were matched by the image of learning as being highly desirable in the eyes of the little ones.

When we anticipate the amount of leisure time our children will have, we recognize another imperative, that of enjoying the creative arts. The opportunities are glorious for this here at Barat. There is much contagion in this example. If I could dream, as I am always urging all of you to do, I would have a community resource coordinator in every school in the country. This would be a certificated role, based on qualifications of personality, training and experience. The job would include bringing to the needs of education, the community resources in art, music, literature, drama, and dance to permit every child a glimpse into the possibilities of creativity of the present and the past, and a long look into himself to see where he belongs and to develop his own creative tendencies.

There are currently emerging projects in which

students make their own tape and TV programs about the social science data they are studying--and it comes from life as well as books. Careers of the future are coming into the curriculum by way of cooperation between television channels and education.

The hobbies that people have are rarely unrelated to serious studies, but because the focus is for fun and the test is production, rather than examination, we think of it as extra-curricular or enrichment. All teachers cannot know all the mathematics of photography, the physics of glass blowing, the technicalities of printing, in stamp collecting, how to card wool, or embroider or work a potter's wheel, but there are people, many of them using the leisure of their retirement who would find a measure of satisfaction in sharing time and skill with a teacher, a class, or a child. Would we not, in our education language, agree that the self concept of the child is closely related to what he can create. What if the future hobbies were purposefully developed as planned opportunities in which every student could find a bit of excellence for himself each year as part of his educational prescription? In the elementary years when the self concept is so crucial, there are many opportunities through sharing resources to do more doing and less labeling.

I am thinking of a child who was disengaged academically, but very involved in his interest in painting. A fine artist volunteered to work with him once a week (discovered by the community volunteer recruiting service and educationally directed by a coordinator). The mentor encouraged reading for accuracy of the painted backgrounds, presented an image of one who valued learning and investigation. If each school had someone whose job it was to coordinate community resources for education, we could dream bravely. We could dream of beginning where each child is, of serving

teachers, students and ultimately society by preserving and cherishing our human resources and feeding them back to the fabric of life, our youth.

Access to our social structure, ability to use leisure time creatively, fade into the background as we think of the first imperative of educational objectives for a viable society. Is it possible to teach some children to communicate? Is it possible for educators to stop teaching others how not to communicate? Our pattern of consumption of knowledge and feed-back is on the wane but the new patterns need more people to back up the teacher.

A teacher of vision said if she could dream, she would want to be able to designate what kinds of information she wanted on any subject, push a button and have available materials to dispense to students to work on individually or in groups. We may not be able to have the machines or push the buttons for a day or two but in many communities teams of volunteers would be ready to research and compile information on request. With schools that approach learning in this way, students talk to one another about ideas, develop and produce projects, plays and movies, solve problems and behave in ways that say they understand what they are studying more clearly than perfect examination results demonstrate.

A major challenge in the educational retooling process is that inner change in staff that is not easily visible to the public, costs money in planning time and may be difficult to sell to school boards. A good volunteer program in the hands of a skilled coordinator can deliver hope which is the very essence of change, to the staff. It becomes worth the teacher's time to talk with a volunteer whose expertise will be shared with a disengaged student. As enthusiasm develops, the teacher can melt the snowball of academic underachievement by underscoring the favorable developments.

Knowing that community experts are available, that the coordinator will make the consultation arrangements, that materials can be prepared, makes the teacher a different kind of professional, more attractive than the prototype who told and tested. And for the students who need a pace quite different from most of the group, whether it is slower, faster, more complicated or more restrained, if the teacher can fashion the design, if the community can recruit the human resource, the coordinator can make the project work. A volunteer will not always be the resource of choice--sometimes it will be a book, sometimes a game, sometimes a set of materials, and very often the teacher. She or he becomes the diagnostician, selecting the resource and plan most suitable. The resource coordinator looks to materials or community to fill the bill.

Communication, creativity and confidence should be what the C in curriculum means. In order to individualize children and teach them from where they are, learning centers or class rooms run like learning centers are emerging. This type of arrangement requires more variety of materials, extra people to do the non teaching tasks. In order to maximize school time and teacher talents, team teaching is emerging. In one large math class children flow from one group to another as they progress at their own pace. New concepts are taught by the team members to combined classes--sometimes in person, sometimes on closed circuit TV. Laboratory science is also taught in this fluid way. Extra hands are needed to follow up teacher recommendations in small groups, mark scores, distribute materials.

A group of social studies teachers regularly have on their team, experts from the community with slides, exhibits, statistics and reports. One math team taught probability with the help of

a race track owner and compound interest with the local banker! The volunteer recruiting service and the coordinator built the bridge.

Where schools have volunteer programs but no coordinators, very often school administrators or other staff are filling the bill. When they have other responsibilities, the use of the community resource is liable to be slim because it takes time to make arrangements, plan a project with the teacher, instruct and supervise and appropriately appreciate the volunteer. When the volunteer is working as a teacher aide in the classroom, personalities and equipment and roles have to be defined. The use of community resources and the relationship of the coordinator is something like our world food problem--there is enough to go around but we are still struggling with implementing distribution. The community resources are available but not all schools have bridges. I have not heard of other colleges that specifically offer an accredited course which trains people to bridge some of the gaps between school and community. The training borrows from education, social work, community organization and secretarial skills.

In the two and a half years that the coordinators training has been available at Barat College, over 100 people have studied and they in turn, on an inservice basis, have shared their training with about 50 others. Teachers and administrators interested in the use of community resources have participated. Some students have become community recruiters, finding the treasure hunt of seeking out the volunteer of their preference. Of the 50 or so here today, half are working as coordinators, a fourth are recruiting and the rest are educators or volunteers. You may be interested in learning that about one-fifth of our coordinators are over 60 years old, and that the volunteers who are working in the north and northwest communities of Chicago



with which I am most familiar, have from 1/3 to 1/4 older adults for volunteers. In view of the fact that about 1/10th of the national population is in this age bracket and not all are appropriate for educational volunteering, the proportion that is involved is favorable.

In the school volunteer programs the majority of volunteers are between the ages of 40 and 50. They tend to return to the work year after year. One would anticipate that this pattern of involvement will continue and that the numbers of older adults so involved will tend to increase.

Industry is cooperating in this pattern. Not only are they beginning to provide volunteers to cooperate with the schools in occasional lectures but some outstanding situations are known where individuals have been released from working hours to work with gifted students, to develop materials for and with a class. Sometimes the student goes to the industry or business and a modified apprenticeship arrangement results.

Retirement and preretirement programs usually begin their focus on income and health of the retiree. As these classes develop, attention turns toward the need for self actualization through continuing and developing community service.

The concerns we express for our young people, creative use of time, a favorable self concept, ongoing and forward leading communication, are equally the concerns and needs of our older adults. They are the same concerns that lead to satisfying middle years. They do not cease suddenly with retirement.

The volunteers, human resources, like the material resources, are not tied to one community. The recruiting services assist one another and

volunteers like best to work where they are most needed and where they are most appropriate. So like the milk inspector in the story with which we began, they go to more than one school so that many children may benefit, recognizing that our circles of influence extend beyond our own horizons for better or for worse.