THE COMMUNITY SCHOOL

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'A problem facing the educational authorities is to devise a curriculum which will meet the needs not only of a small minority who engage in non-agricultural pursuits but the bulk of the population in order that they may be able to lead a better, richer life in a rural environment.'

'Its (education's) aim should be to render the individual more efficient in his or her condition of life, whatever it may be, and to promote the advancement of the community as a whole through the improvement of agriculture, the development of native industries, the improvement of health .....
Every department of Government concerned with the welfare or vocational teaching of the people - including especially the departments of Health, Public Works, Railways, Agriculture - must co-operate closely with educational policy.'

'The school can fulfil its function only if it is part of a more general programme conceived in terms much wider than the work of the school.

Experience tends to show that efforts to educate the young are often largely wasted unless a simultaneous effort is made to improve the life of the community as a whole.

The efficiency of the school in promoting the good life of the community depends upon the extent to which it is able to co-operate with the moral forces operative in society and to build on these as a foundation.'

'It is the duty of every school to relate the whole of the curriculum to the life of the community it serves.'

1. These four quotations are taken respectively from the minutes of the Privy Council in 1847; the 1925 Colonial Office Memorandum 'Education Policy in British Tropical Africa'; the 1935 Colonial Office paper 'The Education of African Communities'; the report of the 1951 Mission on Education in East and Central Africa. These words will be familiar to many present on this occasion and the sentiments expressed have been accepted, in principle, as policy in every country represented. Why, then, are we confronted today with what has been described as a 'Crisis in World Education'? Why should the Ministers of Education in Africa at their meeting in Nairobi in 1968 express alarm at the consequences of the tremendous quantitative development in education?

2. The reasons are many and varied but one that is constantly present in my mind as a possible prime cause is the divergence between the expressed arim of the authorities and the wishes of society as a whole. If not all, then certainly the great majority of the societies with which we are concerned had their own systems of education before contact was made with the Western world. These systems were in perfect tune with the aims, values and mores of the society. The education provided was sometimes formal, sometimes informal and conformed exactly with Durkheim's thesis that education (the school) is the means by which one generation transmits to the next the values and standards it hold most dear. The traditional systems of education were exactly at a pace which permitted change to be accepted with little or no social difficult. The traditional way of life continues but is - and has been for many years - subject to pressure for change from without. As well as a population explosion we have witnessed an education explosion. Schools have proliferated everywhere in response to what Professor Harbison describes as 'the almost insatiable demand for ever more education propelled by irreversible social and political forces.'

3. The Western school is, however, essentially urban in character: it is appropriate to a society engaged in an exchange economy requiring the language of symbols for communication at a distance and for the recording of commercial transactions. Its main concern is, in principle, the development of the potentiality of the individual. Now, although societies in the areas with which we are concerned have all, to a greater or lesser degree (some totally), been brought into contact with the technological, industrialised world outside, they are (often to 90%) rural, often subsistence economies and

traditional values and customs are still prized and upheld. To generalise, in them the group, the extended kinship and family group is of chief importance - not the individual. The hierarchy of status still retains much of its validity. As expressed by Nduka in his 'Western Education and the Nigerian Cultural Background' in traditional culture 'custom is custom and there the matter ends' whereas the Western outlook is critical, flexible and rational.

4. This Western outlook is apparent in the aims expressed in the syllabuses being prescribed for primary education in all parts of the developing world and is the main ingredient in the movement for curriculum reform and development. The aim is to encourage children to observe, to question, to draw logical conclusions from observed facts, to reason - all things which may run completely counter to the wishes of and patterns of behaviour desired by parents who send their children to school.

5. We are, then, confronted with what appears to be a very complete divergence between the aims and attitudes of society and those of the educationalists. With one of its principal aims being the development of potentiality in the individual the school is essentially at variance with the norm of society where this is based on the duties and rights of the broad kinship group. In the words of Professor John Lewis 'a dichotomy exists between the schools and the communities they exist to serve and the teacher is involved in bridging the dichotomy'.

6. In this paper we are concerned in examining possible ways of bridging this gap and certain very obvious and difficult obstacles that need to be overcome. I shall be concerned with the Primary School in a rural setting for two principal reasons, firstly, because 80% of tropical countries are rural, agricultural communities and, secondly, because upwards of 80% of pupils in school cease formal education at the end of the primary course. If primary education is the terminal point of formal education for the majority of children, then an examination of its purpose must be undertaken. What is the role of the primary school in socio-economic change? Has, in fact, the primary school any economic effect? A recent study of a district in Tanzania showed that the education children received at school did not assist them to understand and apply methods of improved cotton growing, the cash crop cultivated in the area. No doubt examples of this kind could be repeated from other countries.

7. It is only in comparatively recent times that education has been seen as an important factor in economic development and this is usually at the secondary and teritary level. Where then, does the primary school fit in? Why, in fact, do parents send their children to school? Their objective in tropical areas does not differ in essence from that of parents in industrialised countries. They look to the school for an opportunity for their children to 'better themselves'. This opportunity has, for many years, been that of moving out from a narrow existence of grinding poverty in subsistence agriculture into respectable, regularly paid employment preferably in Government service. It was, until comparatively recent times, gained after completion of the primary school course of some eight years. This is no longer true - and has not been for a many years - but parental aspirations have not changed. It would, perhaps, be more accurate to say that they had not changed until very recently: present indications in at least two countries (Nigeria and Uganda) are that, for the first time, enrolment in primary schools is decreasing. Is the demand for education no longer 'insatiable'? Is the reason for the decline in enrolment a feeling on the part of parents that the school is no longer the avenue to the better life? Is there still a tendency in parents to expect from the primary school something that it can no longer provide and which, at bottom, is contrary to the interest and benefit of both the nation and the local community?

8. The education provided in the colonial era has been bitterly criticised as being inadequate in quantity and as being too academic, too bookish, too divorced from the 'needs of the people'. In actual fact it was extremely vocational for it supplied pupils with the tools required for clerical and administrative work, the career prized above all other by their parents. In this way the school did respond to the needs of the community. Whether the results contributed adequately to the economic and social development of the country is another question. The answer is perhaps given in the anxiety now being felt in many parts of the world. It is appropriate here to quote some words spoken at the Lagos Commonwealth Education Conference in 1968:

> 'The first question to be asked should surely be "Why has rural education failed to deliver the goods?" The answer is that it has <u>not</u> failed. It has delivered the goods it was designed to deliver, namely ever-increasing swarms of young adolescents possessing minimal skills in literacy and numeracy,

with scarely any manual skills except what have been self-taught or picked up at home, by no means ill-equipped for the inevitable unemployment which faces them, but with next to nothing to contribute to the development which their countries so badly need.'

9. If primary education is to have a beneficial socio-economic effect it must have a recognised purpose and one that is understood from top to bottom in society. In essence this means a radical change in attitudes - from initiators of policy through administrators, inspectors, trainers of teachers, teachers themselves to parents. It may be unwise to single out any one of these categories as the key but in the last resort it must surely be the parent. What reasonable limit can be set to the function of the rural primary school which will satisfy both the parents (that is to say, the community) and those in political authority? For it must be recognised that the aims and objectives of the two are not necessarily always identical. Is it possible to prescribe an aim which will be satisfactory both for the local community and the larger national society? I think it is. In this paper it will be impossible to do more than offer some outline suggestions with full recognition of the obstacles that lie in the path of achievement.

10. This paper is entitled The Community School. In what way will the Community School differ from the ordinary primary school in a rural area? To answer this we need to return to the quotations given at the outset which lay down principles which stand the test of time but whose validity has seldom been proved on the ground. First, the school has to be a 'good school' in that it provides a good education for its children. The teacher's first duty is to teach his pupils well, but what is he to teach them? This of course, is a matter which engages the attention of those involved in the curriculum reform and development movement and, no doubt, will be covered in detail on other occasions at this conference. I would say, however, that the prime objective of the teacher is the attainment by his pupils of full literacy and numeracy, by which is intended the ability to communicate easily in speech and writing in the language prescribed by authority, and to understand and interpret the world around him in its spatial and numerical physical aspect. These are the basic skills required in any society which is developing into an exchange economy. If this objective is achieved it will be adequate both for those who cease formal education at this stage and for those who continue

to secondary and higher education. But will this satisfy the parents' aspirations? How will it help to integrate school and community? Many factors are involved besides simply curriculum reform - teachers' skills and attitudes; parents' attitudes; the attitude of those in authority; the trainers of teachers.

11. It may be considered that to place such emphasis on literacy and numeracy means little more than a return to the 3 Rs and to the system of rote learning so prevalent in schools even today. The contrary is true. The one condition is that all learning - particularly in the early stages - be based on the experience of the children and this entails relating the school to the community. We have seen that 'it is the duty of every school to relate the whole of the curriculum to the life of the community it serves'. Taken from a purely sociological standpoint such a dictum may be open to question. If the community is a stagnant society then the education given will itself tend to be static with no forward momentum. But as a sound pedagogical principle it cannot be faulted although some may say that some environments are so lacking in stimulus that they lack useful experiences. This is doubtful. If I may introduce a personal note, the best bit of teaching that I saw in a recent visit to the South Pacific was in a small school on a tiny island where the teacher took his small class out to the reef to study shellfish and octopus, to the village gardens and the village itself. The English writing of these children aged eleven was far superior to almost anything I saw in secondary schools in the area. The reason is not far to seek: they were communicating experiences they had felt within themselves, relevant to their own conditions of life.

12. Therefore, it is suggested that a valid primary school curriculum can be organised around Literacy, Numeracy and Environmental Studies. This is not the place to attempt any detailed blueprint of the curriculum. It is possible, however, to put forward a few suggestions for the closer relationship between school and community. To achieve this it seems necessary not only to use the environment as a source of rewarding educational experiences but also that the community itself should, as far as possible, be involved in and participate in the educational process. A progressive involvement between the life of the school and the community might be:

(a) a recognition by the teacher of the educational utility of the surrounding environment;

(b) the stimulation of the community's interest in the objectives and techniques of the school.

(c) the participation of the community in school activities;

(d) the full collaboration of the community and school in community activities.

13. Already most syllabuses prescribe 'visits to the local market, the Post Office, the village Dispensary etc.' All such visits contain the ingredients of much valuable 'active training' but only too often are undertaken in a perfunctory manner and are regarded by teachers and parents alike as a frivolous waste of time taken from the serious business of learning which can only take place within the walls of the classroom. It must be recognised that very often the teacher's own previous education and objective may well concide closely with those of the parents who see the chief goal of education to be the passing of examinations which lead to further steps up the ladder of education. This is, indeed, not an uncommon attitude to be met with in what are called the 'developed' nations among both teachers and parents. Where primary education is the terminal stage for most, such an attitude is not realistic but, nevertheless, it is likely to remain one that is influential in a teacher conditioned as he must be by his own upbringing. If he is to be successful in operating this 'community orientated' 'problem-solving' curriculum he needs to be completely convinced of its validity and that it will not jeopardise the chances of his pupils for further education. For this to be conclusively shown to be true an examination and reform of the selection procedure is clearly indicated - but that is a matter into which it is not appropriate to go at this moment.

14. Provided the teacher is convinced that what he is doing is valid how can school and community objectives be best reconciled? This, of course, is not purely a function of the teacher but very largely concerns the wider political and administrative organisation. The teacher is but one unit in this organisation - the 'coal-face worker'. He can only operate successfully if he knows (and the general community knows) that he has the support of those in authority at all levels - Minister, Permanent Secretary, Chief Education Officer, Inspector and Headmaster. This postulates that a policy has been agreed in which principles and objectives are stated and propagated among the people at large. The one example visible

today is, of course, President Nyerere's 'Education for Self-Reliance' and schools do operate where the principles apply. The fact remains, however that the teacher is at the coalface and it is he and not the Minister or Provincial or Regional Officer who has to confront and convince the parent of the rightness of new approach.

15. It would be appropriate to attempt a short definition of what is meant by the term the 'Community School'. It is a place where children learn the basic skills needed for interpretation of their environment and for adjustment to change through experiences provided by that environment in the first stage, broadening out to take in the world outside their immediate horizon; a place where the knowledge and skills of the adult community are brought in to aid the teacher in his task; where close association is sought with the extension workers in the fields particularly of health and agriculture; a place whose buildings may be placed at the disposal of these workers for meetings with the adult community; whose buildings and grounds are available for cultural and recreational activities by the community as a whole - adults and adolescents alike. This may well be an idealised picture and one that is unlikely to be realised on a national scale at the stroke of a pen in a national policy statement. There may well be, however, areas or individual schools where circumstances are ripe for a development on these lines. It is in such cases that the understanding of the administration may be needed to permit experiment, the relaxation of some of the regulations - for example the adjustment of the school calendar to fit local conditions. In all this is involved the preparation of the teacher (both pre- and in-service), discussion with inspectors and supervisors and, in many cases, a reorientation of the attitudes of teacher trainers themselves.

16. Success in new approaches to teaching, in changes in the curriculum, depend ultimately on the quality of the teachers. This is true in any circumstances but applies with redoubled force if a new objective is given to the school. Criticism of the inadequacy of the bulk of the teaching that passes for education in schools at present is familiar to all. The rote learning process to pass examinations and gain admittance to further education is clearly not delivering the goods the countries need. As indicated earlier there is a widespread movement for curriculum change with the aim of integrating the subjects in a coherent whole. The students who come forward for training are themselves, to a very great degree, conditioned

by their own education which has largely been concerned with the acquisition of factual information. To gain a new attitude to teaching they require not so much training as re-education, i.e. an entirely new approach to subjects already learnt. This would be relevant to any good school and would apply to the training of all teachers. What, then, is peculiar to what we have termed the Community School? It is surely the importance of linking school and community together in a common understanding and purpose. It means the school extending its attention to and joining with adult education in the broadest sense and linking with the agencies of social and economic development operating in the area. This is something beyond the scope of normal pedagogical training where attention tends to be focussed almost entirely on the education of children within the framework of the curriculum and syllabus within the classroom. The Community School idea, however, places the school in its proper role as one of the agencies involved in social change. The Community School approach is - and must be - a co-operative effort in which all concerned work together towards a common end, each understanding the contribution which the separate agencies can make.

17. It will not be taken amiss if it is said that not all tutors in colleges of education are competent to undertake this wider function without themselves going through a process of preparation through conferences, discussions and actual experience in the field. A counsel of perfection would be for all agents of social and economic development to be trained in common in multi-purpose centres which might well be described as Centres for Rural Development where teachers, agricultural extension workers, health visitors, community development workers were housed on the same campus, attending some courses in common but pursuing their specialities separately. For many reasons this eventuality is unlikely to come about. What is essential, however, is that at least there must be opportunity for these agencies to be involved and for students and staff of the colleges of education not merely to visit other training centres but actively to participate in the work being done there. If there is to be reality in a joint approach to raising the level of rural community life, then there needs to be a closer relationship between those responsible for training workers in the field.

18. Colleges of education are, however, seldom sited near to other centres of training. The students are trained to be competent teachers of children in the classroom. If it is agreed

that the teacher has a wider function then it would appear to be important that the staff of the colleges should contain members with special qualifications in the fields of Rural Sociology, Community Health, Agriculture and Child Care, persons who would be additional to the normal cadre of pedagogical tutors but working in close collaboration with them. Teachers in a Community School need to know, as a basis for their work, the structure of the society wherein they live. It follows, then, that they require adequate theoretical knowledge and practical experience of studying a community and of identifying the role of the school in its development. It may be said that the teacher already knows his society, of which he has been a member from childhood, but firstly, he may very often be a 'stranger' to the community and, secondly, even if he is indeed indigenous to the area, because of his very familiarity with life he may be too close to it to understand the implications involved.

19. The inclusion of these 'specialists' on the staff does imply the production of expert agriculturalists or health officers. It is to ensure that the teacher has knowledge and understanding of the extension work being undertaken and also is competent to use this knowledge in his teaching of the children. In agriculture, for example, he should be familiar with seed selection, the use (and abuse) of fertiliser, the rearing of poultry and other small livestock, fish farming etc. - all activities which will probably be advocated and propagandised by the extension workers and all of which are items which, under proper guidance, can be profitably practised in school both for their utilitarian purpose and for their educational value.

20. All the above is concerned with the preparation of the young teacher entering the profession. We all know the cold douche of disillusion which he may experience on being appointed to his first school where his enthusiasm, particularly for ideas now put forward, will be met with indifference or even hostility. Of at least equal importance with the training of new teachers is the in-service training of inspectors, supervisors, and (perhaps particularly) head teachers.

21. Reference was made earlier to the inadequacy of the teaching force. This is largely true but, within this apparently under-educated mass there is, I suspect - and from my own experience know - there is a larger number of men and women of imagination and initiative who, if encouraged, could exercise a much greater influence than they do at present. One function

of the inspectorate should be to identify and bring these people more closely into a more effective role. This can be done through courses of in-service training, organised to a great extent on a 'workshop' basis. A point worthy of consideration is the disposition of such teachers after re-orientation. To post them back automatically to their previous schools where circumstances may not be conducive to the new approach may be self-defeating. It may often be preferable to make other arrangements and keep the teachers as team units posted to places where success has a good chance of being achieved. This is a suggestion unlikely to commend itself at first sight to administrators. If, however, they too are convinced of the validity of the Community School, they will recognise that success depends on the co-operative effort of the school staff, supported by the administration at all levels.

22. One factor which so often militates against success is the sense of isolation suffered by the village school teachers. More frequent and understanding visits by supervisors and inspectors (who come more to advise than to 'inspect') will help to break this sense of isolation. Week-end seminars and discussion meetings where teachers themselves can bring forward suggestions in the light of experience will help to foster a feeling that they are themselves an integral part of a dynamic, forward-moving idea and not merely the recipients of directives from above. But, as indicated already, this is not only a local or regional matter. Where Community Schools are organised it must be clear to all that they have the support of the central government. News letters from Headquarters and radio "Teachers' Forums" have their part to play in keeping touch with the schools themselves but this is really only part of a wider programme of adult education, to which much lip-service has been paid in the past. If Rural Reconstruction and Development has the priority in policy that governments seem to be according it, then a concerted and coherent plan of adult education, aimed at changing people's attitudes is called for. At this point we are indeed, back in the days of Phelps-Stokes and the 1925 Memorandum. Over forty years have passed but the ideas then put forward seem to have just as much - perhaps more - validity today. 1970 will see the start of the second Development Decade and is to be celebrated as International Education Year: Unesco is elaborating programmes for 'life-long' education; F.A.O. in collaboration with Unesco is to hold a world conference on agricultural education. Is not the time ripe for a fundamental re-assessment of the problem of education in rural areas and the role of the school in development, as part of an attack on a broad front?