

## THE VILLAGE SCHOOL

Note: This Paper was presented by one country in the region at a Pacific Conference a quarter of a century ago. The only changes that have been made are to shorten it a little and change the name of the country to "the Island of Paradise". Participants may like to keep in mind the following questions as they read it:

1. How far does the author's analysis of the problems of school and community in a rural situation fit my country today? Are his assumptions valid as a whole, or in part?
2. Has the kind of village school he describes, involving the whole community, come into being anywhere in the region, either in exceptional situations or as a widespread pattern?
3. What are the problems of implementing a policy to involve the community in education, and how can these problems be overcome?

In the Island of Paradise most villages are not very large. A big village would be one of 1,500 people, and a more usual size from 200 to 300. The number of villages is large, and a great many village schools are needed to provide for all the people of the country. Exactly how many will not be known until the country's census is complete, with all its details of each village, including the number of children of school age.

Another thing to remember in thinking of village schools in the Island of Paradise is that many villages show important differences in their ways of life; there are so many different languages, so many different ways of governing villages, so many different material techniques; and, although practically all villages depend on gardening for most of their food, there are many different methods of food production. This list of differences may seem a long one; even so, it is by no means complete.

We take notice of these differences because we believe that our village schools must be adapted to the present life of the people in the villages. We do not think, for instance, that a village school can be very useful or very successful if it is simply copied from a school in another country, where ways of living may be quite different from those of our own people. We do, of course, want our village schools to help in improving the conditions of life of the people, but we feel that this can best be done by starting work in ways and with things which can be understood by most of the people in a village. We hope that through the work of the village schools, many things which need improvement may be changed. But there need not be change in everything.

We are sure that every village in the Island of Paradise has much knowledge and experience and many activities which are worth keeping, not only because they are valuable in themselves, but also because they can help in the maintenance of pride in the people's own past. We think that such a sense of pride in their own past and in the finer things their own people have

been able to do is necessary for the present happiness of every nation and territory. There is, of course, much that all of us can learn from one another - this conference is a great opportunity for such learning - but people will probably not be able to feel that there is much good in themselves if they have to believe that everything worthwhile comes from outside their own land.

There is another reason for planning the village school to fit village life. It is the need to keep peace and friendliness between young people who have had the chance of going to school and older people who have not had that chance.

Schools in most parts of the Island are rather new institutions. In many cases the parents of the children attending them did not have the opportunity of going to school. This does not, of course, mean that those parents were not educated: they were educated in the daily practice of living and in that way their means of education were very much like those now favoured by many of the best known teachers of countries which have had hundreds of years' experience in the work of schools. The old education of the country was certainly one which fitted most of its people very well for life in those times.

In every country it is probable that there is some social strain as young people grow up with new skills, and parents feel "left behind" when their children begin, with natural pride, to make use of those skills. It is very likely that this cannot be helped, and where both parents and children have been to school, the strain may not be very great. However, in a country in which schools themselves are something new, one feels that if concentration on new skills means throwing away everything belonging to the past, the strain will be much greater. It may lead to a feeling of unfriendliness and to a good deal of disturbance between the generations.

In the Island of Paradise we hope, of course, to do a good deal for the further education of the parents, but it is certain that we can only add to their earlier education and cannot replace it, even if we so wished. They will remain individuals formed by an earlier process of training, with some skills - reading and writing, for instance - added. In doing this, we shall have to relate such new skills to the daily life of adults, and it seems likely that the complete education of a village will be most successful if the outlines of educational work among children and of that among adults are generally similar. If, then, we take out to the adults a sense of the importance of such skills as reading and writing, we should bring into the school an appreciation of the value of such skills as canoe-making and gardening. It is on such an appreciation, both inside the school and in the village outside the school, of the value of both the old and the new skills that not only the material progress of a village, but also its present social harmony depend.

While this belief in the need to fit village schools into village life is one which we share with a great many other territories, it is probable that in no territory is its practical application so difficult as here. This may perhaps be seen if one refers back to the opening of this paper and considers some of the results of the great number of differences which exist between the many villages of the Island. An important point arising from these differences is that village schools need teachers trained with particular care - men and women who are not only skilled in guiding children to various kinds of knowledge, but who are also able to give fair recognition to the importance of every kind of essential village school work. If this end is to be achieved, the training of teachers requires provision for considerable flexibility and for adaptation to a range of widely varying circumstances. It is clear that for

part of their work - the teaching of the 3 R's for example, the details of teachers' training will come fairly close to uniformity. However, it will not be altogether uniform, for even in the teaching of reading and writing one must remember that the language in which such subjects will be taught will be that suited to the local circumstances of the village.

The number of villages in the Island of Paradise speaking the same language is generally not large, so that a large number of languages are used in village school work throughout the country. Even so, it remains impossible for every village school to work in its own language, because some of the language groups are so small that it would not be practicable to produce reading material or to train teachers in them. In many cases, it has been found necessary to choose one language spoken by a large number of people in a particular locality and to extend its use to schools in nearby localities whose languages show some resemblance to the one chosen for such use.

Even in the teaching of arithmetic in village schools, there is need for adaptation to local uses. It is necessary that the teacher in the course of training, should not only acquire skill in the imparting of techniques, but also a sense of the need for understanding the use to which those techniques may be put by his village people; for example, what in the past were the nature and uses of the people's own systems of number and measurement, in what ways they might have benefited by other systems, and what need they may have of new knowledge in the immediate future.

When we go beyond the 3 R's and come to a consideration of the part to be played by village experience in social studies, training in arts and crafts, in agricultural matters, in health improvement, and in other matters, we realize even more the difficulty of providing for satisfactory teacher-training. Even if we agree that a solution may be found in the participation of local villagers in school work, we cannot forget the need for sympathetic interest and intelligent understanding on the part of the trained teacher. He will need not only sympathy, but considerable training in bringing local experts with little of the self-consciousness in their skill and practice into the inevitably more self-conscious atmosphere of the school. From this point of view it would certainly be as well if teachers were trained for work in the schools of their own villages or in villages living a similar kind of life. It is clear that to start new schools in new villages teachers will have to be brought from outside. Even apart from the difficulty of language, such teachers need very thorough and careful training if they are in any real sense to relate their school work to the life of the villages in which they are established. On them will, in many cases, fall the burden of discovering the nature of that life.

While village schools in the Island of Paradise have the purpose of preparing children for life in their own villages and training them to improve that life without separating them from the valuable knowledge and skills of the older village people, they have the further purpose of preparing some of the pupils for progress to schools of a higher standard. Sometimes education in the latter schools will lead to training for life outside the village community - training, for example, for careers in medicine, in agriculture, and for teaching in higher educational institutions, as well as in village schools. Wherever an individual's education may lead him, he should, nevertheless, retain a keen appreciation of the great importance of the life of the village in the development of the village in the development of the Territory. In the higher stages of education, it may not be easy to give particular attention to individual village matters. This makes it important that the individual proceeding to those higher stages of education should be acutely aware that

life is based on the organization of village communities and should have that idea firmly established in his or her mind at the village school stage.

A type of school higher than the village school but approximately equivalent in scholastic standards to the village school, is the area school. This serves a group of culturally related villages. Though all standards of school will be conducted by mission organizations, it is at the commencement of the area school stage that the Department of Education generally starts the organization of educational projects conducted directly by the government. In its area school programme the Department provides for a close relation of educational work with the life of surrounding villages. From this point of view area schools may be looked on as extensions of village schools. Educational work among adults will be provided for as part of the programme of such schools. The Department of Education pays particular attention to the latter point in its provision for Area Education Centres for the all-round education of whole communities. Though area schools provide the starting points for such centres, emphasis is on the fact that education in the Territory cannot be a matter of guiding school children only, or of providing an exclusively literary or scholastic programme of activities.

The first such centre on an experimental basis has recently been commenced with the opening of an area school in a rather remote locality where education, in the sense of schooling, is a very new thing indeed. This school has been designed to serve a limited number of villages belonging to a single cultural and linguistic group. Limitation has meant that not all the villages of that group have been included in the area for the present school. The reason for this is that some of those villages are too far from the school for children to return to their homes every day.

It is not desired that this type of school should be a boarding school because wherever possible, we want the children attending area schools to remain in daily contact with their homes and the normal life of their villages. At the same time it is desired that adult villagers should be in a position to have as much contact with the school as possible. By these means, among others, it is hoped to stimulate adult educational interests while encouraging the children's growing interest in village activities, government and economics, or the pleasant relaxations of feasts and dances.

Besides the Department of Education, other Departments are helping with the work of the experimental centre. The Department of Public Health is advising about the health education suitable to the area, and the Department of Agriculture is guiding the making of school gardens. In agricultural work the children in the school will be encouraged not only to grow new kinds of food which may help to make them more healthy, but also to grow the foods which have for long years been grown in their own people's village gardens. Some of the older men of the villages have already said how pleased they are about the latter activity. They had been afraid that the young boys would spend so much time in a schoolroom that they would grow into men who knew and cared nothing about gardens.

From the experiment which is being watched and reported on very closely, we hope to learn much about the details of activities suitable not only in area schools but also in village schools in different parts of the country. From it, too, we hope to learn a good deal about the relation between the further education of adults and the schooling of children.

To what extent and with what increasingly good results the two types of village school and the area school can be profitably related to village life

remains then a matter for experiment. We do see very clearly, however, that those schools in our country in which village life has been ignored have achieved very little in the way of the development of the community; they have, in fact, often produced individuals quite incapable of fitting into their communities at all. On the other hand, those in which some attention has been paid to the experience of the people and the real needs of a village have had more useful and more stable results. We know, too, that many other territories, some of them with far longer experience in the introduction of the new educational processes involved in schooling have been led to a similar view.