

# A Plea for a More Child-Centered Community School Program

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GENERALLY, what does the community-school movement mean to us teachers? Practically, this means more work — an increased zeal in our crusade to make our community a better place to live in. To accomplish something in this phase of our school work, we have to approach all sorts of people — gamblers, idlers, farmers, fishermen, merchants and professionals. We subdivide them into the following general categories: cynics, snobs, patrons, and sympathizers.

But we teachers know we have a mission to accomplish. Hence, we try our best to deal with all types of people. We are not afraid to meet problems. Come hell or high water, we shall go on.

As the ultimate aim of our community-school movement is to make our community a better place to live in, our educational leaders have been handing to us formulas which, in one way or another, influence our school administrators to hold the following: *purok* festivals, conferences on community-school development, workshops on local home industries, symposiums on human relation, etc. Improvements in the community; namely, the establishment of *purok* centers, libraries, and the like, are thought to express the people's desire to live better.

But much to our regret, what has happened? Those community improvements are now becoming superficial show windows of the real conditions obtaining in our respective communities. Why? Community-school coordinators, teachers, and principals usually inform the members of their respective *purok* that on a

certain date, experts on community-school education from the central office are coming to tour the different *purok* in the community. Who would not prepare for such occasion?

This writer is not, in principle, against the community-school program now made popular by our leading school administrators. In this connection, we want only to pose this question: In the implementation of that program, which should be given more emphasis: the moral growth of the townspeople or the physical improvement of the community?

One may say our question is anomalous. The moral and intellectual growth of our townspeople goes together with the development of the physical conditions in the community. Generally, this statement is true. However, for the sake of argument, we are going to discuss the matter in this paper.

The present tendency in the implementation of our community-school program is to put more emphasis on the physical aspects of its objectives. The majority of school administrators, by force of habit, want to show their respective school progress on community-school development in terms of mathematical data. For them, a high increase on itemized community improvements, such as, number of newly-constructed toilets, reading centers, etc., is something the higher authorities can more appraise and appreciate. They put on record the details of *purok* festivals and other community-school activities. They flatter about the cooperative spirit shown by the people in their community.

In this case, our community-school movement seems to become a materialistic display of community school progress. This writer had observed in several occasions the dog eat dog competition between the different *purok* in the community during *purok* festival and *purok* visitation. One week before the visitation, the *purok* is like a flirt smartly dressing up for a big occasion. Fences are repaired and constructed; streets are paved; newly-made waste boxes and waste cans are placed in conspicuous places; the *purok* center, thoroughly extricated of its filth and filled with reading materials, fire-fighting equipments, etc., becomes a realistic symbol of a work well done.

On the other hand, exhibitionism is the fad in most communities where *purok* festival or community fair is held. Every *purok's* booth has its own distinct individuality: One is beautifully constructed; the second, artistically decorated; the third, full of expensive antiques; the fourth, appealingly native with its display of products of different local industries; and so forth. Although against Bureau regulation, beauty contests are being held too. On one occasion, the community

school that held the beauty contest was able to purchase a sound system, an electric bell, and other utensils for the school's cafeteria. Each teacher campaigned for her *purok's* candidate. You may think the teachers enjoyed such activity. They hated it. As one remarked: "This community-school activity is getting all my time. Aside from my duties as a classroom teacher, I still act as a *purok* adviser, beauty-contest campaigner, sponsor, messenger... To hell with that added burden!"

The common procedures in implementing our community-school activity are basically unfavorable to teachers. The scope of their duties has expanded far and wide, brought about by a seemingly administrative obsession among school officials to see the material progress in their community-school program. Professionally untrained and unfamiliar with the multifarious phases of community education, a teacher finds her community-school work a great burden.

And what has our community-school program accomplished so far? Look at our reading centers; look around and see whether or not our townspeople have changed their apathetic attitude to community development. Have we at least minimized the number of cabarets, gambling dens, and other places of vice and moral corruption in the community?

We must not take for granted the fact that one of the fundamental objectives of our community-school activity is to find ways and means to further develop the moral character and personal discipline of our pupils. In order to delimit the very broad scope of our community-school program, community-school activities which will not ultimately redound to the well-being of our pupils should be eliminated. In short, every community-school affair must be inherently pupil-centered.

It is the belief of this writer that in the implementation of our community-school program, the psychological approach must be effectively utilized. Before we can make our townspeople become a real asset to our community-school program, we have to correct first their wrong attitude; let them realize what is right and wrong, what is decent and indecent; and develop in them a keen sense of responsibility and moral rectitude.

We know our community environment is just the opposite of our school environment. In the classroom, we use countless varieties of teaching methods, techniques, and devices to instill in the mind of every pupil desirable habits, attitudes, and skills needed for a more useful and happy life now and for keeps. Our school grounds and buildings, spick and span as ever, reflect sterling qualities of character which

teachers also want to realize, by all means, in the community.

But our community environment has more audio-visual attractions. A large number of our pupils learn at an early age to smoke and drink because they see grown-ups do so. A pupil may see his father drunk; the other may see his mother playing **panggingge**. Fiestas provide our young students to learn more new forms of gambling, give them chance to see the bare facts about the most immoral acts in burlesque shows, and let them acquire the habit of cutting classes.

Added to these hundreds of unmentionable temptations is the apparent neglect of most parents to help the teacher develop personal discipline in their children. They leave everything to the teacher. To them, the education of their sons and daughters is the teacher's job. Teachers are being employed for that sole purpose, they say.

Along this line, we can see now the big gap between the school and the community. Both teachers and townspeople must come to realize that one cannot work successfully without the wholehearted cooperation of the other. The problem is how to make this kind of school-community relationship a reality.

In our community-school program, we must first give due emphasis on the moral and intellectual reformation of our townspeople. If the mental set of the great majority of our townsmen is inimical to the fundamental principles of good citizenship, can we expect to make our community a better place to live in?

In school, we teach moral character, personal discipline, civic conscience, vocational efficiency, and the duties of citizenship. Who can be an example in the community? Yes, every now and then, this writer has been embarrassed by his students pointing an accusing finger to many of our so-called responsible members of the community. Imagine the influence to our young people of a municipal mayor who sleeps on a bench inside a gambling place. What would be our students' impression of a businessman indulging in illegal business, or a common harmless lecher?

The irony of this is: Many male teachers are influenced by the community environment. Why? Because of the so-called "public relation," needed to bolster our community-school program, an increasing number of teachers and supervisors have given up their stand against alcoholism, immorality, and other

vices. For instance, during boy scouts' rally, some town officials would invite at night boy scoutmasters to a drinking spree. Who would not accept this invitation especially if those people are accompanied by school officials and other teachers?

Teachers are builders of character. At all times we exhort our pupils to be good, honest and sincere. We implant in themselves that success is service. And we let them realize that real happiness consists in giving happiness to others. We teach them to emulate the lives of good men. In a word, character is not an incidental phase of teaching but it is its core. Without character, our educational philosophy would have no meaning at all.

Therefore, in order to make our community-school program more child-centered, and more beneficial to the community in general and to the townspeople and teachers in particular, the urgent need of our time is to orient and prepare our **purok** organization to launch a moral crusade in the community. Let our **purok** organization be militant enough to arouse the interest and acquire the cooperative assistance of other civic organizations, like, the **Women's Club, Catholic Action, Christian Youth Fellowship**, local Y.M.C.A. chapter, and others. Our initial motto may run like this: "What shall it profit a community if it gain the whole world and lose its own boys?"

The objective here is to revitalize our community-school program by instilling first in the minds of our town officials, professionals, and laymen, a genuine desire to wage a war against vice, immorality, graft and corruption. If more and more number of our townsmen would stand up for such a noble cause, the objectives of our community school program would also be more and more carried out effectively. In the long run too, more and more people in our community would realize the true significance in their lives of this law of moral growth: "Whatsoever things are true; whatsoever things are honorable; whatsoever things are just; whatsoever things are pure; whatsoever things are lovely; whatsoever things are of good report; think on these things."

Before any man could do something of great value to his fellowmen, he must get first wisdom of the heart. We cannot reconcile cooperation for anything that is basically wrong and evil. If we know that intoxicants are corrupting and degrading, that immorality is lewdness, that graft and corruption are evil, well, we must, by all means, "put it away, out of our life and out of the life of our community!"