

WORK AND EDUCATION

(In the Context of Community Participation and Development)

Policymakers, educators, and others involved in education are seeking ways to utilize limited resources efficiently and effectively in order to identify and solve problems in the education sector and to provide quality education for children. Their efforts have contributed to realizing the significance and benefits of community participation in education, and have recognized community participation as one of the strategies to improve educational access and quality.

This is not to say that community participation is something new in the education delivery, however. It did not suddenly appear as panacea to solve complex problems related to education. In fact, not all communities have played a passive role in children's education. For instance, Williams stresses that until the middle of the last century, responsibility for educating children rested with the community. Although there still are places where communities organize themselves to operate schools for their children today, community participation in education hasn't been fully recognized nor extended systematically to a wider practice.

Community

Communities can be defined by characteristics that the members share, such as culture, language, tradition, law, geography, class, and race. Some communities are homogeneous while others are heterogeneous; and some united while others conflictive. Some communities are governed and managed by leaders chosen democratically who act relatively autonomously from other levels of government, and some are governed by leaders imposed from above and represent central authorities.

Participation

The term "participation" can be interpreted in various ways, depending on the context. Shaeffer clarifies different degrees or levels of participation, and provides seven possible definitions of the term, including :

1. involvement through the mere use of a service (such as enrolling children in school or using a primary health care facility);
2. involvement through the contribution (or extraction) of money, materials, and labor;
3. involvement through 'attendance' (*e.g.* at parents' meetings at school), implying passive acceptance of decisions made by others;
4. involvement through consultation on a particular issue;
5. participation in the delivery of a service, often as a partner with other actors;
6. participation as implementors of delegated powers; and
7. participation "in real decision making at every stage," including identification of problems, the study of feasibility, planning, implementation, and evaluation.

Shaeffer stresses that the first four definitions use the word 'involvement' and connote largely passive collaboration, whereas the last three items use the word 'participation' instead, implying a much more active role.

Community Participation in Education

Education takes place not only in schools but also within families, communities, and society. Despite the various degrees of responsibilities taken by each group, none can be the sole agent to take 100 % responsibility for educating children. Parents and families cannot be the only group of people for children's education as long as their children interact with and learn from the world outside their families. Communities and society must support parents and families in the upbringing, socializing, and educating of their children. Schools are institutions that can prepare children to contribute to the betterment of the society in which they operate, by equipping them with skills important in society. Schools cannot and should not operate as separate entities within society.

Since each group plays a different role in contributing to children's education, there must be efforts to make a bridge between them in order to maximize the contributions. Education takes place most efficiently and effectively when these different groups of people collaborate. Accordingly, it is important to establish and continuously attempt to develop partnerships between schools, parents, and communities.