

THE PUBLIC SCHOOL AS THE NEIGHBORHOOD CENTER

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No one will gainsay that the richest possession of a democratic nation is its public school system. Whatever be the demarkations of society, in the public school all children meet on a plane of absolute equality. Here rich and poor, high and low, black and white may mingle in such a manner as to eliminate all class distinction, all lines of poverty or prosperity.

In theory, at least, this is true. In practice it was the state of affairs until recently. Today, however, the condition of equality among public school children is vastly altered, due to the fact that the wealthier class of parents have very largely withdrawn their children in favor of privately conducted educational institutions. In fact, the public school of today is about the only public institution of which the poorer classes of society have a monopoly; for by refusing to enter their children in the public schools wealthy parents have turned over to the less fortunate ranks of the populace this "richest possession" of ours.

Aside from the danger attendant upon the fact that a distinction which formerly did not exist has thus voluntarily been made between the upper and lower strata of society, there is a great and important question involved affecting present-day school management, namely, how best to accommodate the schools to those who need them most, and use them most.

This issue is not so new, but that it has been well answered already in some communities. In the early days it was thought quite sufficient to teach children between six and sixteen the rudiments of reading, writing and arithmetic, a given number of days in the week and months in the year. Gradually, as educational ideas broadened, manual training was added for the boys and sewing and cooking were simply taught to the girls, while a kindergarten was added for the little ones under the regular school age.

In the meantime came the great influx of foreign people, a circumstance which was met educationally by opening night schools. This departure was of real significance, for it was the first attempt to open the schools at other hours than for the regular day

sessions. We may imagine that it cost the men who made the original move some considerable effort thus to break away from established precedent. For so many years the schools were the closed possession of the regular pupils that to open them after the supper hour for the instruction of older people was a bold step forward.

Yet this work was educational and entirely under the jurisdiction of the Board of Education. What was probably of even greater import, therefore, was the first step toward a "social center." Here was a move not concerned with the three R's, far from the original purpose of the founders of our school system—a move to provide social recreation for the boys and girls who had passed out of the day school into the factory; a move to bring back into the school building and the school life grown-ups who had supposedly long since passed beyond the influence of the school building.

This was indeed a new recognition of the demands of those classes of society which depend upon the day school for the education of their youth, and upon any form of commercialized entertainment which the public had heretofore offered for the amusement of their adolescent children. Its significance and value are scarcely to be summed up in a few words. For it is the first open recognition of the great principle being slowly evolved by modern society that a civilization which commercializes all the working lives of our youth and gives these lives to society for the material benefit of the latter, must in turn provide legitimate and public entertainment for the hours of leisure and relaxation which come after the work time is past for the day.

The social center movement is in a measure a public acknowledgment of the fact that the home is no longer the center of attraction for our youth. One wonders why! Partly because there has ceased to be a sympathetic understanding between parents and children; partly because the young folks who fill our factories by day and our cheap amusement places by night have all too soon become wage-earners, and therefore independent of parental authority; partly because in many families there are

no real "homes" in which the evenings can be spent; partly because the call of the street and its unrest is upon us all, high and low; but principally because commercial enterprise has made amusement so cheap, so alluring and so profuse.

Except for the "movies," this commercial recreation serves to accentuate the line of separation between parents and children. The dance hall, the bowling alley, the pool-room, the amusement park, all attract the young folks; supervision in these places is conspicuous only by its absence. Regulation is negative in character. Constructive play is unthought of. Initiative in sports is entirely cut off. The "movies," to be sure, entice the whole family away together, but at the expense of nerves and good habits.

It is too late, however, to argue that the proper cure for the unfortunate situation is to encourage the home-staying habit. Before one can start upon any such rash crusade it will be necessary to see that every home is made livable, that every family unit is taught to re-create its own amusements, that a better understanding is established between parents and offspring than now prevails among the poorer classes.

And before this can be done it will be necessary to begin with the top ranks of society and ask that better, far more modest and simple examples be set. It will be necessary to forbid the show window which creates the desire for fine clothes—which in turn create a demand for occasions upon which they may be displayed. It will be necessary to stop the quick transportation from all parts of the city to the center, to shut off the street lights and disconnect the telephone!

Surely no one asks or desires that this shall be done. Hence we meet the amusement and recreation problem in far more earnest manner when we start out to find the right kind of place to which the entire family can go together for an evening of clean, wholesome and intelligent play.

This is where the social center in the public school enters. It is the one "people's clubhouse" which stands ready to solve our problem. Without additional expense, save for modest equipment which all newer school buildings possess, entertainment either purely recreational or entirely edu-

cational, or both, can here be established for every member of a family in the manner in which that member desires it. Do the older folks wish a lecture on a sober theme; do the men wish to discuss politics or literature or what not; do the women wish to sew or cook; do the boys wish to play basket-ball; do they wish to debate or sing or drill for boy scouts or study or read; do the girls wish to practice folk-dancing; do the children care to read or play games; do the boys and girls together wish to study dramatics; do the young men care to play billiards; does the entire group prefer an occasional moving picture exhibit of the right sort; is there need to take care of the babies while the mothers are busy elsewhere—all this and more too can be done at one time in the schoolhouse. And here, if anywhere, neighborhood groups can offer competition to the objectionable dance hall by conducting dances in the school hall.

If boards of education will but provide an official organizer for each school the neighborhood can be helped to help itself—as has been successfully done in Chicago, Brooklyn and New York. And this would redeem the amusement situation sufficiently to put it once again on a constructive basis. The passive habit of having our amusements thrust at us is robbing our young folks of the only opportunity left to most of them to show any initiative whatever. Work life is so much a matter of formula and repetition of tasks that if originality and spontaneity are taken from the leisure hour there is no play for the imagination left.

Hence the great need for this clubhouse of the people, where, with intelligent guidance, young and old may again create their own recreation. What the settlement has been able to do for the few the school must do for the many. No better use could be made of its classic enclosures. Room for the boy and girl who because of poverty have been forced to leave the day school at the early age of fourteen! Room for the young man and young woman who in the period of adolescence seek a proper outlet for their nervous energies! Room for the tired father and mother who, after a long day's labor, search for modest recreation and diversion! Room for the older men and women who ask for a place in which

to spend a quiet hour cheerfully, comfortably and peacefully! Room for the enthusiastic, energetic people of all ages who demand only lively entertainment of any kind, safe from the seducing power of drink

WHAT LOUISVILLE DID FOR THE UNEMPLOYED

Harris Ginsburg
Cincinnati

Louisville was somewhat reluctant in admitting the existence of an unemployment problem. For a time the idea was entertained by some men of affairs that the unemployment was of a momentary nature, or at its worst—characteristic of the “won’t work,” casual and transient classes; but the ever-increasing demand on philanthropic agencies, the cases of distress frequently brought to the attention of church organization and other social agencies, forced the community to take some action.

A Mayor’s Committee on Unemployment, consisting of twenty-five citizens representing the different social strata, was brought into existence, whose duty it was to ascertain the extent of the situation and to provide ways and means for its handling. Louisville could not follow the more modern course pursued by other communities in meeting the same emergency through issuance of bonds, as the State law provides a popular approval at the regular election; the committee was therefore compelled to use the less modern and less dignified way in providing funds by a subscription. This stumbling block afforded by the State law would have thrown off the immediate practical work of the committee for some time were it not for the magnanimity of a well-known, public-spirited citizen, who guaranteed a \$20,000 fund. This guarantee was well taken both by the Mayor’s Committee and the city administration, which was to advance the money on the pay roll, and cleared the way for immediate practical work.

The ridiculous helplessness of American communities to utilize the labor power, when such is forced on them, on some useful field where the results would be lasting and of tremendous value to the community, is characteristic. All that goes to make up the physical part of a city—

and disorder! And room, too, for the more sober portion of our neighborhoods who would gather in friendly council and debate and make effort to impress their fellow-citizens with the worth of good citizenship!

the building of roads, the paving of streets, the construction of canals, the laying out of parks, etc.—are let to contract by private firms, leaving to the city a limited insignificant sphere which dwarfs her activities in exploiting her surplus labor power, even when that power is gratuitously offered to her.

Louisville was no exception in this respect. There was no other way of employing the unemployed, except in sweeping the streets, under the supervision of the Street Cleaning Department, which furnishes the supervision and teams, the latter at a cost of \$8552 from the city funds.

A sub-committee of seven was intrusted with the supervision over the registration bureau, which later assumed the name of the Public Free Employment Bureau. The Bureau was given quarters in the City Hall, and registration centers were opened in almost every police station, a situation which made it possible for an applicant to register as many as five times, and caused duplication of assignments before a working system was introduced.

During the month of February the community responded to the call for help very generously. Contributions were forthcoming from individuals and firms very lively. In the earlier part of March the subscriptions slackened up, coming almost to a standstill toward the latter part of the month, when the fund reached the \$19,000 mark. From the reports of the different teams it seemed as if the civic body had exhausted its financial vitality, awaiting the injection of some stimulant. This stimulant came in the form of a motion from a member of the Mayor’s Committee to copy Chicago, which succeeded in realizing \$10,000 one afternoon from newspapers sold by prominent citizens, who in their remote “knickerbockers” made their first dollars in

newspaper business. The idea was enthusiastically supported by the rest of the members; a publicity campaign was immediately launched; a date was set, and the drafting of “newsies” squads was begun. The pulpit, the bar, the “captains of industry,” the M. D. and Ph. D. were well represented in those squads. On this occasion, which served as a “revival” for Louisville in general and for the participants in particular, a sum of about \$4000 was realized, bringing the total of the Unemployment Fund to \$22,914.31. The prices received for a single paper were from a nickel to a \$100 check, the slogan being “no change.”

Of the amount raised, \$566.80, or about 2.5 per cent, was paid in salaries to the office help for administering this fund; \$460.30 was donated to Salvation Army for “Bundle Day” movement; \$19,585.26 was paid in wages to the unemployed for cleaning the streets, and the remainder, a little over \$2000, was appropriated for the further maintenance of the Employment Bureau.

As to the number of unemployed in Louisville, approximate figures were offered from 1000 to 8000. The actual number registered with the Bureau for work, from February 1st, the day of its opening, to April 10th, the day of its closing as a relief station, was 2767 males and 427 females. A classification of the whole number by trades would be very interesting. Unfortunately, during the first two weeks, before a proper record system was introduced, many applicants answering the crude question “what can you do?” registered their trade as “anything”—a statement impossible to permit of classification. From the number properly recorded, it is to be seen that laborers predominated, comprising 54 per cent, farm hands 7 per cent, drivers 6 per cent, handymen 4 per cent, carpenters 4 per cent, paperhangers and plasterers 2 per cent, clerks 2 per cent, firemen 2 per cent, engineers 2 per cent, porters 2 per cent, machinists 1.5 per cent, molders 1.5 per cent, cooks 1.5 per cent, cement workers 1.5 per cent, bricklayers and masons 1 per cent, blacksmiths 1 per cent, and 8 per cent for all other trades.

In administering the fund to the needy, the Bureau was guided by police investigations and the endorsement of social agencies or trustworthy individuals. The police in-

vestigations revealed 141 cases in 1870, or about 7.5 per cent, unworthy of assistance. Drunkenness and non-support figured prominently as reasons for declaring a case unworthy.

Seventeen hundred and twenty-nine men were benefited by the Unemployment Fund. A classification of these beneficiaries with respect to their family units and the average amount earned by them shows that:

Number Men	Number Dependents	Average Earned
170	0	\$ 8.81
405	1	11.31
363	2	12.46
226	3	14.46
142	4	13.16
94	5	14.68
53	6	14.46
31	7	19.28
21	8	18.10
5	9	13.55
3	10	11.86
216	“no card”	4.17
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1729		

The largest portion of the fund was shared by the groups with dependents from one to six, the average size of the American family. The reason that few families with nine and ten dependents earned a smaller average than those with less dependents is due to the fact that in a large family there are usually several wage-earners, thus relieving distress to some extent and exempting the family from the “in urgent need” class.

The 170 cases with no dependents, who were benefited by the fund, were made up of those exceptional cases mentioned before, and those who benefited by mistakes made in handling the problem in the early period of the Bureau’s existence.

The “no card” group also belongs to the earlier period of the Bureau’s existence, and indicates beneficiaries who did not register with the Bureau at all. These were recruited by the Street Cleaning Department early in the day to fill the gaps caused by those who failed to report or reported late for work.