

ABRAHAM MOSS COMMUNITY RESOURCE CENTER

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ABRAHAM MOSS COMMUNITY RESOURCE CENTER

Introduction

As developing countries work toward joining forces with technologically advanced countries, the need for educational reform becomes increasingly apparent. Potentially valuable human resources lie largely untapped in underdeveloped countries as traditional education systems prove unable to touch the majority of people. Traditional education largely excludes the poor, the isolated, the rural, and the illiterate. Ignoring such a significant number of people not only negates human potential, but places the burden of growth and modernization on a select few. As the danger of continuing such a situation is recognized, increasing attention is given to designing new education strategies.

Underlying these different strategies lies the common theme: Education must have something for everyone. Countries cannot rely on a standardized education system patterned only for a nation's youth. Such a shift in philosophy calls for major changes in the structuring of learning/teaching designs, from physical plant facilities to curriculum content and learning methodologies. Developing countries recognize this need to change, but have not the time to achieve new inroads based solely on the natural process of trial and error. Careful study of current designs and guidance on how to successfully adapt these ideas to the needs of other societies helps speed the process of building equal nations.

This paper directs attention to a particular model of Community and Continuing Education. Exploration into the purpose of Community Resource Centers precedes a description, discussion, and brief analysis of one center in current operation. Conclusions are drawn for possible implications of adapting Community Resource Centers to the needs of a developing country... Egypt.

Community Resource Centers: Definition and Purpose

The Community Resource Center is one strong example of changing from the traditional attitude of education solely for the young, to include a continuous expansion of knowledge throughout life for the entire community membership. Education in partnership with the community is one of the strongest change concepts evolving from traditional education today. Paul Hanna (1953) gives a brief idea of the limitations imposed by traditional education programs:

Traditionally, schools have been given the responsibility for developing men and women with sound and liberal education under the assumption that, if this were done, desirable and necessary social changes would inevitably occur through the efforts of these individuals in their adult years. With some notable exceptions, schools have existed in a sphere more or less removed from contact with the real problems of community life. Too frequently, education has concentrated its attention on the teaching of the skills of literacy and citizenship in an academic atmosphere with little emphasis on the development of programs aimed directly at the solution of social problems and the meeting of social needs (p.49-50).

Lifting the limited scope Education imposed upon itself, a much broader purpose for education can be realized. Melby Kerensky (1971) describes this broader role:

The most distinguishing mark of the new educational program is its close involvement with the life of the entire community. The richness of its program will reach all the people at convenient times and places with offerings adapted to their interests and needs. The education centered community provides education for all. It not only helps people but it also helps people to help themselves. In the school of such a community and its varied community life, much of the teaching and leadership comes from the people themselves. In the process of helping others they educate themselves (p.102).

As new philosophies redefine the purpose of education for society and the individual, changes in the scope and design of schools become the next developmental step. The integrated role of education and community is successfully carried out through the Community Resource Center. Programs, materials, and facilities are designed with everyone in mind. Education which includes the entire community as its students and teachers, will limit age, social, cultural, or economic barriers.

A complete resource center offers both formal and informal education programs within one facility. Materials for self-teaching, and specialized teachers are included as part of the resource package. Comprehensive libraries include a broad range of learning media from the well known textbooks to the more recently developed audio and visual tapes, useful to both the reader and non-reader. Teachers and technicians are readily available to assist anyone desiring help.

Resource centers are designed to serve many purposes. Mr. R. Mitson, principle of Abraham Moss, breaks down these purposes into several categories. His main points are abridged below:

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1. The school as a center of knowledge. The resources of many schools are often limited to buildings and teachers with limited materials. A well organized and equipped center allows the school to become a genuine center of Knowledge.
2. The school as center of enquiry. A resource center provides the means for encouraging critical thought and self-teaching. This can make the school environment both enriching and educative for teachers as well as pupils.
3. Teaching and learning. Schools need to offer a variety of teaching and learning methods and opportunities. Resource centers give teacher and learner a choice. Teachers do not have to rely on chalkboard and talk because the center provides books, materials, tapes and other resources.
4. The teacher. The teacher can become less of a lecturer and more of a planner, guide and editor. Resource centers offer new roles for the teacher and provide him with the tools to do the job.
5. The learner. Learners are given the opportunity to experiment with a variety of techniques to find how they learn best. Critical thinking is encouraged.
6. Resource centers and the community. The Resource Center tries to open out toward people in a locality. Adults and children can take part in joint projects with adults given the opportunity to assist children who seek help in their

learning (pp VIII-XI).

Given such an all-encompassing answer to the many shortcomings of today's education, the natural question arises as to the ability of a resource center to fulfill such a collection of needs. The natural response to such a question is to take a thorough look at a comprehensive resource center in current operation.

Abraham Moss Community Resource Center

One of the most comprehensive learning resource centers recognized today is located in Manchester, England. Here the Abraham Moss Center opened its doors to the public five years ago. Abraham Moss was designed to offer a full range of services for the surrounding community with no exceptions to age or educational background. It includes: A lower school, a middle school, a college of further education, an adult education center, a shared district leisure center and a district library, a nursery adjoining the children's library, a performing arts center which includes a theater, drama studio and a music suite, a youth club center, a senior citizens' club, and a short residential wing for youth far away from home living experiences.

Ten years went into planning and design of Abraham Moss. The Center opened in 1973, though some services were yet incomplete. The physical plant encompasses several acres. The open college has 750 full time students and 3,500 part-time. The two year lower school has 600 students and the three year middle school has 400 students. The Center employs 400 teachers. It is estimated that 15,000 people

use the Center in some form every week.

As is evident, people from all ages and types can seek out the services of the Center for a variety of reasons. The objectives of the Center cover five broad based areas: 1. vocational, 2. avocational, 3. recreational, 4. habilitative and 5. rehabilitative. The objectives of Abraham Moss are designed to integrate training resources into these broad areas based on community and larger society perceived needs.

The following objectives, abstracted from documents describing the Center, formalize these criterion:

1. Bringing together diverse community groups to develop an understanding of each other and education.
2. Smooth the transition between formal education and membership of the adult community.
3. Increase the possibility of enabling each individual to learn whatever he needs through the medium offering him optimum efficiency in learning.
4. Establishment of an effective storage and retrieval information system.
5. To provide an open-plan integrative environment, where learning and curriculum is leavened by the community philosophy, collaborative planning, and in service training.
6. A cost-effective rationalization of use, in that education facilities are not left unused during evenings, weekends and holidays, nor public facilities underused during the working day; plus being economic in terms of capital costs.

The feeling at the Center is that centralization and sharing of resources by youth and adults in the community brings the people together to dissolve past notions of group separateness. The Center's

principal, Mr. R. Mitson, feels there is an attempt to: "Blur the finite view of education until it is seen as an integral part of the fabric of life....Whatever is available to the community becomes available to the students, and whatever would normally have been available to the school and college, and probably unused during evenings, weekends and holidays, is made available to the community also" (p.6).

Community schools and resource centers of different size and complexity exist in other areas. What makes Abraham Moss unique is the scope of programming it affords, and its organizational coordination. Rather than being financed and operated through one basic agency such as Education, Abraham Moss combines the powers of three autonomous groups: I. Education, II. Local Legislative Government, III. Social Services. Following a general overview of the programs and responsibilities of each agency will be a discussion of the success and problems concerning the Center in terms of meeting community-oriented objectives.

The Department of Education joined together at the National and local level to design an extensive array of programs to be offered at Abraham Moss. Education as one of the three coordinating agencies, operates both a formal and non-formal education program. Formal secondary school includes a lower school for ages 11-13 and a middle school for ages 13-15. Lower and middle schools have been designed as almost self-contained schools, sharing the sports

facilities and the library resources with the total center. A fully accredited curriculum is offered which leads to secondary school graduation. Entrance exams are given for entry into a two year college program also available through the Center.

In Addition to the lower and middle schools, Abraham Moss encompasses an open college. The open college combines the six form academic program with the non-formal college program. Four basic programs are offered: 1. Art,craft and technical studies, 2. General and business studies, 3. Hair dressing and beauty therapy, 4. Languages. In addition, adult and community education offers part-time classes and recreational and leisure activities. Government sponsored commercial retraining programs are also offered for adults over 19 years.

The performing arts bloc contains music practice rooms which the public are allowed to use for a fee. The 275 seat theater is used jointly by school and community groups. The theater, while free to the schools, charges a fee for use by community groups.

The Leisure Center at Abraham Moss is administered through the local legislative authority, autonomous from Education. The Community recreation program is scheduled to coordinate with school class schedules and the youth club. Available facilities for joint use consist of: 1) a 25 meter pool, 2) a teaching pool, 3) a 60'/120' sports hall, including specially designed climbing wall, 4) a gymnasium, 5) a dance/activity area, 6) a weight training area,

7) two squash courts, 8) an enclosed range where cricket, golf and archery may be practiced indoors. In addition, the Leisure Center provides some services available basically for the public sector. This includes a pub where no one under 18 is allowed. In addition, sauna and hot baths are available only to private individuals on a paying basis.

Social Services operate the Library Resource Center at Abraham Moss. Library Resources occupy a three storey column in a central area of the building. All media and printing facilities are centralized in the Resource Center. This gives College, Secondary School and Community accessibility to a wide range of audio and video software materials no one group could separately afford. Five employees operate a print shop supplying a potential of over 2,000 daytime users. Jobs are done for the community at a minimal cost.

All equipment is available to students, teachers and the public. Self teaching aids using tapes, pamphlets, sight and touch materials are among the learning materials available for skill training improvement. A glass enclosed study room connected to the library allows both enrolled students and the public a quiet place to think.

The library is divided into three parts: 1) Junior library, 2) lending library for the community and 3) research reference library. A children's library connects with the library on the first floor, which in turn connects to a nursery room. Mothers who are enrolled in classes at Abraham Moss can keep their children at the nursery

while attending classes. All three floors of the library are open to everyone interchangeably. An open floor plan has been used where people on the second and third floors can look down into the main floor. This gives an open community atmosphere as all ages from youth to senior citizen associate openly.

Many other services are provided by the Center in addition to the three basic divisions described above. Following is a brief description of two of these programs: 1. The Youth Club encourages membership from all youth under 18 to join, whether they attend school at Abraham Moss or not. A special clubhouse facility designed for teenagers gives the members a place to come together for games, dances and meetings. Each month a calendar of events is set up which includes both indoor and outdoor activities. Trips to the country, other centers or local weekend sports events are some of the activities coordinated by the youth club director and his youth club workers. 2. A Short Stay Residential Wing was designed so children between ages of 11-17 could live away from home for periods of time lasting from one to three weeks. The residential idea came from a needs survey done during the early planning stages of the Center. The purpose of live away from home experience is to give teenagers a chance to work toward personal growth in terms of self-confidence, socializing and learning to care for themselves.

Abraham Moss is essentially a conglomerate of facilities and programs being operated on a joint basis by three independent agencies.

The physical size of the Center makes effective plant utilization and program coordination a considerable task. Housing a wide variety of resources for joint operation has many assets and liabilities. The intricacies of the assets and liabilities of such an operation can only be realized by living through the system as a student, community member, teacher and administrator; for each sees the Center with a different set of criterion. However, the following is an attempt to critique some of the basic concerns expressed by the Center membership in terms of their effect on the Center's current and future success.

Abraham Moss was built during a period of rapid change in educational philosophies. The objectives of the Center vary greatly from those of traditionally youth-oriented formal education objectives. Careful planning based on all reliable sources of information is necessary when implementing a new concept. Theory and practical knowledge gained from others' past experiences are brought together to predict potential problem areas before they occur. Abraham Moss has suffered somewhat by having no earlier counterpart to evaluate during the important planning stages. Unforeseen difficulties occurred in the areas of community acceptance, student matriculation and tri-agency coordination.

During discussions with administrators throughout the Center it was apparent that several held mutual concerns for the Center. The philosophical importance of community participation throughout planning and operation stages was stated throughout the creation of

Abraham Moss. The Center's creators gave full support to the idea that participation brings with it understanding and support of a new idea or project.

In reality, the Center -- what it was conceived to be, its location, size and holdings -- were largely pre-determined before the larger community to be affected was included. Administration has admitted a lack of rapport with much of the community membership. The cause is attributed to the insufficient communication and initial participation at the local community level.

Community centers are created with the entire community in mind. Their utilization is planned on a round-the-clock basis which keeps Abraham Moss open through most of a day. Ideally as everyone uses the Center and claims it as one's own, a protective bond will be formed. Vandalism will be lessened as potential vandals see that destroying the Center is destroying something that belongs to them. Based on this idea Abraham Moss was built with an open door policy. The physical plant itself is completely open. No one section can be opened while another is locked off.

Therefore, if the Recreation Center is open late, assessibility to the library or middleschool is also possible. Unfortunately, the Center has experienced vandalism and theft. Now all rooms containing valuable materials are kept locked unless in use. School lockers have been particularly hard hit as attempts of break-in for valuables results in costly damage. The problem to be solved is seen as how to work with all of the people so the Center is regarded as a personal

asset to everyone.

Many people at the Center expounded on the cost effective issue at Abraham Moss. Putting several resources together should make it easier to centralize administration and save money on plant facilities through shared usage. There is, however, another side to this issue that was brought out by some administrators. In many ways the community school is less responsive to the community than other schools because much time must be spent coordinating the school with the rest of the Center. The large size of the Center makes it a community to deal with within itself. Additional personnel are necessary to provide the extra coordination necessary to both the outer and inner community of the Center.

Running the school's library and leisure center through different councils or agencies is important for overall community support and understanding. This helps dispell the stereotype of an organization run solely by education and helps break-up the possibility of an organization run with the self-interest of one group. This same asset can also be a liability if each council remains inflexible to the needs and unique concerns brought out by each partnership. Little problems can break the smooth operation of effectiveness of the Center and run down the morale of the people directly affected by the unsolvable bureaucratic problems. Examples of this are the library council being unable to hire teacher librarians because cultural services does not hire teachers, and education cannot hire teachers to work in the library since it is not operated by education,

indicate the possible inefficiencies of such a partnership of agencies.

An optimistic future is held for resolving the non-standard problems that periodically arise due to the Center's unique organizational structure. A special governing committee has recently been designed to coordinate finances and services which need to cross the responsibilities of more than one agency to be successful.

Abraham Moss is a large and complex organization. To give a thorough description and analysis of all its limitations and capabilities would justify the writing of a book. The preceding has been a brief introduction to the possibilities to be found at the Abraham Moss Center. For more detailed information on aspects of particular interest refer to the names and addresses given in the Appendix.

Community Resource Centers around the world are growing in importance as education continues to change from a narrow channeled view to a comprehensive and continuous system of learning and teaching. Both technologically advanced and developing nations show a growing acceptance of the resource center as an important instrument for answering the inadequacies of traditional education.

Implications for a Developing Country: Egypt

Every nation has its unique needs and problems. Simply transferring the design of a center from one country to another without planning and adaptation will result in a project unable to meet its full potential for success.

Egypt has the limitations of a varied geography, culture and population dispersement. Literacy is estimated at 25% of the total population with lower percentages in the rural areas. Education is government supported through the central agency of the Ministry of Education (MOE). Traditionally education has stressed theory over practical application. Learning resources are limited largely to teacher, chalkboard and text. Tradition lends support and prestige to the Liberal Arts Education. Vocational and nonformal education carry less status than degree awarding programs, even though severe manpower shortages show needs in technical and vocational areas.

Egypt recognizes the problems of its formal education system. The low literacy level, combined with the need for trained manpower, indicates the problems of human resource development. However, the mere making of new laws or government push does not change long established values and ideals held by the people. Though effective change can only be accomplished through the trust and acceptance of the people, the need for rapid change in education is understood. Economic and technological progress is a major goal of the Republic of Egypt. However, communities hold time-honored traditions toward education which cannot be merely sidetracked or ignored.

Community Resource Centers give the potential to expedite necessary changes for the traditional ideals held for education. Through participatory planning and involvement in all stages of a

center's development, benefits are seen and better understood. The multi-media resource center has the ability to educate any person regardless of his point of input into the system. Available cultural and recreational facilities add to the acceptance of the center as an integrated and useful part of every community member's life.

Possible pitfalls must be recognized early. The availability of self-teaching multi-media machines must be accompanied by a skilled staff of technicians and teachers. Expensive equipment sits idle or broken in more than one Egyptian school because people were not given the necessary help or inservice training.

Community participation in the planning and operation of the Center is crucial to gain the people's understanding and acceptance. If the local citizens stand by and watch a center being built without being consulted about local need or included in development plans, the center will be viewed as an outside establishment and acceptance will be slow.

Multi-Ministry responsibility and control can bring benefits to the establishment of a Resource Center. But, care must be taken to solve the potential problems of divided goals, inflexibility and lack of equal support by any one agency. Benefits of several ministries working together include a wider involvement in the Center's continued success. Finances brought together can make a more comprehensive Center possible than finances only one ministry could afford. Specialists can be brought together from several areas to

give wider scope to the team of teachers, counsellors and technicians available at the Center.

Overall, the Community Resource Center has the potential to bring together the programs and materials of both formal and non-formal education systems. Illiteracy does not have to mean uneducated, as teacher, chalkboard and books are but only one variety of available methods for learning and teaching. Acceptance of the multiple forms education placed together on an equal basis helps build acceptance toward the manpower training programs Egypt so urgently needs.

Community Resource Centers are not presented here as a panacea to the many problems of education both within and outside Egypt. They offer but one example for moving ahead of many of the present problems discussed in this paper. Education systems must choose for themselves what method best suits their individual needs and carefully plan those decisions.

APPENDIX I

Abraham Moss Resources Contacts

Further details on programs, clubs and materials are available by writing the specific area of interest, in care of:

Abraham Moss Center
Cresant Road - Cheetham
Manchester, England

Document reports are available for the following areas:

1. General Description of Abraham Moss Center, doc. no. AD/0088
2. Open College
 - a. Adult Education
 - b. Art, Craft, and Technical Studies
 - c. General Business, Studies, Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy
 - d. Languages
3. Yearly Youth Report on Youth Work at Abraham Moss
4. Lower School and Middle School

Scheduling of visits or referring questions on particular areas to proper sources of information is done through the Vice Principal for Community Services.

REFERENCES

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