

THE NEED FOR INVOLVEMENT
Social, Personal, and Academic
Development in the Small-Scale School

by

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ABSTRACT

Throughout the twentieth century, the number of American students has steadily increased while the number of schools has declined. Much of this is due to the consolidation of schools, a trend that has seen many smaller schools go by the wayside as larger ones have replaced them. In part, this is due to the population increase and the closer proximity of these students to a larger centralized school building. Other factors contributed greatly to this trend, as cost savings, a greater breadth of course offerings and the potential for greater extracurricular achievements were introduced as potential positive outcomes. It was thought that the improvement in these areas would lead to greater academic achievements of students, as well as heightened personal and social growth.

The mere fact that consolidation has proceeded so successfully this century would cause one to conclude that larger schools have succeeded in the mentioned areas, but much of the research states the contrary. On the whole, monetary savings have not occurred in larger schools, and though many have offered broader course selections, the majority of students are unable to take advantage of such availability.

Small schools, because of the potential for a high percent of student involvement, provide a broader curriculum in that their students have a greater opportunity to be significant contributors in the school and what occurs there. And the involvement in the school community and its activities tends to carry over into real life situations, as graduate students from small schools tend to continue involvement in adult life. In light of this, small schools and the education that occurs therein must once again be seen as valuable. And as school consolidation is questioned, we must look into ways of turning existing large schools into structures that provide more of the personalized, positive outcomes currently occurring in small-scale schools.

Chapter I

A Brief History of Schooling in America Including School Size Issues and Trends

The phrase "one-room schoolhouse" elicits numerous mental images, most of which are related to a part of our American heritage that has long since disappeared. Immediately, many of us picture a "snap the whip" climate, or visualize the structure itself--a red-bricked, one-room building that was a part of small town America, often neglecting to consider and appreciate the education that occurred therein. In its truest sense, that which went on inside that structure was small-scale schooling, a source of education that has been increasingly neglected through time and is in serious danger of extinction. Small-scale schooling simply refers to education that takes place in small schools and districts, commonly with fewer than 300 students in grades nine through twelve. Certainly society has seen tremendous changes since the time of the one-room schoolhouse, so shouldn't it be true that schooling would follow suit? Obviously, the one-room building is no longer a feasible facility for our schoolchildren, but are there aspects of the schooling that occurred therein which should be currently embraced since they still have strong implications for society today?

As we have focused on the academics of education, the three R's if you will, have we neglected to consider some acutely

significant realms of education, which go beyond textbook learning? Areas such as personal growth and the acquiring of a sense of community and a sense of affiliation need to be considered and addressed if we are to provide a useful, meaningful education for children, rather than simply schooling them. The one-room schoolhouse of the past as well as the small school of today provides an attitude and an atmosphere where such meaningful education might occur.

For the schooling that occurred in the one-room schoolhouse to lead to meaningful education, much communication and cooperation were required. Not only was teacher to student communication imperative in this setting which housed children of all ages, communication among students was essential as well. The teacher served as the classroom leader and organizer, but the daily activities and schooling could only continue with the significant contributions made by the members of the classroom community. Duties such as carrying of water and firewood, upkeep of the fire and tidying of the classroom were commonly performed by schoolchildren without a mutter. Perhaps even more significantly, the older children served as tutors for the younger ones, since students of all ages existed in the same setting. The sense of significance and contribution felt by each pupil in such a community atmosphere was tremendous, with the presence of each one being important to successful daily learning. Therefore, the climate of the one-room schoolhouse was one of give and take. It was a climate where all students played a meaningful role and understood that the learning that was occurring in their small classroom community was important to every member of that community.

➤ **The Trend of Consolidation and its Results**

The early twentieth century saw an attitude toward growth and expansion that led to a perception of weakness of the small school. Consolidation of schools, which is said to have begun in 1918, was a response to this perceived inadequacy, and continued as one of twentieth century education's most actively and successfully implemented policies (McIntyre and Marion, 1989). It was felt that smaller schools were not cost effective and that one large school would be more economical than many smaller ones due to reduced expenditures for capital improvements, basic building maintenance, and other costs of upkeep and administration. Also, by combining classes and increasing their size, fewer teachers would be necessary. Therefore, large districts might save money because more students per teacher would be possible due to the more efficient use of teachers. This basic idea stems from what late nineteenth century industry referred to as *economy of scale*, and schools from the early twentieth century to the present have bought into the theme of reducing production costs by increasing the size of the facility (Orr 1992).

To more clearly show what consolidation has done to school sizes, Ravitch (1984) compiled statistics attesting to the fact that even though the number of schoolchildren nearly doubled between 1945 and 1980 (from 23 million to 40 million), the number of schools dropped from 185,000 to 86,000 (see Figure #1). In terms of school districts, a 25-year trend shows that 22,010 existed in 1967-68, to 15,713 in 1986-87, and finally, 15,025 in 1992-93 (see Figure #2). Statistics also show that in the six years previous to the 1994-95 school year, some 575 of the

country's smallest school districts (fewer than 600 total students) were lost to consolidation. Fowler (1989) claims that "some states, such as Illinois have enacted legislation with financial incentives for school districts to consolidate," with some educators equating enormity with quality.

Figure #1

**Number of Students Compared to
Number of School Districts in US
1945 and 1980**

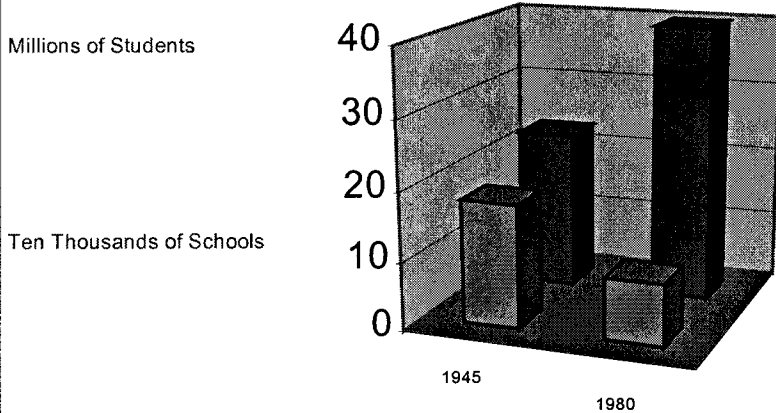
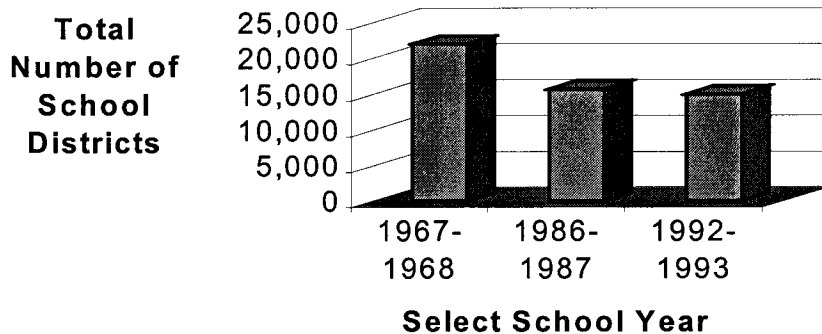


Figure #2

**The Decline of US School Districts
Since 1967 - 1968**



As the move toward consolidation gained momentum, additional justifications for the merger of schools were presented. It was said that the better level of organization possible in larger schools permits a more varied curriculum, especially in secondary schools. Larger schools can also justify offering a wider variety of classes, since from a larger population of students, enough youngsters are apt to show interest in a particular course to warrant offering it. Secondary education programs became more departmentalized as teachers became specialists in their fields, having the opportunity to teach a lesser variety of classes in a single, isolated, area of study. This led to, among other things, a greater segregation of school subjects, which has more recently become viewed as a major educational blunder. Educators of today are still working diligently to integrate the subject areas, with hopes that students will understand concepts better if they are able to view them as meaningful pieces of a puzzle rather than as bits of isolated information.

Also, a larger student body means a larger pool of potential athletes. It is no secret that through consolidation, schools gain the potential for greater notoriety in sports. According to Kay (1982), sports programs and extracurricular activities flourish in consolidated schools because of combined numbers of athletes and amounts of funding.

Recent years have seen such supporting arguments presented and seen consolidation proceed at a rapid rate, but in this rush to get to bigger and better, have we lost some irreplaceable positive attributes of small-scale education? Attributes such as a concern for the personal and social growth of an individual must be considered along with their academic achievement. If small

schools continue to go by the wayside, will the schooling that occurs in newer, larger schools be as educational as that which it is replacing? In order to answer these questions and understand how consolidation has affected schooling, we must isolate and analyze some of the most valued outcomes of schooling. The following is an overview of some of the most agreed upon desired outcomes of schooling along with a discussion of how consolidation's large schools have addressed these outcomes.

Chapter II

Education in the Large School

The Less than Impressive Results of School Consolidation

Tremendous development occurs during an individual's progression from a kindergarten child to a twelfth-grade young adult. Obviously, physical maturing is the easiest form of development to see, but numerous other, more difficult to measure progressions occur as well. Though the measurement of such progressions is complicated, these are the reasons why public schooling is in place. Of the various facets of development some are viewed as being much more planned for and desired than others.

➤ **The Various Types of Curriculum**

Gail McCutcheon has defined the curriculum as "what students have the opportunity to learn." In order that schooling may produce the various desirable outcomes deemed important, general curricular requirements are designed and put into place in the schools. These are courses of study, and they guide individual teachers in establishing plans that will help them bring their students to pre-designed outcomes and goals. The curriculum designed to achieve this is the overt curriculum but it, in and of itself may or may not lead to the successful attainment of desired student development. According to Hoover and Kindsvatter (1997), this overt curriculum includes "material in text books, lesson

plans, class materials, student codes, courses of study and workbooks."

Other types of curriculum assist in producing developmental outcomes in students. Unintentional learning also occurs in the school setting although not planned for or stated as an objective by teachers or administration. This is what Hoover and Kindsvatter refer to as the hidden curriculum, and it produces learnings that the students need to be able to function in the school setting. Aspects such as social attitudes and acceptable behaviors are essential learnings for students, even though no one explicitly designed ways for the students to learn such things.

A third curriculum, the null curriculum, "represents that aspect of the curriculum where opportunity to learn something is denied." It is obvious, or not so obvious, by the conspicuous absence of opportunity to learn significant knowledge. Each of the three types of curriculum is present in classrooms, and other than the null, each leads to certain gains in student development. Schools that provide students a greater opportunity to learn are offering a broader curriculum. Surprisingly, as we will show in the pages to come, in this sense, smaller schools offer a wider curriculum.

➤ **Significant Areas of Desired Student Development Related to Large Schools**

Although a plethora of areas of student development are desirable, these works will specifically focus on three areas. The coming pages will define and discuss: (1) academic development; (2) personal development; and (3) social development in terms of how small and large schools meet the needs of children

in these significant areas of student progression. All are viewed as means through which our schools can educate individuals to be contributing citizens in a democratic society. After all, one of the foremost goals of schooling is that it will "prepare children to inherit the mantle of civic responsibility in this democracy" (Hoover and Kindsvatter, 1997).

1. Academic Achievement

Written tests, or other similar methods of measurement, are used mainly to provide students a means of displaying their acquired knowledge, their level of academic achievement. Such tests produce scores that categorize students by grade and provide teachers feedback regarding student understanding. The most highly valued test, at least from an administrators viewpoint, is the government standardized test, which has been designed to display how successful teachers have been in their presentation of the overt curriculum. By far, the most empirical and easy to analyze form of academic attainment, this type of achievement is seen as so significant that it is often used as the only measure to determine the success or failure of teachers, programs, departments and entire school systems.

Since a main motivation for school consolidation was that it could broaden the curriculum while allowing teachers to become more specialized, the success of larger schools in terms of academic achievement must be analyzed. Following a review of fourteen major studies, Sher and Tompkins (1976, p. 26) claimed: "in fact, of the recent controlled studies, there is not a single one which records a consistent, positive correlation between size and achievement, independent of IQ and social class." Sher and

Tompkins added, "while there might be some financial benefits to consolidation, claims of fiscal efficiency had been greatly exaggerated by proponents of reorganization" (Sher and Tompkins, 1976).

In March of 1989, McIntyre and Marion presented a publication titled *Academic Achievement in America's Small Schools*. In it, they extensively reviewed existing research and drew data of their own from the *High School and Beyond Database*, which at that point had sampled a variety of American students four times between 1980 and 1986. Their sample included 13,425 students chosen randomly from 1,015 schools. Schools with 900-1,200 students in grades 9 to 12 were termed large while those with 400-700 were considered medium, and those with fewer than 300 students were titled small. While SES accounted for considerably more variance in student performance than did any other factor, school size produced consistent differences in educational outcomes as well. "In all cases except the mathematics measure, students from small schools had higher mean scores on the dependent measures" (McIntyre and Marion, 1989). The same study showed that students from moderately sized schools measured higher than did students from large schools.

In 1972, Michelson produced similar findings for 110 Washington, D.C. elementary schools, concluding that "an increase in size of school is detrimental to test scores, all else considered," even if student/teacher ratios are held constant. More recently, numerous studies have confirmed a positive effect of small-scale schooling on student achievement, while controlling for the SES variable (Eberts, Kehoe & Stone, 1984; Giesbrecht, 1978; Walberg and Fowler, 1987). Friedkin and Necochea's research

located a "strong negative effect of large size in low-SES schools and districts," and they commented that "the benefits of large-scale schooling are more limited than previously imagined" (Friedkin and Necochea, 1988). "Mounting evidence also suggests that small schools and districts may generally produce superior results, once the effects of SES are acknowledged" (Howley, 1989).

2,3. Personal Development and Social Development, the Acquiring of a Sense of Affiliation

Both personal development and social development rely heavily on a student's *affiliation* and the sense of belonging that he or she feels within the school setting. Therefore, before one can discuss personal or social development, the student's ability to identify with the school and its activities must be fully understood. Much time has been devoted to the study of how school size is related to a student's feelings of affiliation and belonging. The overwhelming conclusion related to these areas of development is that large schools produced by consolidation have fallen short. Consolidation has been counterproductive.

Classroom climate is a broad term with which all educators have become familiar. Education courses at the college level have stressed to them how important it is to have the appropriate atmosphere in the classroom so that all students feel comfortable and ready to learn. This is also an area in which administrators often rate teachers during yearly evaluation. How ironic it is then that schools have been increased so dramatically in size, since school climate has been one of the areas most devastated by this size increase. Ornstein (1990) describes the large school as

a place where "students and teachers do not know each other and where people are buried by a bureaucratic number." He continues:

No more than 25% of the student body consider themselves part of school life, and no more than 10% to 15% consider themselves part of the "in-crowd." In large high schools, both students and teachers are sometimes distant psychologically from each other, and it is easy for many "average" students to be overlooked.

In fact, probably 70-80% of children from larger schools fall into the cracks. Ornstein (1990) termed the large school climate as "socially and psychologically detrimental, producing anomic behavior among students, in many cases, loneliness and despair." Anomic behavior in this case would be typified by a student's feelings of not being known as an individual person with a name, but instead as simply a face in the crowd. One of the most extreme results of such a climate is complete withdrawal from school, dropout. Fowler (1989) and Schoggen and Schoggen (1988) have related school dropout to the poor climate that is so common in larger schools. They showed that school size was highly positively correlated with dropout rate, controlling for socioeconomic status. The effect of school size on dropout rate was studied by Pittman and Haughwout (1987), who found that "... for every 400-student increase in the high school student population there would be approximately a 1% rise in the dropout rate." (p. 343)

In order that children stay in school and achieve at their highest level, they need to feel a connection with their school, a sense of affiliation. Students, in an attempt to define

themselves, desire affiliation, "to establish a sense of self worth through peer associations that function to validate (their) sense of worth" (Hoover and Kindsvatter, 1997). Lack of affiliation leads to feelings of alienation which in turn produce an even stronger need for affiliation, which will usually be satisfied somewhere. Frequently this will occur beyond the school setting and will often associate the student with negative behaviors such as tobacco use and alcohol and other drug use.

Research in the early 1990s led R. M. Page to conclude that small school students were less apt to experience the loneliness associated with alienation than were larger school students (Page, 1991). In terms of finding affiliation of some sort, she noted that "students in large schools were significantly more likely to drink alcohol, get drunk, smoke cigarettes, use smokeless tobacco, and use marijuana or hashish than students in small and medium schools." (Page, 1991, p.18)

It seems then that the average student's sense of affiliation may be significantly impaired by the large school climate. Such a climate hinders a student's sense of affiliation in the aforementioned developmental areas of personal and social development. Further, in terms of personal development in particular, large schools again fell short, with the consolidation plan neglecting the "long-range consequences for individual development, of lack of active, personal involvement in important activities, of feeling not needed and not wanted during one's high school years." (Schoggen 1984) Although shortcomings in personal and social development can occur in any setting, they are most prevalent in larger schools. Since personal development and feelings of self-worth are more apt to grow out of a setting where

individuals are known personally and individually, students are more likely to flourish where they know, and are known by those around them. This situation is rarely seen in settings where the number of students is relatively large.

Socially, students can grow whenever they are part of a group. Kids create and become members of groups for survival's sake. Deborah Meier (1996) discusses how children not only need to be part of their own groups, but of groups that contain at least one adult as well. The only problem, contends Meier is that in schools, "only two groups of kids, each a small minority, are able to join the subgroup where adults are significant people to them . . . the academic stars . . . and the star athletes." Once again, this means that the large school's average students, of whom there are many, are left to fend for themselves.

Upon consolidation, such average students become lost in the crowd. For example, prior to the lessening of the number of schools, numerous cheerleaders, majorettes, statisticians, band members, and other contributors were needed as support crews for athletic programs. But following the merging of schools, a much smaller number of such people are needed, meaning that many willing students and capable athletes will not have the chance to be involved. Also, with fewer per student leadership roles available, a lower percentage of large school students will have the opportunity to be in positions of authority. Consequently, the average large school student graduates having held fewer leadership positions during their schooling. (Baird, 1969; Kleinert 1969; Grabe 1981; Morgan and Alwin 1980; Barker and Hall 1964; and Gump and Friesen 1964)

➤ Large School Conclusions

These shortcomings in the areas of desired student outcomes, particularly in the areas of academic achievement, and personal and social development, cause one to question the conventional wisdom of consolidation. It makes one wonder why the trend toward larger schools has occurred at all, and certainly why it continues. Having reviewed some of the works that have studied the impact which larger schools have had on the development of schoolchildren, it would not seem that consolidation is being pursued for the students' sake. We would expect then, that consolidation is currently being pursued due to the positive effects it has in the initially mentioned areas of cost savings, broader curriculum, and stronger extracurricular activities. It had been anticipated that all such areas would be affected in a positive way by consolidation.

In relation to monetary expenditures, larger schools were expected to save money, since overlapping positions could be eliminated and a condensed, a more streamlined big school could run more efficiently. Although there seems to be no clear, consistent conclusion in the literature, larger schools do not appear to be saving money. Sher and Tompkins (1976) reviewed numerous studies and concluded, "while there might be some financial benefits to consolidation, claims of fiscal efficiency had been greatly exaggerated by proponents of reorganization" (McIntyre and Marion, 1989). "Big corresponds with school inefficiency, institutional bureaucracy, and personal loneliness" (Ornstein, 1990). Some data suggest that "schools in small

districts spend about \$250 to \$500 less per student" (Walberg, 1989).

Ornstein (1989) suggested that some reasons for larger schools being more expensive per student could be higher overall salaries, extra curriculum offerings and instructional facilities. The higher cost per student in larger schools can be partly attributed to the idea that the financing of additional supervisory services comes at the expense of students' instructional services (Monk, 1987). Most surprisingly though, is that Monk also found overall classroom size to be detrimental to large schools, a reversal of what had been predicted by early backers of consolidation. Research has shown that schools of fewer than 400 students have smaller class sizes (Monk, 1987).

Regarding the enhanced extracurricular offerings of the large school, more and broader opportunities do exist. Larger schools provide a wider variety of curricular and extracurricular offerings in which students may become involved. Therefore, by volume, large schools involve more students in school activities. But to make a meaningful comparison, one needs to understand that small schools still have a significantly higher ratio of their students involved in activities. The sheer variety of offerings tends to convince many that since larger schools have more overall possibility for involvement, that they therefore have more involvement by percentage. Barker and Gump, in their 1964 landmark study, Big School, Small School concluded that the number of students in a school increases 8 times faster than the number of opportunities for extracurricular involvement. The superstars of the classroom and playing field will stand out in any school program, but only smaller schools provide more opportunity for

participation by the average youngster. Ornstein (1990) stated it the following way:

Since most students (and adults) are average, but still prefer to make the team or excel in front of their peers, they have a better chance of being recognized (and feeling good about themselves) when the numbers are fewer and the surroundings are more familiar. Large high schools win state championships in sports and national recognition in academic scholarships, and they also have impressive bands and student papers. Yet . . . most students do not participate or receive recognition from their teachers or counselors; thus, the costs for these extra facilities and activities are high per student.

These findings apply to within the classroom setting as well as in extracurricular involvement. It appears that even though larger schools offer a broader range of coursework, including advanced placement courses, average students do not appreciate the overall impact of these offerings. In fact, as mentioned previously, the high level of departmentalization, which occurs so often in larger schools, tends to be counterproductive for educational integration. By creating an educational setting that isolates subject areas, large school administrators are preventing students from understanding how knowledge from the various subject areas interrelate. Smaller schools, where staff is more likely to communicate regularly, lend themselves to a higher level of cross teaching, therefore providing students the chance to integrate knowledge in a more meaningful way. This provides students the opportunity to understand the desired curriculum more completely.

Further, it permits students the chance to appreciate the entire concept of education, by allowing them to fit together the often-individualized pieces of schooling into the broader construct of meaningful learning.

Therefore, two of the major initial reasons for consolidation, cost savings and curricular enhancement, pale in comparison to the positive small school outcomes (Fowler 1989). If larger schools are generally lacking in the significant areas of academic development, social development, and personal development and are also failing to live up to their billing of being cost-saving facilities with greater offerings, what then are we to conclude? Exactly what are small schools more successful at, and why so? The following chapter will seek to unlock some of the originally unappreciated qualities of schooling and educating in the small-scale school.

Chapter III

An Analysis of the Unique Educational Aspects

Of the Small School

Initially, schools were small not because of the educational benefits of a smaller size, but instead because it was only appropriate to their communities. As times changed and growing cities provided the potential for one large school rather than numerous smaller ones, many people bought into the concept that what worked for industry would also work for individuals. The wisdom of such an attitude is at best, questionable. As discussed previously, size increases have not led to the numerous advantages that had originally been anticipated. Up-scaling, the increasing and broadening of applications, which has led to great gains in business and industry has not had the same effect in education.

To understand this from a distance, we simply need to remember that we are working with living, breathing, individuals rather than machines. But to understand the breadth of the situation, the small school and its qualities must be more closely viewed and analyzed. We need to understand why these qualities exist in a smaller setting and are nearly impossible to duplicate when the numbers are much larger. In the following pages, we will analyze the unique educational effects of small schools and will relate this to the aforementioned desired outcomes of schooling. In so doing we will be comparing small schools to the consolidation-produced large schools discussed in the previous chapter.

➤ **Appreciating the Small School**

To begin to appreciate a small school, we need to not only understand the history of the small school, which has previously been presented, but also we need to get a feel for the climate of a small school. Certainly some of the biggest reasons for the close-knit, cooperation-oriented atmosphere of a small school are communication and cooperation. If there is a necessity for smooth functioning in a school community or an ordinary community for that matter, it is communication. If the size of a setting is somewhat small, the sharing of thoughts and ideas is much easier and can provide all members of the school community with a sense of connection.

In this sense, *connection* is what allows an administrator to have a feel for how the teachers and the children are doing on a given day. It provides those people in the school with a means of assessing the climate in the school and of anticipating small problems so they can be controlled before they escalate. Successful meetings between administration and staff are essential to promoting the sense of connection in a building. Studies in group efficiency suggest that when groups larger than 20 people meet, sustained attention and involvement are negatively affected with progress being significantly inhibited (Meier, 1996). Very large staff meetings are ordinarily only productive and meaningful to very few persons, with most members going away from them without a genuine sense of commitment. With a small staff however, meetings that serve their purpose are much more possible. Ideas can be shared and discussed in a meaningful way, with such dialogue being both vital and productive. And the successful

communication and sense of connection that ensue are major factors in producing a successful group climate, especially for a school staff.

In much the same way, students must be connected with the school and the activities that occur therein. The key concept in this case is involvement. Students need to be involved in the activities of a school in order to feel the benefits of the climate that exists. If the climate is safe and positive, some students choose to involve themselves in numerous activities because of the sense of belonging which involvement creates. For various reasons, though, some children tend not to become involved, especially if they lack confidence or feel that they cannot make a significant contribution. For any student to reach his or her educational potential, school involvement is essential. Herein exists one of the greatest assets of small schools, the opportunity for involvement. And not only does it provide opportunity for involvement in academic circles, but also that which transcends the essential, yet less tangible aspects of education such as social and personal connection. Small schools provide the opportunity for students to feel a connection with their school, and through this connection, have a greater appreciation and respect for the school and what goes on there.

➤ **Small Schools: A Chance to Be Involved**

Much of the early research supports the concept of connection, describing potential involvement as *behavior settings* (Barker and Barker, 1964 p.50; Gump and Friesen, 1964, pp.82-83). Because of the greater variety of curricular and extracurricular

offerings in a large school, more total behavior settings occur there. School size research shows that as we look at schools on a continuum from small to large, behavior settings increase much more slowly than school population does (Barker and Barker, 1964, p.49). This means that in smaller schools, participants have more opportunity for involvement since they are in short supply, meaning that each individual feels more needed and more wanted. This relative underpopulation of small school behavior settings leads to greater voluntary participation, with small school students holding positions of responsibility more than twice as frequently as their large school counterparts (Schoggen 1984; Kleinert 1969; Baird 1969; Grabe 1981; and Morgan and Alwin 1980).

Small school students then, even though their school does not offer the wealth of opportunities for involvement, have more opportunity to get involved and learn. According to the Gail McCutcheon definition of curriculum provided earlier, this means that smaller schools provide a greater curriculum, as they actually provide more opportunities for learning (McCutcheon, 1988). But small schools are not only advantageous in a quantitative way, but in significant qualitative ways as well, eventually producing a more civic minded person. This advantage of small schools is one that is more readily recognized and appreciated by anyone who has attended or worked in a small school. One of the first and most meaningful analyses made by a person who works or has worked closely with a small school is that most everyone has the opportunity to participate.

Schoggen (1984) described the increased participation as being due to the students' realization that they are needed for the continued successful operation of school activities. Fowler

(1992) claims that though greater opportunity is available to all small school students, marginal students benefit most, as they work to raise themselves to the level of their desirable counterparts. This results in a decline in loneliness, a greater concern for others, an increased sense of community (common goal), and a decrease in deviant behavior. It is commonly thought that these developments occur because participation helps students acquire new skills and strengthen attitudes, and allows them to receive special awards that influence their personal development. Halsall's review of the research pertaining to school size led to these statements relating to an environment more favorable to student development.

The pressures which small schools are shown to exert more successfully than large ones help to contribute to a sense of competence, since whether weak, strong, inept, skillful, young or experienced, each pupil really is important. Many activities cannot continue without his participation, and the increased sense of responsibility which this situation generates is likely to produce greater and earlier maturity, as well as a greater capacity for leadership (Halsall, 1973, p.95).

Using information from the National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972, Lindsay (1984) described *sociability* as "an individual's predisposition to participate in voluntary activities." It seems that students from certain backgrounds are much more apt to involve themselves, simply for the sake of being involved and being able to contribute. He

stated that a student's small school background had a stronger affect than did any individual background variables such as SES, academic ability, gender, sociability, curriculum track or class rank (Lindsay, 1984). Controlling for socioeconomic status, academic ability and gender, Lindsay's findings showed what numerous other studies had shown; students from smaller schools are more likely to participate in extracurricular activities, therefore displaying greater sociability.

In further findings from his study, Schoggen (1984) cites evidence attesting to the idea that high school voluntary extracurricular involvement has "significant consequences for personal, social, and cognitive development." Perhaps even more significant is the measurable link between high school involvement and adult voluntary social activities and political and civic involvement (Baird, 1969). With one of the goals of education being to help students become contributing citizens in a democratic society, small schools, by offering more opportunity for involvement, are helping to produce more contributing citizens.

➤ **Academic Achievement in the Small School**

A projected result of school consolidation was that larger schools would have a positive impact on the academic achievement of students. The passing years have witnessed numerous studies designed to find if this anticipated advantage of large schools indeed occurred. In particular, what effects did consolidation have on academic achievement and the social and personal development of schoolchildren? Again controlling for SES, Walberg (1991) found that school size was negatively related with school-

level achievement and educational attainment. Eberts, Kehoe, and Stone (1984); Giesbrecht (1978); and Walberg and Fowler (1987) also controlled for the effects of SES and found a positive effect of small-scale schooling on the achievement of students. In other words, they found that smaller schools, no matter how rich or poor, produced students who have a higher overall level of academic achievement. Fowler (1989), having done numerous studies on this topic, concluded that small schools have "an independent, positive effect upon student achievement, extracurricular participation, student satisfaction, and attendance. Otto (1975) had already found that involvement in high school activities "plays a significant role in the educational attainment process, independent of SES, academic ability and academic performance."

It has long been known that a positive correlation exists between SES and academic achievement, but these studies, among others, found another variable also has a consistent positive effect, school size. But the difference was not in the way that consolidation's proponents had anticipated, since small schools instead have the advantage. Not only do they seem to be more successful in terms of academic measures, but as previously mentioned; in social and personal forms of development as well.

➤ **The Future of the Small School**

The trend toward consolidation has been promoted and followed by shortsighted groups and individuals that lack appreciation and respect for the small school and what occurs therein. Small schools provide more opportunity for involvement. Involvement fosters care and concern, responsibility, maturity, achievement, leadership, and numerous other results of social and

personal development. In many ways, education in the small schools has distinct advantages over what is occurring in larger schools.

As a result of this, a significant educational question arises. Is small school education somehow less applicable in a high tech world that is currently embracing the *bigger is better* theme as it minimizes the importance of personal communication and the care and concern that accompany such communication? Or maybe, is a small school education somehow more advantageous for a person from a small community, but not as much for others? We would certainly hope that what is being gained in the small school setting would meaningfully permeate an individual's life, with the effects of such an education showing in significant ways. And we would also hope that it follows a student beyond school walls and becomes such an integral part of a person's being that it shows through in their active everyday life. Additionally, it would be desirable that the greater level of involvement experienced by small school students would foster positive attitudes toward involvement throughout their lives. E.P. Otto (1976) spoke of such a relationship, stating, "involvement in high school activities was a strong predictor of involvement in adult voluntary activities, e.g., civic groups, church and lodge groups, sports teams, charity, and welfare organizations."

In a 1984 study, Lindsay was interested in the effects of school size on not only high school participation, but on into college. He confirmed his central hypothesis, finding that greater participation in high school carries over to involvement in more voluntary social activities as an adult. This strengthens the previously discussed work of William Fowler that showed small

school involvement led to a greater concern for others and a stronger sense of community. It is obvious that these schools are offering much, and that that which is being offered can significantly affect the quality of person that emerges from the small school. In light of this, it should come as no surprise that some citizens' groups are fighting hard to preserve the endangered small school and the climate and qualities which exist therein. An example of this is currently occurring in New York, where a statewide organization of small school districts has banded together in hopes of forestalling their dissolution.

The small school provides some valuable attributes. It offers more of a sense of belonging, the potential for greater personal and social growth, and the chance for higher academic achievement through what can be viewed as broader curricular and extracurricular opportunities. It offers opportunities that are available to a much higher percentage of students than happen in the typical large school. Still, the move toward larger schools continues, but is based on many unfounded attitudes that need to be seriously reconsidered. Many questions regarding this ongoing trend toward consolidation need to be addressed. Will the trend toward the dissolution of small schools continue or can it be reversed? How important is it that we try to reverse this trend? Also, what can we do to meet the needs of students if we crowd them into less individual space and into situations where they receive little individual recognition and hardly any chance for involvement? And of course, if the large school is not appropriate, what then are we to do with these structures since they are expensive and already in place? If the feasibility of the small school building itself is gone, then somehow can we use

what we have to get down to the important business of educating children in an environment where they feel known, needed and important?

CHAPTER IV:

Embracing an Age-Old Attitude:

Teaching Children through Personal Communication

In a Nurturing Community

If current education is to serve the community and serve the student to the highest level possible, it must be adjusted - not overhauled, simply adjusted. Too often, those seeking change jump on an educational bandwagon embracing some trendy cure-all that promises to make modern day education so much more successful. In reality, most trends have limited impact, which can be seen in the brief amount of time which most trendy attitudes remain in use. This is especially true if the correct educational attitudes are not initially in place in the school to complement such changes in approach. For a child to learn things that have educational value, they must be comfortable with their setting and feel important and needed there. If this is not so, no specialized device, method, or teacher will matter. And though they will learn in any setting which has so many people in one place, if they are to work toward the core curriculum that their teachers strive so diligently to deliver, they must feel at ease and ready to learn. Otherwise they may only be learning the dynamics of group survival, a situation leading to apathy and behavior problems. Many of the dilemma which currently plague education can be addressed only when we realize that educational problems

are not in isolation but instead are a result of societal attitudes and societal changes.

➤ **Times Are Changing, and So Are Children and Their Attitudes**

According to the age-old adage, it takes an entire community to raise a child. One of the most significant parts of raising a child is providing him or her with a well-rounded education which not only includes the acquiring of facts and knowledge, but the attainment of personal, social and community growth. Such attitudes were strongest during the early part of the twentieth century, following the heyday of the small school. During that period, the community welcomed such a responsibility, and open communication between friends, neighbors, and school personnel helped keep the child's behavior well monitored. More recently, though, as a result of increased urbanization and suburbanization, greater crowding and poorer personal communication, the watchful eye of the community has turned its back. The once concerned, close-knit neighbors have gradually shied away from such responsibility.

For whatever reason, these once active pathways of communication are weak and children are suffering. Part of the reason they are suffering is that since they now have the open opportunity to get away with more negative behaviors, they do. Adults blame the kids and kids continue being kids. Without the open communication, which once existed, a sense of community fails to develop. In reality it is not that the youngsters do not care, and it is not that they're not motivated. It's just that the children of today are motivated by different stimuli than in the past and they place values in somewhat different areas than

today's adults once did. Many of the attitudes which currently exist show a lesser appreciation for school education. The children with such attitudes are also more prone to difficulties with self-esteem and self-respect since they are underachieving and are aware of it. If an individual has difficulty respecting himself and his actions, he is less apt to respect others and social problems are likely to arise. Such problems can affect an entire school since a problem anywhere in a school community is often felt by all. On a larger scale, these negative social attitudes and resulting problems can affect education in general as apathy anesthetizes those whom it contacts. With the nature of such a problem being the lack of affiliation and of a feeling of close community, large schools will continue to be unable to address the situation.

➤ **Advantages which the Small School Climate Offers**

Social and educational literature alike praises the socio-psychological benefits of recognition and affiliation that occur more in smaller settings. Benefits such as a strong sense of acceptance, identification, belonging, morale, and better attitudes all can occur more easily in the small school setting (Barker, 1986). The products of such an atmosphere are a higher self-concept and motivation for achievement (Ornstein, 1990). In fact, along with the emphasis on increasing self-esteem, many of today's educational innovations have their roots in the small school. "Notions such as non-graded classrooms, individualized instruction, low student/teacher ratios, cross-age grouping, peer tutoring, using the community as a resource, mainstreaming of mildly handicapped students, and emphasizing of basics," all had

their origins in the small school (Barker 1986). Reuven Feurstein (1980) discussed the implications of existing in a strong genuine culture such as the one in a small school setting:

Qualities such as learning to plan, knowing how to cooperate, recognizing and applying accuracy and precision, developing a work ethic, and understanding change are the result of culturally focused experience and thinking. When the culture is (weak), a child's potential to learn is reduced.

Small towns and certain urban neighborhoods can offer the type of setting that fosters a sense of community more naturally than larger settings. Schools can offer only certain aspects of community. But, if a school can become an interwoven part of a strong community, the resulting structure can be a potent educator. Consolidation's giant schools, as they currently are, will find it difficult, if not impossible to achieve such community strength. The concept of strength in numbers only works to a certain extent, beyond which anonymity and alienation occur. According to the studies cited earlier, up to 90% of students from large schools experience such feelings, causing them to sense that their mere presence often goes unnoticed and mostly unappreciated. This is a compelling reason why we must look for a change in attitudes regarding school size. It is time to move toward smaller schools.

➤ **Changing the Educational Metaphor**

In an American Educational Research Association address, Thomas Sergiovanni (1993) insisted that educators "change the metaphor" from school as an organization to school as a community.

He referred to learning as being "nurtured" or "cultivated," not as a "product" or an "output." He also proclaimed that any school exceeding 300 students could not sustain a "true" educational community. According to Brown (1993), the ways of thinking associated with bureaucracy, brought about by the Industrial Revolution "exert a powerful influence on behavior--to the detriment of true education." If bureaucratic attitudes are contrary to an environment where true education occurs, how might schools avoid such problems with bureaucracy so they can get serious about educating children? After all, the large schools, which have come into existence during consolidation's reign, have proven to be bogged down by bureaucrats (Ornstein, 1990).

Thus far this work has mainly focused on citing shortcomings of large schools and lauding the smaller schools and their redeemable traits that allow them to educate children in a more personal, often more successful manner. As more and more people are recognizing the advantages of small schools, a real challenge emerges, since, in a practical sense it would be seemingly inconceivable to revert to smaller buildings, even if it were desired. Some very large school districts have responded to the positive findings about the small school experience by downsizing. Their strategy has been to section off existing buildings into sub schools that are much more manageable and personal. Even if the buildings cannot physically be divided, social separating of the students so that no more than 200-300 students come in contact with each other is possible.

Deborah Meier (1996) details the dividing of some 20 New York City schools into separate schools until 52 schools occupied the 20 buildings available. These sub schools utilized sections

of existing buildings and reorganized the existing administration in order to cut the number of students and staff who contact each other by more than half. Although the planning and implementation of such a plan would seem overwhelming, it is being done, and done successfully, in that they are creating schools that do for all kids what we now do for a few (Meier 1996).

Although the buildings used in this situation were designed and built large, in many important ways the current educational and social structures within them resemble those of the small-scale school. Because of this, much significant learning can occur therein due to the more personal, close-knit atmosphere which is possible. As mentioned previously, since the small school creates a climate in which students often receive more opportunities to achieve in all areas, a more meaningful, enduring education can occur. An enduring education is one that is not only meaningful and accessible to its owner, but is also valued enough by its owner that it is shared with others and passed down through generations.

In this sense, everyone has learned something from someone else's enduring education, and everyone has learned things that will be part of his or her own enduring education. Since those with more enduring educations also value their knowledge enough to pass it along more often, they also value their own personal involvement with others, which provides them with a means and opportunity to educate others. Communication on a personal level is imperative if a teacher is to educate others, rather than simply schooling them. And this is the arena where large schools are really missing the boat.

We are in an age where personal communication and cooperation are nearly extinct, for all ages. What once were a face to face personal conversation and a handshake became a phone call. More recently, the need for even talking has diminished with the advent of computer e-mail and faxes. Since the amount of personal contact and communication has diminished, the capacity for meaningful, active dialogue is certain to follow. The personal education that could occur through such dialogue will continue to wane. The decreased opportunity to exchange information through personal conversation is likely to create frustration in the generations to come as their ability and capacity to conduct personal, meaningful communication becomes lost. Such frustration as well as a lack of positive modes of communication is likely culprits for the current rise in hate crimes and crimes of rage. A person, who has something to say, but has no open, productive means of communicating, may resort to violence to voice their message. Certainly the recent number of school shootings as well as the phenomenon of road rage are clear examples of such inability to communicate in appropriate ways.

School-age children are increasingly becoming entertained by non-activities that require little active involvement of the physical and often mental variety. Through television, computer games, and computer communications, children are becoming watchers of life, rather than individuals who actively involve themselves in the real world around them. Though a great extent of sharing of ideas is possible through computer communications, personal communication skills are still vital and must be utilized if we are to keep students closely involved in a healthy, positive way with those around them. If we cannot teach children to cling to

such personal involvement with others, any amount of meaningful, enduring education that could have occurred will not. Eventually, their concern for others is sure to diminish, as they become more and more self-centered. And self-centeredness is the ultimate contradiction to education and community. "That, after all, is what school is all about: It's a way one generation consciously tries to influence another--and in turn is influenced" (Meier 1995). Such educational communion is most likely in a comfortable situation where close, personal contact occurs in a natural way. It is likely to happen in a small-scale school.

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