

Community Participation in Systemic Restructuring: Member-Selection Procedures

Alison A. Carr and Charles M. Reigeluth

Context and Rationale

Experts on school-based restructuring claim that community involvement is necessary for effective, long-standing innovation (Banathy, 1991; Havelock, 1973; Havelock and Zlotolow, in press, 1994). While this is appealing, we know little about the nature of this involvement or preferred methods and procedures for drawing community members into increased levels of participation.

Much has been written to guide school change efforts, but recent emphasis on shared decision-making teams which involve community members lacks specific guidelines for selecting members. When educational planners invite community members into the restructuring process, they invite various competing agendas, educational and social values, and work styles. This diversity, while a source of innovation and energy, presents a challenge for educational planners. How participation will be handled can determine the success or failure of the effort (Havelock, 1973; Havelock and Zlotolow, in press, 1994). A key aspect of this process is the determination of exactly who will be involved.

Overview

In this article, we offer guidelines for selecting community members for systemic restructuring efforts in public schools. A careful examination of what we mean by the terms "community" and "systemic restructuring" is followed by precursors which should be considered prior to beginning

Alison A. Carr is a doctoral candidate, and Charles M. Reigeluth, a Contributing Editor, is Chair, Instructional Systems Technology Department, School of Education, Indiana University Bloomington.

selection efforts. A justification for the importance of selection efforts is presented prior to an overview of selection guidelines. Finally, each of the steps in the community selection model is described in greater detail.

Defining Community

Who is included in the school community? Warren (1978) offers a classic social science definition of the term community as, "a social unit which consists of persons who share a common geographic area interacting in terms of a common culture and which incorporates a range of social structures which function to meet a relatively broad range of needs of all persons who make up the social unit" (p. 2). Therefore, a community cannot be defined solely by the physical region it occupies, nor can it be limited to individuals in the community with a compelling interest in the school.

Warren (1978) provides another conceptualization of the term community as, "an arena or field of interaction manifesting certain systemic tendencies" (p. 409). Wagstaff and Galagher (1990) offer this reflection on such a perspective, "From this angle, community transcends time and space. It is a condition where people come together over values, needs, and demands" (p. 98). These definitions are appropriate because they account for the complexities inherent in social systems.

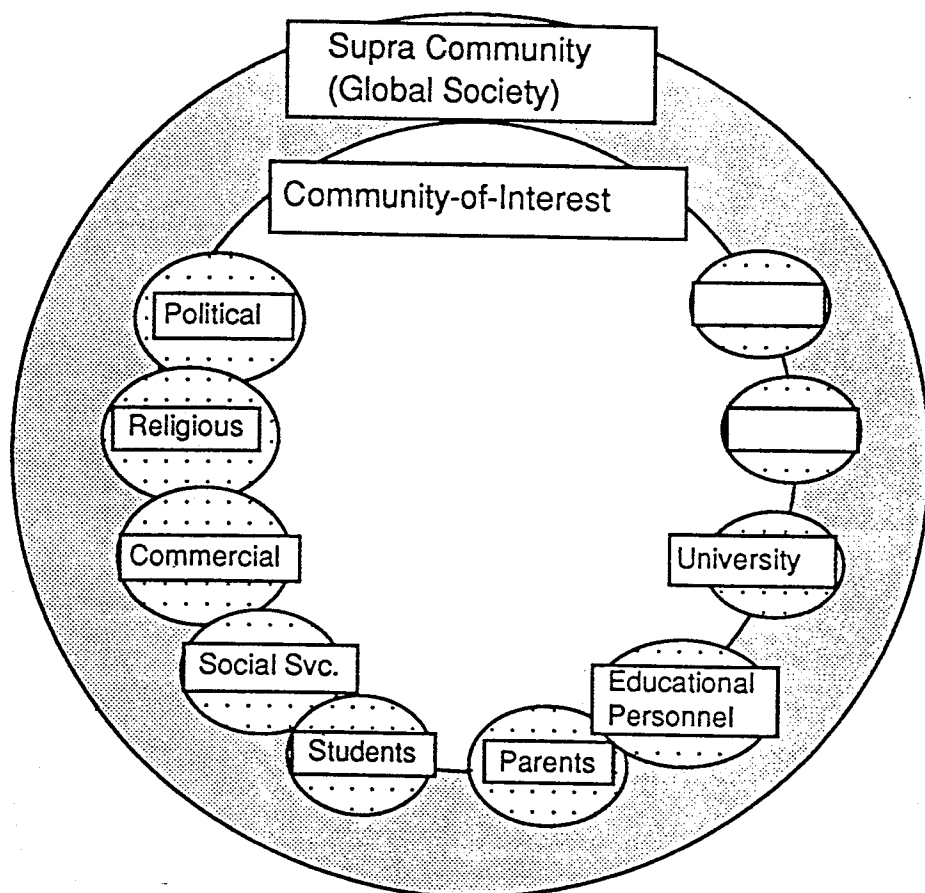
Therefore, it is useful to consider the community as a system. A school community combines people, institutions, regions, and processes which create a whole that goes beyond the contribution of any single component in the system. There is a synergy in the community. The concept of community as system encourages a global view of the community and forces consideration of all stakeholder groups, interactions among components, and effects of changes on the entire system.

We can say that every community has a supra-community of which it is a part and several sub-communities which are parts of it. Figure 1 represents the community as a system. In the case of Figure 1, there may be intervening systems which lie between the supra-community (here identified as the global society) and the community-of-interest (in this case the school system community). For example, there are national, regional, and local communities that exist separately from the school system and may lie between the global and school communities. Figure 1 also indicates that sub-communities may lie both inside and outside of the community-of-interest.

Groups that can be considered stakeholders (Reigeluth, in press) include political, religious, and

Figure 1

Community as System



commercial leaders, social service and educational personnel, as well as student and parental populations. Each of these sub-communities has its own members, social norms, and status in both the supra-community and the community-of-interest. Several blank sub-systems are shown in Figure 1 because we cannot identify here all stakeholders for a given community.

The visual representation of the systems in Figure 1 is purposeful. The community-of-interest has a boundary which separates it from the supra-community and any intervening communities. However, this system is an open system which exchanges materials, resources, and information with the larger global community and intervening communities. The sub-communities lie in both the community-of-interest and the supra-community. Stakeholders have one set of interests, expecta-

tations, and opinions of the community-of-interest, while they may hold separate interests, expectations, and opinions in the supra-community and maintain membership in the sub-community. Communities may overlap as indicated in the figure. Members of sub-communities may belong to more than one sub-community or even many of them.

Systemic Restructuring

We use systemic restructuring and Educational Systems Design (ESD) interchangeably. ESD seeks to create new images and divisions of educational systems which exist beyond the current paradigm or system of schooling. Banathy (1992) distinguishes between restructuring and systems design efforts, indicating that true systems design extends beyond the existing system to create something

new, whereas re-structuring, re-form, re-suscitating, or re-surrecting a failing educational system remains, according to Banathy, *within the already established system*. At the other extreme, the term restructuring has been colloquialized to mean almost anything which previously was considered a reform effort. Since many practitioners are not familiar with the term ESD, and *are* familiar with the term restructuring, we use the term *systemic restructuring* to denote *the kind of restructuring that creates a new paradigm or system of education*.

While selection guidelines for community participants are useful regardless of the school effort (reform, systemic restructuring, etc.), the importance of *effective* community participation in systemic restructuring is particularly crucial. Both Reigeluth (in press) and Banathy (1991) express deep concern over the state of community "buy-in" at the outset of design efforts. Banathy (1991) emphasizes the importance of community support, saying it must be "generated by inviting and encouraging a genuine involvement of representatives of the community in the design activity" (p. 168). Such a posture demands a balanced, committed team of individuals willing to exercise power and take responsibility for the education of their community's youth.

Precursors to Selecting Team Members

If certain conditions are not met prior to beginning a change effort, the success of such an effort is at stake. Three steps which should precede selection efforts include: (1) assess the readiness of the community; (2) select an outside facilitator; and (3) obtain commitments from stakeholder groups (Reigeluth, in press).

One of the key elements of community readiness (precursor #1) is a high level of *dissatisfaction* with the current system of education (Reigeluth, in press). This may seem averse to school personnel, who are accustomed to promoting a positive public image of the school. However, communities which display high levels of dissatisfaction are more willing to invest the necessary time and are more likely to be open to radical changes. Without community dissatisfaction, change efforts are likely to be piecemeal and short-lived.

Although the school corporation or district may appear committed to the restructuring process, it is imperative that readiness for restructuring be closely scrutinized. The selection of team members should only be considered *after* sufficient readiness has been confirmed. In order for a systemic effort to have a chance of success, it is necessary to lay a strong foundation of grass-roots support for

fundamental change.

The second precursor to selection efforts is to choose an outside facilitator. This may not be necessary in all cases, but is highly suggested, as an outside facilitator brings objectivity and expertise in educational change processes to the task of systemic restructuring.

The third precursor to selection efforts is to obtain commitments from stakeholder groups. This is important because, if you begin selection prior to gaining commitment in formal settings such as the local Chamber of Commerce, you run the risk of powerful stakeholders perceiving that they have been "cut out" of the process.

Why Is Selection So Pivotal?

As we have seen from the precursor-discussion, selecting team members can be a delicate political process, as well as a search for excellent volunteers. As the first formal and visible step in an educational change process, selection will set the tone for future work on the project. As the design process progresses, ignored or unrepresented stakeholders can block or even sabotage design efforts.

Havelock (1973) presents several case studies which support the importance of early inclusion of community stakeholders in change initiatives. One case study outlines the development of a sex education curriculum for K-12 in which the community, which was not consulted publicly early in the process, blocked the program:

... we should have been forewarned by the experiences with community antagonism which had been related to us by school personnel in districts which had established similar programs At one meeting questions were raised about how we were going to teach Judeo-Christian ethics. Our spokesman stated that, 'We can't teach morals,' and BOOM! the lid flew off. (p. 29)

The rest of the case is an account of sabotage efforts undertaken by an extremist group which planted doubt in the minds of the citizenry and drew negative media attention to the sex education curriculum. Carefully selected community representatives on the curriculum design team would have been helpful in overcoming such political roadblocks.

The importance of who will be involved should not be underemphasized, even in teams invested with varying levels of power. Recent reform efforts have focused on the inclusion of community participants in roles ranging from advisory to decision-making capacities. Regardless of level of power, it is important that time be taken to ensure that the highest caliber participants engage in

public school change efforts. While some administrators may feel that lengthy selection processes detract from the "business at hand," and may be tempted (particularly where advisory boards are concerned) to shortcut selection recommendations, it is important to recognize that team efforts can be jeopardized by insufficient inclusion of stakeholder groups.

A recent experience in a large urban school district may serve to illustrate this point. Advisory boards involving parents and community members were created with little or no direct power over the affairs of their local school. After one year of meeting as advisory boards, the community members were clamoring for, and received, increased legitimacy and power. Therefore, selection should be viewed as an opportunity to gather the best volunteers the community has to offer, given that what starts out as an advisory board may evolve into a more powerful decision-making team.

In summary, whenever an invitation is issued to involve community members in one's public schools, care should be taken to ensure that a balanced, informed, committed group of volunteers is chosen. If such care is not exercised, stakeholder groups may rise up to challenge or sabotage the change effort.

The Two-Team Approach to Change

Reigeluth (in press) identifies two primary groups for designing educational systems: a coordinating council and a design team. The coordinating council, or advisory board, serves a primarily political role, while the design team serves a more central role in the actual design of an alternative educational system. There are thus two major functions for team members: (1) advisory board members garner support for already-made decisions, and (2) design team members are responsible for actively participating in a decision-making role.

In drawing support for restructuring decisions, the advisory board member is asked to concur with broad goals and provide political cover and financial resources for often controversial decisions. In actual decision-making, design team members are involved before solutions are determined, and even before problems are clearly defined. Here, the community member takes responsibility for problems and solutions, and educators must respect and value the opinions of this lay person. In educational change efforts, these two roles can be serial or parallel, temporary or permanent. However, the roles are distinct, requiring different skills and personnel and calling for different *selection criteria*. The *procedures* for selecting these two teams, however, may be the same.

Overview of a Community Selection Model

A cautionary note is merited here. We recognize that each community has varying environmental conditions under which community member selection takes place, and the procedures and criteria must, by necessity, be flexible enough to accommodate different types of communities and populations. The model presented here is a set of guidelines that are *meant to be altered* to fit the needs of practitioners in the field.

1. Identify stakeholder groups.
2. Decide to form a selection delegation.
3. Hold town meetings:
 - A. Identify candidates for selection delegation.
 - B. Identify candidates for design team and advisory board.
4. Select delegates.
5. Hold Delegation Meeting #1: Orientation.
 - A. Review the criteria for selection and procedures.
 - B. Review design team and advisory board purposes.
 - C. Review selection delegation task.
6. Hold Delegation Meeting #2: Candidate Overview.
 - A. Present candidate profiles to delegation (without discussion).
7. Hold Additional Delegation Meeting(s).
 - A. Discuss candidates based on criteria.
 - B. Divide candidates into two groups, "yes" and "no." OR Create a "short list." OR Use a combination approach.
 - C. Create a draft slate as a growing whole.
 - D. Review/revise final slate.
 - E. Vote on final slate.
8. Confirm commitment of members on final slate.
9. Hold a "Coming Out" event.
10. Ensure self-renewal of teams.

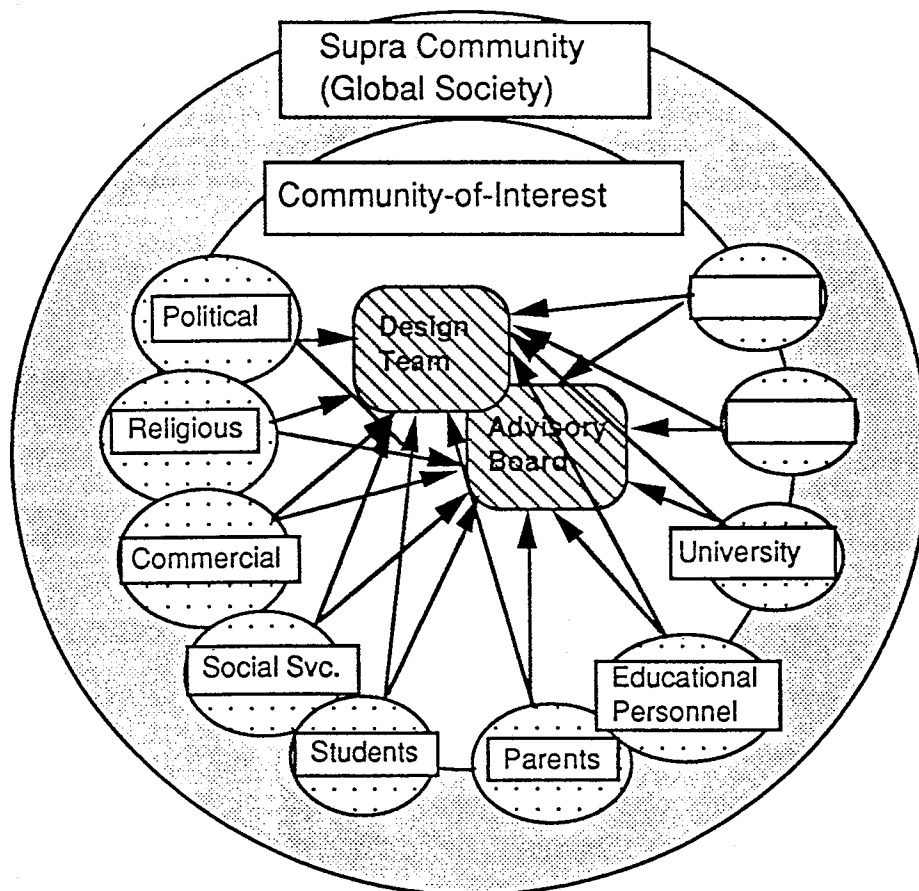
The Community Selection Model

1. Identify Stakeholder Groups

Within a school community, there are sub-communities or stakeholder groups which are affected by the educational system. Each stakeholder group should have some influence on the design and advisory teams. As a result, we can say that generally, team members should be chosen from these stakeholder groups (see Figure 2). Early identification of stakeholder groups is crucial to successful selection efforts. "Without such involvement," writes Stevenson and Pellicer (1992), "change is perceived as a 'top-down' process, misunderstood and often resented by

Figure 2

Two-Team Approach and Stakeholder Groups
(note two arrows from each element)



those charged with its implementation" (p. 137) Haphazard identification of stakeholder groups can lead to acrimony or sabotage of change efforts.

2. Decide to Form a Selection Delegation

A good method of selecting team members is by selection delegation. In this method, a delegation of interested stakeholders who are *not* going to serve on the design team or the advisory board is asked to select members for both teams based on predetermined criteria. It is not recommended that only one person select the team members. If an individual working alone, say the school principal, identifies all the team members, the community may view the team(s) as being "stacked" rather than representative of the larger community.

Therefore, it is recommended that a delegation be formed in order to identify and select team members.

The most common criticism of selection delegations is that, if the criteria are not followed, partisan choices are likely to result. Sumption and Engstrom (1966) suggest that the "group" membership ties which result from the delegation approach may be emphasized to the point that team members are not able to collaborate. As long as the criteria are kept in the forefront of the selectors' minds, it is unlikely that such conflicts will emerge.

Another difficulty with selection delegations is that they take time. Time must be spent selecting the delegation and meeting with them to choose

