

## **A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF H. M. HAMLIN AND THE COMMUNITY SCHOOL CONCEPT**

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### **Abstract**

*The purpose of this historical study was to gain a deeper understanding of the community school and its developer, Herbert M. Hamlin. Primary sources including texts, magazines, monographs, and an oral interview and secondary sources including books, journals, and magazines were analyzed. The researchers found Hamlin's community school philosophy revolved around practical applications of a community-based program of education. His philosophy was grounded in the ideals of the American democratic process and rural communities. Community schools represented a logical way for today's teachers to intertwine the community and program's needs and wants.*

### **Introduction**

Secondary agricultural education programs face many challenges in the new millennium. Recent educational reforms such as the No Child Left Behind Legislation have called for increased accountability measures in education and alignment with academic standards (Ohnemus, 2002). Further, budget cuts in many school districts across the nation as well as threats to state and national funding sources for career and technical education programs such as the Perkins funding have created economic burdens and threats to the sustainability of agricultural education programs at the secondary level (Cavanagh, 2004). Additionally, the United States Department of Education (2003) stated that, "Current expenditures in constant 2001-02 dollars increased 47 percent from 1987-88 to 2000-01. From 2000-01 to 2012-13, current expenditures in constant 2001-02 dollars are projected to increase" (para. 3-4). The current context of change and uncertainty raises many questions for agricultural education programs. For instance, how must secondary level agriculture programs adapt to be viable in times of rapid societal change

and economic uncertainty? An examination of the work conducted by Herbert M. Hamlin over eighty years ago could lend insights into this question.

The success and stability of current agricultural education programs are at risk as programs become more expensive to fund and many school districts are already facing financial uncertainty. It is imperative in times of state and national financial crises that school districts and programs minimize costs. Hamlin's community school philosophy espoused the utilization of community resources within public education. The community school could potentially enrich learning experiences of students while keeping expenses to a minimum. The study of Hamlin's works can serve to inform the profession regarding important principles upon which agricultural education was founded, in order to better serve the future needs of secondary agriculture programs. In regard to the importance of knowledge of the past, Thomas Jefferson (1954) said, "History, by apprising them of the past, will enable them to judge of the future..." (p. 148). An examination of the past principles upon which agricultural education programs were

founded as well as the scholars who developed them could serve as the basis to inform the scholars and practitioners of agricultural education in the new millennium.

### Theoretical Perspective

The perspective of community school and community-based education from two recent sources informed the researchers. Hiemstra's (2000) *The Educative Community* articulated that the community school concept is a sociological process that makes the community and its resources central to its educational infrastructure. A community school meets the needs of the community it serves, involves citizens in problem solving and democratic decision making, builds community empowerment and beautification, and emphasizes interaction with the community to maximize the education delivered. The philosophy developed by Hiemstra asserts that learning is a lifelong necessity for the individual. Thus, the learning process begins at birth, progresses through school, and continues into one's life and work within a community. Gallbraith (1995) deduced three aspects of life long learning through community educational providers, formal education (i.e. learning institutions), nonformal education (i.e. libraries), and informal education (i.e. family). Haleman and DeYoung (2000) and Doeden's (2000) case studies found positive attributes of community-based education within the context of rural education that focused on the development of students, community, culture, economies, and social networks and structure. The key factor in this type of system is the collaboration of the young people and stakeholders in the development of the rural community. This collaboration creates students who are aware of current rural issues and ready to take a leadership role in their rural communities. Haleman and DeYoung and Doeden represented a real-life examination of Hiemstra and Gallbraith's community-based education philosophy. These studies informed the researchers on the community-based perspectives defined by contemporary educational theorists. While Hamlin

represents a different historical time frame, theoretically he was proposing many of the same concepts. He developed a philosophy of community-based education for agricultural education.

Hamlin began his scholarly career as an Assistant Professor of Agricultural Education at Iowa State University in 1921. Hamlin was a co-founder and the first editor of *The Agricultural Education Magazine* in 1929 (Warmbrod, 1969). As a scholar, Hamlin's work included the study of the influence of communities on agricultural education. "H. M. Hamlin and others in Iowa measured the effects of vocational agriculture on the farming of communities over a period of years" (Stimson & Lathrop, 1942, p. 617). Hamlin's scholarly work developed into his community school philosophy and evolved into what is promoted today as an integral component of secondary agricultural education programs.

During an era of stringent centralized federal and state guidelines for agricultural education programs (Hillison, 1999), Hamlin actually argued for the contrary. Hamlin's notions of community schools, the role of agricultural education in the community, and the ways in which the community guides the agricultural education program itself served as a foundation for the implementation of effective agricultural education programs at the secondary level. Hamlin asserted that with cooperation and communication a great deal could be done to meet the needs of a school and community. His writings offered both philosophical statements about the nature of agricultural education and the community, yet also contained practical applications to this philosophy. Finally, to fully understand the ideas of the community school one must understand the context from which it was developed. The historical era in which Hamlin worked shaped what he wrote about and the language he used. A deeper understanding of those historical influences is important when trying to understand the philosophy of Hamlin's community schools and to better inform present and future generations of the principles upon which a discipline was founded.

## Purposes and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the community school philosophy and its developer, H. M. Hamlin. The following objectives guided the stated purpose of the study:

1. Articulate H. M. Hamlin's definition of a community school;
2. Analyze the functions of H. M. Hamlin's community schools;
3. Interpret the philosophy of H. M. Hamlin within its historical context.

## Methodology

Historical research methods were used to accomplish the purposes of this study (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 1996). Borg and Gall (1983) stated that historical research involves, "the systematic search for documents and other sources that contain facts relating to the historian's questions about the past. By studying the past, the educational historian hopes to achieve better understanding of present institutions, practices, and problems in education" (p. 800).

Data were gathered through research at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign library and personal communications with eyewitnesses. Whenever possible, the researcher utilized primary sources of information. The primary sources utilized in this study including: manuscripts, books, articles in *The Agricultural Education Magazine*, *Education Week*, U. S. government reports, research studies, and personal communications with eyewitnesses. Secondary sources of information included books, articles from the U. S. government documents published online, and articles from *The Agricultural Education Magazine*, *The Journal of Agricultural Education*, and *Journal of Research in Rural Education*.

The researcher exposed all documents to internal and external criticism. The researcher established external criticism by reviewing each document to determine authorship, originality, and authenticity. The documents were also examined for internal criticism to evaluate the accuracy

and worth of the statements for addressing the objectives of the study. An audit trail, a reflexive journal, and peer critiques of themes established formed documentation for trustworthiness and credibility of the analysis.

## Results

The first objective was to articulate the definition of a community school according to Hamlin's writings. By name and geography only, every public school is a community school. As such, the citizens of the community pay for the operation of the school and the education of their children. Yet not all schools would fulfill Hamlin's definition of the true community school (Hamlin, 1949). According to Hamlin's (1949) definition, "A 'community school' would recognize that meeting the needs of the people of its community is its only function" (p. 25). Thus, the difference between a community school and a public school was the interaction between the school and its community. To fulfill this stated definition, the community school aimed to prepare students in the way the community deemed necessary and satisfy needs for further development of the community and its citizens. In regard to the purpose of the community school, Hamlin (1949) noted:

Even to start thinking about community schools, we must get rid of the idea that public schools exist primarily to help students to realize their selfish purposes. They have been established and are supported and controlled by the public for public purposes. Individual desires are recognized to the extent that they are consistent with public interest. (p. 16)

While this definition serves as a guide for the general aim of the community school, its applications remain unclear. Thus, an understanding of the specific functions of the community school is needed to fully illustrate the concept of a community school.

"Traditionally, education is a community affair" (Hassinger & Pinkerton, 1986, p. 205). The second objective was to determine

the functions of a community school. Hamlin (1949, 1952, 1955) highlighted many procedures and functions necessary for the effective use of the community school. These included utilizing community resources, incorporating the expert knowledge of local professionals, and implementing advisory councils to give a voice to the community and its citizens.

The first function of the community school was to serve as an extension of school resources. Hamlin noted that, "Every school is limited by the resources it has" (Hamlin, 1955, p. 76). Even in times of financial stability, schools cannot provide all of the resources and equipment to effectively teach all of its classes. Yet, according to Hamlin, the community that surrounded the school had an abundant amount of these resources readily available that would provide potential authentic learning environments for students. Further, utilizing community resources effectively also meant bringing the resources to the school itself. Many schools could not afford to purchase the advanced technologies and equipment utilized in modern agriculture, yet utilizing the community for such technology represented an important method for providing students real-world learning experiences. "No school is so well equipped physically that it does not need supplementary facilities its community can provide" (Hamlin, 1949, p. 29).

The utilization of expert knowledge comprised a second essential function for the effective implementation of the community school. "A community includes people with a great variety of special abilities which are needed to supplement the abilities represented in the school staff" (Hamlin, 1949, p. 29). The use of outside community members as experts in a particular subject matter was intended to supplement the general knowledge of the agriculture instructor. Hamlin noted that, "Many laymen know certain fields practically that the teachers know only theoretically; teachers and laymen make effective teams for teaching theory with practice" (1955, p. 73)

The third essential function of the community school, as well as H. M. Hamlin's lasting legacy to agricultural

education was the development of advisory councils. Advisory councils initially appeared in agricultural education in 1911, and Rufus Stimson is historically credited as the first advocate for their use (Moore, 1988). However, Hamlin credited the rise of advisory councils to adult education classes of the 1930's. "The modern movement toward the use of advisory councils in agricultural education traces directly to their use in connection with evening schools for farmers rather than to the early use general councils for agricultural departments" (Hamlin, 1947, p. 14). As such, "adult class" councils did much to help their programs, including recruiting students and helping plan courses. Some adult class councils evolved into general agricultural education councils that advised the high school agriculture educator in course planning at the secondary education level (Hamlin, 1949). Hamlin (1940) believed that advisory councils were vitally important to the teacher. "Teachers of agriculture need groups of laymen to assist them in making their more difficult decisions, in planning their programs and policies, and in interpreting their work to the public" (Hamlin, 1940, p. 224). Hamlin studied advisory councils and disseminated findings from effective practice in the implementation and use of advisory councils.

Advisory councils were intricate representations of the community that had the support of the school administrator and board of education. The group numbered between nine and twelve citizens that represented a diverse scope, such as in age, gender, geographical location, and occupations, of the community. Hamlin (1947) argued that advisory council members should represent the community rather than their demographic or specialty. To Hamlin, an effective advisory council would perform a variety of tasks for their school's agricultural education program. These members assisted the teacher with curriculum questions, material shortages, and general guidance with the direction of the agricultural program. The advisory council was the most important part of Hamlin's philosophy for a community school. A proper advisory council could

accomplish many of his community and school's functions, making tasks easier for the teacher. Furthermore, the advisory council represented the democratic process within a community school. The voice of a community and its influence on its own students' learning was one of Hamlin's (1946) major visions for the community school.

The 'American Dream' depends for its realization upon the development of schools which are responsive to and which serve all of the people. A system of advisory councils which is part of our traditional machinery for operating the schools seems to be the best device that we have discovered for linking school and community and for developing and maintaining a wholesome interest in the schools on the part of the people generally. (p. 125)

The advisory council represented the most effective cooperation and communication between the community, its citizens, and the school's program.

A final function of the community schools was to serve as a vehicle for the public to have a voice within its own school. Hamlin (1955) espoused the role of citizens and education.

In this country public education may be conducted for the purposes and the people its citizens specify.... Citizens are not only responsible for the kind of public education we have. They are responsible also for means open to citizens for improving public education. If the arrangements for the participating of citizens in school affairs which have been described are inadequate or unsatisfactory, citizens can change them. (p. 25)

Hamlin noted that the public's involvement in the educational process was one of the most important responsibilities of a community. The benefits of the interaction between the school and the public would have many lasting positive effects. When managed properly, advisory councils and other cooperative groups helped guide the

agricultural education program to best satisfy community needs. The interaction and progress with the community school became especially powerful with a community that had a plan of action for the community as whole. While Hamlin's philosophies of community schools were structured around the community, they were grounded in his ideals of education and democracy.

The third objective was to interpret the philosophy of Hamlin within the context of the era in which he wrote. Hamlin was a philosopher of agricultural education. As such, he had many ideals regarding the goals and purposes of education, particularly at the secondary level. These ideals were inherently democratic in nature. In this instance, democracy referred not to a broad and liberal education, but rather democracy as a process and culture. J. W. Studebaker (1940) articulated this form of democracy and world debate in an article for *The Agricultural Education Magazine*. Studebaker wrote, "This democracy of ours and the educational system it nourished were products of an agrarian society of men who counted on the land and tools for their independence" (p. 184). It is difficult to directly label Hamlin's belief as a certain definition of a process, such as socialism or democracy. One can perceive his ideals closely matched those of the general American public, though they were not mutually exclusive.

The agrarian Democratic ideal existed from rebirth of secondary agricultural education in the late 19th century. Davenport represented one of the most influential voices in agricultural education prior to the Smith-Hughes Vocational Educational Act of 1917. "The American Farmer is not a peasant... He belongs mostly to the ancient and honorable Puritan stock descended from that great middle class in England that came to this country to establish and maintain, not aristocratic, but democratic institutions" (Davenport, 1908, p. 7). Historically, agricultural education was orientated to the community from the onset of its modern revival (Kliebard, 1999). Furthermore, agricultural education began as a rural phenomenon with its roots in the community school philosophy (Ashmun,

1966). Hamlin's scholarly contributions evolved during an era that experienced the Great Depression, WW II and the beginning of the Cold War. The American people sharply contrasted themselves from the enemies they faced (i. e. McCarthyism). Given the historical context of his writings, Hamlin's community school philosophy is grounded in American and Democratic ideals.

Hamlin's emphasis on community involvement in education went beyond the notions of advisory councils and community-based programs that are espoused today. Hamlin became the chairman of Department of Agricultural Education of the University of Illinois in 1938. While at the University of Illinois he wrote some of the most influential books of agricultural education for his time. His most notable books were *Agricultural Education in Community Schools*, *the Public and Its Education*, *Public School Education in America*, and *Citizens Committees in Public Schools* (Woodin, 1963). During this period the world became split into an ideological battleground between a variety forces. Hamlin represented the democratic way of life and even served in the United States Marine Corps for a year during the First World War (Warmbrod, 1969). Hamlin's (1949) community school's language contained statements regarding his views on the American way of life.

The practice of democracy has been protected in many ways.... The schools in our democratic country have, however, often been far from democratic. In recent years there has been increasing realization that we must bring them into line with our general practices if we are to prepare citizens of a democracy. (p. 23-24)

Hamlin's incorporation of the democratic principles within his text conveyed a clear vision of how schools and citizens should function.

These ideals may have meant more to Americans in the 1930's, 1940's, and 1950's than one might expect today. During this time, America attempted to separate itself

first from European Fascism, then from the Soviet Union's way of life after World War II. This reaction was apparent in even agricultural education writings. "This is a day of isms. In foreign lands it is fascism, communism and so forth ...In Russia, Germany, and Italy education of the people is to indoctrinate them with the ism of the force in power. The press, the schools, the churches, all must teach to this end" (Martin, 1939, p. 143). At that particular time in history, these countries had government controlled educational systems. The totalitarian regimes controlled not only education, but also the voices of the citizens. Studebaker (1940) articulated these concerns in another article that appeared in *The Agricultural Education Magazine*. "When people are burning books in other parts of the world, we ought to be distributing them with great vigor; for books are among our best allies in the fight to make democracy work" (Studebaker, 1940, p. 185). These excerpts represented the patriotic movement that America was experiencing during that period before, during, and after World War II. While one may look at the past as a whole in which things are either black and white or right or wrong, Hamlin was a man viewing the world through a particular context. Therefore, one must relate the man to the era and not the era to the man.

Hamlin did offer his view on different ideologies and political movements. The follow passage from Hamlin (1952) sheds light into his beliefs.

There has been fear that the schools in some communities may be substituting new value systems for those the people have held. It is not surprising that, having witnessed the use of school's by Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia to set children against their parents, many Americans have been watchful lest this happen here. Most of the apprehension is unwarranted, but distrust of teachers by the public can develop all too easily in the present situation which keeps teachers and the public too much segregated. The present fear of communists in the school is a dangerous element in the present situation. (p. 6)

Hamlin seemed acutely aware of the dangers of over zealous ideologues. He provided the reader with a valuable disclaimer for the pro-democratic beliefs he espoused. Without this, Hamlin's texts may be seen as zealous in their own right. "The prospects for agricultural planning are particularly bright because we are evolving democratic planning procedures, suited to rural people, our firmest defenders and best practitioners of democracy" (Hamlin, 1937a, p. 64). He had a deep believe that the rural society was strongly democratic. In regard to agriculture teachers teaching curriculum that had no relation to the needs and will of the community, Hamlin (1937b) declared, "There is something seriously wrong with it. No teacher of agriculture has any right to exercise that much authority independently. After all, he is a community employee and not a community dictator" (p. 7). These examples of Hamlin's political nature span his entire career of scholarly research.

"Public education is education of, for, and by the public. No lesser concept will do. It is axiomatic that it should be conducted in the public interest. It is assumed in this country that the public interest is determined by the public or its adequate representatives" (Hamlin, 1955, p. 9).

In regard to the democratic process Hamlin (1949) noted, "We are accustomed to thinking of democracy as right and just; we have not always realized it is, in the long run, the most effect arrangement" (p. 24).

A glimpse into the past and consideration of world events illustrates how some of Hamlin's ideas became popular in mainstream America. An analysis of nearly 30 years of texts revealed that Hamlin's ideals were constantly democratic and citizen-based over that period of time. "The [advisory] council is a device of representative democracy" (Hamlin, 1943, p. 7). This ideological bias did not diminish, but rather substantiated, Hamlin's contributions to the field of agricultural education. Hamlin utilized innovation in his attempt to solve a problem with agricultural education. He offered a solution that appealed to the public during WW II

and beyond. This study of Hamlin's writings strongly suggested that world events have impacted, and continue to shape, the nature of public education and agricultural education in America.

### **Conclusion and Implications**

H. M. Hamlin became one of the most prolific writers of agricultural education and a leading mind in the discipline. His writings had an impact on those around him and his philosophy left a lasting legacy upon agricultural education. Hamlin is considered by many to be one of the great minds of agricultural education. "He was the leading philosopher of agricultural education during his lifetime" (Phipps, personal communication, April 11, 2003).

According to Hamlin, not every public school or community unit school district was a true community school. A community school required cooperation and communication with the community's citizens. The school existed to fulfill the requirements of the community. Yet the school and community are separate entities working towards the same goal. Hamlin believed that community schools gave the public a voice, which was a vital part of democratic process. Hamlin's community school philosophy, though predating the work of Gallbraith (1995), Hiemstra (2000), Haleman & DeYoung (2000), and Doeden (2000), offers a relevant example of certain parts of a modern community school. Hamlin detailed the functions of the community within the school. His community school philosophy doesn't detail the benefits of the community from the school. Nevertheless, Hamlin's community schools represent a relevant template for the modern agriculture program.

The impact of Hamlin's research in current times can be noted in a number of ways. First, advisory councils are considered to be a vital component of quality agricultural education programs today (Phipps & Osborne, 1988). Hamlin was the founding expert on the appropriate use of advisory councils and promoted the importance of advisory councils in agricultural education programs more than anyone else (Moore, 1988). Secondly,

Hamlin's notions of the aims and purposes of community schools extended beyond the implementation of advisory councils and are widely used in agricultural education programs today. One question for further investigation could be how contemporary advisory councils meet the needs of the community and represent Hamlin's community schools? Little evidence is present to suggest whether or not modern advisory councils do fit into a community school model and if they truly help the program meet the needs of the community. This question is very important, when considering that advisory councils are considered to be an integral part of a functional secondary agricultural program. A study of Hamlin's community schools requires contemporary programs to reflect on how they fulfill the tenets of the community school philosophy.

Hamlin's philosophies do not neatly fit into the two-sided ideological struggle of the historical era in which he lived and worked. Hamlin did not mold his views for the nation's acceptance, but rather his ideals matched the mood of the country during that era. It was the nation that accepted his philosophy of community schools, a nation heavily influenced by world issues. One can deduce from this that the world has a very powerful effect on American education systems on many levels, including practices and policies as well as philosophies and beliefs. These effects could be direct, such as the passing of the Smith-Hughes Vocational Education Act of 1917 in response to world demands. Changes could also occur indirectly, like the slow and steady acceptance of Hamlin's ideals of the community school.

### Recommendations

As secondary agricultural education programs evolve to meet the changing needs of society, it is crucial that they do not forget the lessons of history. Agriculture teachers, teacher educators, historians, and researchers should revisit the beliefs and philosophies of the founding fathers of agricultural education. H. M. Hamlin's community schools philosophy is increasingly relevant for today's agricultural

education programs. Teacher educators should incorporate Hamlin's writings on community schools and the use of advisory councils into program development courses for pre-service agricultural education students. Secondary agriculture teachers should review Hamlin's recommendations for including the community into the agriculture program as experts, resources, and advisors. Teachers should utilize Hamlin's writings in conjunction with the community-based program planning material developed by the National FFA Organization (2004) to organize agricultural education programs that are supported by, and meet the future needs of local communities.

H.M. Hamlin is not the only historical figure that is relevant to today's agricultural education programs. Agricultural education scholars, historians, and researchers should regularly research the writings and philosophy of individuals involved in education, vocational agriculture, experiential education, and youth leadership development. *The Agricultural Education Magazine* should regularly publish historical reproductions of philosophical articles from the beginnings of vocational agricultural education and the Future Farmers of America organization. Most of today's agricultural education majors, secondary agriculture teachers, and teacher educators never have the chance to learn and understand the theoretical foundations of agricultural education. Reading and researching historical scholars such as H. M. Hamlin would help today's agricultural education professionals understand the past, and be better prepared for the future.

There is a need for a concise and definitive history of agricultural education and its pioneers. This would create a vast repository of knowledge for all agricultural education researchers. Agriculture education must study its history to visualize its future. Attaining a historical perspective for the discipline will help shape the discipline for future generations.

Additional research is needed to determine the connection between Hamlin's definition of community schools and advisory councils and what is taught in pre-service teacher education programs at land-

grant universities. Research should be conducted to determine current changes in American society and the applicability of Hamlin's community schools concept for today's agricultural education programs. The value of community resources to agricultural education today should also be investigated. New technologies, current community arrangements, changing demographics, the value of community resources, and American ideals may shape the nature and need for community schools in modern times. Future investigations into current community needs could help to make community school functions outlined by Gallbraith (1995) and Hiemstra (2000) more applicable for today's agricultural education programs.

Research should also be conducted to establish the links between agricultural education and world events. Understanding the impacts of world events to education could help scholars to develop curriculum materials, instructional strategies, and student activities to bring real-world events, and the local communities' reactions to them, into the secondary agriculture classroom.

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