Foreword

Drs. Bryan and Wang are presenting much of the latest thinking and practices that are in use or have the potential for use by the cohort of educators that refer to themselves as “community educators,” which is a distinctive title that sets them apart from their school-oriented colleagues. The distinctiveness of community education is underpinned by several core beliefs, values, and foundational principles.

Briefly:

- Each community is unique, as each individual is unique.
- One has to understand the wants and needs of each community before you can address their needs.
- Decisions are made at the operational level. No big one size fits all bureaucracy is needed or practiced.

These foundational practices are enough to mobilize authoritarian bureaucratic mindsets to set off alarms and spark resistance to turning decision-making to the uninitiated. At the same time as those resistances to the principles of community education were in vogue, the idea caught the imagination and attention of the individuals who have become icons to those who embrace the concept of community education.

In the 1930s, Frank J. Manley, a physical education director, championed providing physical education and recreation for teenagers in depression-mired Flint, Michigan, USA. At the same time, Charles Stewart Mott was looking for ways to “give back to a community in need.” Juvenile crime was rampant in depression-riddled Flint, Michigan, as was unemployment with a 26-30% unemployment rate, and both men were looking for creative solutions.

Charles Stewart Mott was considering funding several boys clubs, when he heard Frank Manley’s idea to open the potential boys clubs in often vacant school buildings. The schools were closed in the afternoons, evenings, weekends, and summers, so given proper resources, the schools could become boys clubs. The Mott Foundation as funded by Charles Stewart Mott in several schools in Flint later became the Foundation’s hallmark nationally.

Opening the first Flint community schools became Frank Manley’s responsibility. Manley handpicked a “team” of community educators. These community directors carried forth Charles Stewart Mott’s humanitarianism and philanthropy, and Manley’s charisma and understanding of people. Both Mott and Manley were people- and community-oriented, and the new cadre of community school directors carried those ideas to the community.
Today’s news is replete with the Emmer Gantry stories of takers, not givers, who enrich themselves at the expense of their followers. In life, it is important to know with whom you are dealing, and C. S. Mott and Frank Manley were the real thing.

One of several illustrations follows the “Mott” approach. Mr. Mott and Charles “Boss” Kettering were friends and associates. They both had large foundations dedicated to serving humanity and the community. While both men were alive, the word on the street was that Kettering had all of the staff “read bureaucracy.” Kettering maintained large staffs, with few working programs, while Charles Mott had a small staff, with many working, successful programs.

Up until Mott’s retirement, a grant from the Mott Foundation was drawn on Charles Mott’s personal checking account, and was written by his own hand. What is equally illustrative is that Frank Manley delivered these checks himself, in person.

A great deal of technological water has passed under the bridge since the passing of both men. In fact, the water has become a torrent that few could have predicted, and continues sweeping away old ideas and institutions.

Both Mott and Manley had core values and beliefs that would withstand the onrush of the technological tsunami. They were both people-oriented, rather than object-oriented. Both saw good in people, not gold. The Mott Foundation funded hospitals at Wayne State, the University of Michigan, and the child health service in Flint. For both men, people came first. Neither one was a Luddite, but neither one would welcome money-saving notions that reduced the “quality of life” to enhance bottom line profits. They both promoted high tech, as well as high touch. An example, customer answering services that push out employees as well as customers were seen as false economies. Automatic tellers and unemployed business majors would not make sense in their scheme of things.

Specializations that divide us, not unite us, is not progress. Technologies that reduce the quality of life and make some individuals redundant again did not make sense. Redundant, in Great Britain, describes a lifetime of unemployment and being unemployable.

When you look at the people Mr. Mott and Mr. Manley surrounded themselves with, you find individuals that grow people, not reduce them. Both men brought women on-board long before it became fashionable or required.

In too many cases, some with high tech skills have become “smart-alescs,” who have little respect for those who bake bread or fix the plumbing. A person can have dignity, even if they do not have a Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube. Charles and Frank did not like the word “boss” and would not have championed technocrats that would become the “new bosses.”

The quality of life for individuals, in groups or communities, is the first and major priority. Community educators, as individuals and in groups, must not let the machine become the end-all. For it makes no matter how fast, small, or impressive it becomes, it is still a tool. Mankind should never become a tool of its own tools. Change at its best is creative construction, and/or destruction. The creative aspects should always protect the sanctity of the individual.

The air of caution in the humanitarianism of Mott and Manley should not detract from the fact that if they were alive today, they would double down on the best practices and promises of technology, as a management and leadership tool. As an example of a specific, Manley’s bulletin board of activities would be replaced by a grid of demographics from the latest census on that center’s community.

Vasil M. Kerensky
Florida Atlantic University, USA
Vasil M. Kerensky passed away unexpectedly on Wednesday, November 21, 2012. Dr. Vasil M. Kerensky was a former Charles Stewart Mott Eminent Scholar of Community Education and Professor of Educational Leadership (1982-2003) and more recently Professor Emeritus in Educational Leadership. He was a member of the faculty for over 35 years. He was a leader in Florida and the nation in community education and gave tirelessly to the field. Dr. Kerensky published: The Sovereign: New Perspectives on People, Power, and Public Education (Kendall Hunt Publishing Company, 1989), Education II: The Social Imperative (Pendell Publishing Company, 1971), A New Foundation: Perspectives on Community Education (Pendell Publishing Company, 1979), Education II: Revisited – A Social Imperative (Pendell Publishing Company, 1975). Prior to moving to Florida, Kerensky was the principal at Haslett High School in Michigan. Prior to retirement, he traveled around the world promoting and speaking on behalf of Community Education. He was very active in the community and served on the board of the Greater Boca Raton Beach Tax District for 10 years.