

Comprehensive Community Reformulation

Foundational Presuppositions

The Institute is firmly convinced that any effective resolution to the problems of cities and communities must be comprehensive. We believe that any other approach is finally harmful to the situation and wasteful of funds and human effort. The fragmented approach with one project here and another there, unrelated by a common inclusive model, is but sophisticated benevolence, never penetrating to the real issues. Such methods only tend to put proud flesh over the deep wounds of the forgotten communities.

During the 1960's, the Institute developed a model program of comprehensive community reformulation in a 16 square block community on the West Side of Chicago. Out of this experimentation, certain operational principles, methods and constructs emerged. A description of some of these will indicate what is meant by comprehensive community reformulation.

1. The *first operating presupposition* has to do with geography. Comprehensive reformulation begins with a **carefully defined area**, set apart by clear boundaries. This reduces the sense of chaos created by the seeming impossibility of the task. It curtails dissipation and duplication of effort. It enables penetration in depth that reaches to the last citizen. It makes possible a clearer picture of the maze of problems that paralyze the citizens. The delimited area fosters a sense of community identity which is essential to the comprehensive approach.
2. The *second operating presupposition* requires that the **depth human problem** in the community be filtered out and directly dealt with. This is crucial to comprehensiveness. All other facets rest directly on this foundation. Unless the imagination of the citizens is refurbished, re-programmed, if you please, nothing else can lastingly be altered in communities.
3. The *third operating principle* is that **all the human and ecological problems** in the community must be addressed simultaneously and in a coordinated fashion. Piecemeal approaches never get at the real issues and cannot create the needed morale for action. In order to move one problem toward significant solution it is finally necessary to move them all. The education, economic, social, political, cultural and ecological problems cannot be disjoined from one another if effective resolution is intended. Each individual is a total human being.
4. *Fourth, all age levels* among the citizens must be dealt with at once. Just as community problems reinforce one another, so the postures of the various age groups dramatically influence each other. If the elders are neglected, they will unintentionally communicate their images of submissiveness to the young. Programs must be created that will operate from the cradle to the grave. The comprehensive approach to community reformulation requires a network of interrelated and coordinated projects which deal with all the various levels and groups representing the beginning, rising, emerging, established and elder generations.
5. The *fifth operating principle*, the **use of symbols**, may be the most important, even though its function is also the most difficult to articulate. Every effort that deals with a substantial body of people is deeply dependent upon symbols. In creating a community, large or small, a sense of commonness in mission must be created. A task and a corporateness relative to the task define community, and this is mediated through living symbols. These include songs, festivals, the geographical area itself, its distinguishing name, landmarks, art pieces, rites, insignia, local leaders and respected persons, and on and on. Symbols are crucial to the morale and expectation that make the difference between social despair and creative society. Symbols are foundational to inclusive social change.



Adapted from Dean Joseph W. Mathews' Testimony before the Subcommittee on Government Research, Committee on Government Operations, US Senate on April 17, 1968. Sited in *Bending History: Talks of Joseph Wesley Mathews, Volume II*; John L. Epps, General Editor, pages 194-196.

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