*Full Length Research Paper*

# Community strategies that replace marketing in the relationship between continuing education organizations and the community

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Abstract

**The existence of community concepts is analyzed here with the aim of reaching definitions of continuing education and other related education forms. The role of the community environment as a natural place for a relationship with education institutions is also considered, along with community strategies designed to ensure that the relevant organizations relate effectively to the local environment and contribute to the development of the community. Emphasis is placed on the value of the use of community development programmes and on establishing a learning community, a community of practice and a work community. The importance of the creation of social capital is also emphasized, along with the roles of adult education in the community, community leadership, grass roots organizations, coalitions, empowerment and critical reflection and networking. It is proposed that community strategies could replace marketing if a community approach to doing business is used. It is argued that, by employing such strategies, educational organizations can build a sustainable relationship with the community.**

**Keywords:** Continuing education, Community, Strategies, Organization, Marketing.

## INTRODUCTION

Community strategies are necessary to develop relationships between organizations and communities (Juárez, 2011). Such relationships, which are usually created with the assistance of marketing techniques, cannot be based merely on an orientation to individuals, but on forms of community development that can ensure that a firm is sustainable. Continuing education is in a good position to take advantage of these strategies. It focuses on the person and the environment and on community values, norms, meanings, history and cultural identity (Van Der Ven, 2003), along with changing attitudes, knowledge and skills (Mardar, 2010), understanding others and seeking harmony (Delors et al., 1996:21-22). The aim is to help individuals become knowledgeable and capable of informed judgements and action, and conscious of their relationships with the environment (Delors et al., 1996:20).

Thus, there is an association between education and the use of community strategies to promote educational services. In this theoretical study, the existence of community concepts in continuing education and other related education forms is analyzed. Also, the manner in which education promotes an ongoing relationship with the community and the community strategies to differentiate itself from competitors in education market is examined. These strategies can be used as substitutes for standard marketing techniques and can stabilize the relationship of education organizations with the community, based on the development needs of both community and organizations.

However, this process requires some focus to be placed on previous conceptual analyses such products (educational offers) in order to determine whether community contents can exist in education definitions and modalities. It also demands some examination of the community (client) as a proper space for the relationship with organizations and, finally, a description of the potential community strategies that fit demand. Consequently, this is a

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conceptual-theoretical research study which includes analysis of approaches to the relationship of organizations with the community.

## Community content in education and educational offers that justify community strategies and are not merely marketing

Although education takes into account individual differences (Watson, 2007), it is one of the products offered by organizations that generally involves a sense of community, as it is rarely carried out purely by individuals and is subject to government regulation. Its orientation is toward community as it provides knowledge, skills and models of behavior for citizens (Parellada and Vallonesta, 1997:23), as well as contributing to a country's productivity (Camors, 2009) and social stability (Vila, 2000). Furthermore, according to United Nation Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), it is the essence of individual and community development (Delors, et al., 1996:14).

The individual construction of learning (Billett, 2009) creates knowledge by experience, reflection or instruction (Parellada and Vallonesta, 1997:22), and this contributes to the community. Community-based learning combines these objectives with academic activities (Holland and Robinson, 2008) which occur in the context of the community rather than in an academic setting. This becomes clear in a conversational environment in which students are motivated (Watson, 2007) by their individual needs, intentions and consciousness (Billett, 2010), even if those motives are self centered. This is also true in training for job performance (Lopez and Leal 2002:17) which leads to adaptation to technological change and working conditions (Parellada and Vallonesta, 1997: 22), which contribute to the wellbeing of the community.

Thus, educational activities have a community status, but many differences exist among them. While education provides conceptual-theoretical frameworks and analytical-critical long-term training and techniques, training needs to accommodate rapid changes (Buckley and Caple, 1991: 5-6), and to solve problems in the environment (Pulgar, 2005: 27). Informal learning serves the interests of the student more than the employer (Overwien, 2000), whereas training is more directed at work than at individuals (Buckley and Caple, 1991: 2). Continuing education trains both individuals (Parellada and Vallonesta, 1997: 21) and transmits cultural legacies (Morales, 2009).

Thus, some community content exists in every educational offer that could justify a community approach to the relationship of organizations with the environment.

## Community content in educational modalities that promote community strategies instead of marketing

The educational crisis, as described by Coombs (Sanabria, 2009), divided education into formal, non-formal and informal elements (Riera and Civís, 2008), making knowledge and experience visible (Colardyn and Bjornavold, 2004). However, these three forms of education arise from the macro-concept of education and all involve some participation in communities. Formal education is government regulated (Colom, 2005), institutionalized and hierarchical (Coombs and Ahmend, 1974:19). It creates growth and integration (Morales, 2009), includes certification (Baiba and Peks, 2005) from elementary education diplomas to doctorates (Colom, 2005). It is an intentional form of learning (Colardyn and Bjornavold, 2004), which is highly structured and involves admission criteria (Aguirre and Vasquez, 2004) and serves the interests of the general population.

Non-formal education is a product of innovation and new professions (Colom, 2005). It is organized outside formal structures and does not require certificates or qualifications (Baiba and Peks, 2005). It contains many elements of learning (Colardyn and Bjornavold, 2004) and takes learners in different directions (Coombs, 1989). It is flexible in methodology and content (Herrera, 1993), learning (Balan, 2009), duration, the people it involves (Camors, 2009; Morales, 2009), and in how it integrates work and free choice (Fitzgerald, 1993) and satisfies needs (Combs and Ahmed, 1974: 23). Its flexibility and adaptation to populations reveals its community character. Also, it helps build communities by creating social capital and networking knowledge (Shrestha, et al., 2008). Informal learning occurs throughout life (Baiba and Peks, 2005) and can be considered as either an intentional or non-intentional form of learning (Colardyn and Bjornavold, 2004). It consists of the experiences or accidental forms of learning that occur in everyday life, and does not require certification (Colardyn and Bjornavold, 2004). It also includes environmental elements (Aguirre and Vasquez, 2004), the development of strategies and the correction of errors (Herrera, 1993), and interaction with other types of learning (Overwien, 2000).

Because of the interrelationships between these forms of education, community content penetrates them. Informal education includes non-formal and community education, social counseling includes informal education and self-determined learning relates to non-formal education (Overwien, 2000). Also, the relationship between formal and non-formal education is a key to learning throughout life (Morales, 2009). Thus, continuous and individual learning (Billett, 2010) requires considerable organization to meet the needs of the populations (Camors, 2009) with a community focus. This focus should always be present in education. In this way,

community contents permeate education modalities, favouring the use of community strategies to promote education offers.

## Continuing education and lifelong education forms that promote the organization-community link beyond marketing

Various educational forms support a permanent relationship of organization with the community, promoting organizational sustainability and growth. Thus, community content characterizes continuing education. This type of education follows initial training (Mejía, 1986), facilitating individuals in becoming aware of themselves and the environment (Delors, et al., 1996:115), and increasing competitiveness in organizations (Mardar, 2010) through vocational education and skills (Fitzgerald, 1993). This education meets organizational needs (Mardar, 2010) and increases community growth by connecting education and training (Vali, 2012).

Although non-formal education institutions must provide continuing education (Lujan, 2010) while educators coordinate relations with the community (Cieza, 2010), it is a mistake to consider the community as just a recipient to be filled, as education aims to solve the community's problems. Thus, institutions must be a part of the community if they wish to develop. The same applies to lifelong learning. Such learning promotes social integration and equality of opportunity (Mardar, 2010), along with greater understanding of others and the world (Delors, et al., 1996: 21-22), so the involvement of communities is crucial (Billett, 2010). The community perspective is evident in the four pillars of lifelong learning, which are: a) learning to learn, b) learning to do, c) learning to live together and d) learning to be (Delors, et al., 1996: 96-129). Furthermore, this form of education transmits knowledge (Delors, et al, 1996: 23) for social action at work (Delors, et al., 1996: 20), while promoting competence (Tejada, 2005) in terms of experience-practice integration in continuing education (Zarifian, 1999). Therefore, institutions cannot only take on the role of service provider, as the community contributes considerably to promoting knowledge by competencies. Moreover, lifelong education is a confluence of formal, non-formal and informal forms of education, and creates new value (Jongbloed, 2002) by avoiding breaking ties with the community. Establishing a balance between the needs of individuals and the community is relevant (Billett, 2010) in a cultural context (Fitzgerald, 1993). Also, solving community problems without relying only in personal achievements and results in the creation of long-lasting relationships.

Thus, education provides a series of ongoing opportunity for organizations and communities. Higher education should be a process of continuous learning

(Németh, 2011) focused on interest groups (Melton, 1996), designed to achieve the following objectives: a) quality and efficiency, b) universal access, and c) an opening to the world (Vali, 2012) and interaction with the environment. In lifelong education, or prolonged education (Colom, 2005), study and action are a part of learning (Tünnermann, 2010) and knowledge development (Lamb, 2011). Also, every social group is in its own way educational (Tünnermann, 2010).

Certain types of permanent education address the competitiveness of organizations (Delors, et al, 1996:113) as well as changes in markets, technologies and transferable skills (Colardyn and Bjornavold, 2004). On the other hand, adults want recognition, growth, learning, influence and authority (Chen, 2002) but they also need to learn about society, rights and responsibilities (Melton, 1996) and, since learning binds to individuals communities (UNESCO Institute for Education, 1998), it is necessary to assess this learning (Billett, 2010) and its impact (Holland and Robinson, 2008). This is done within the community. It should also be taken into account (Németh, 2011) that adult education promotes the skills and knowledge required to participate in society (UNESCO, 1976), including basic, professional and updating training in permanent education (Delors, et al, 1996, p. 117).

Similarly, lifelong education is the basis of citizenship (Saban, 2010), since learning increases pro-social behavior, multiculturalism and understanding (Eyler, et al., 2001). Pedagogy (childhood or adolescence education) and andragogy (adult education) confirm lifelong education (Riera and Civis, 2008), combining formal and non-formal knowledge into competencies for society (Delors, et al, 1996:115), with practices in different contexts (Forrester, et al., 2000).

There are a number of relationships between the above mentioned concepts. Thus, permanent education is an expansion of adult education and lifelong education (Tünnermann, 2010), emphasizing integrity and concern for the individual (Tünnermann, 2010:123). Permanent education includes adult education and learning out of school (UNESCO, 1976, p. 2), while lifelong education is similar to permanent education in its use of continuous learning (Ortega, 2005) awareness of the self and the environment, and social function (Delors, et al, 1996:15). Similarly, vocational training, according to organizational needs (Hartley, 2007), is, for Delors, a part of permanent training (Mardar 2010), which promotes permanent learning (Delors, et al, 1996: 96).

In addition, continuing education involves training throughout life, while continuous education is an extension of school education and relates to permanent education, which in turn relates to adult education (Requejo, 2003: 17-19). Permanent education encourages learning at different periods, modalities and purposes (Preece, 2011) and contributes to lifelong learning in local and global contexts (Aitcheson, 2003).

Continuing education concerns the professional aspect of education, while permanent education can be defined more broadly (Tünnermann, 2010). In permanent learning, individuals learn through taking actions in life (Su, 2007). It differs from education and training, because they terminate at a given age (Forrester et al., 2000). Such learning is a socio-personal fact (Billet, 2010), is self-justifying (Forrester, et al., 2000), and helps develop different skills and ways of changing (Preece, 2011), both of which are very important (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2010).

These many forms of educational concepts and their community contents force educational institutions to seek a permanent relationship with individuals and communities. Thus, there is a link between organizations and the community and the sustainability of educational institutions. Marketing might not fit the requirements of this link, since a strategy must focus on the community and not just on individuals. It involves problem-solving over an extended period, rather than focusing on single educational events.

## The community as a relationship space with organizations

A community is a socio-geographic ecosystem, with plural interactions, networks, and identification as a historical group (Cieza, 2010). It consists of both individuals, groups (Engestrom, 2004:6), and subgroups, with the same object (Hartley, 2007), affection and commitment to values, norms, meanings and culture (Etzioni, 1996). In the same vein, educational organizations are micro-societies with culture, climate (Backman and Secord, 1968), goals, resources and self-evaluation processes (Cardona, 2008), personal development and social transformation (Sandoval, 2008). Individuals contribute to their educational mission (Cardona, 2001) through interactions with each other and the environment (Cardona, 2008).

Within this context, cognitive activity produces learning (Nevis, et al., 1995), creates critical thinking and develops practice (Diaz, 2000). However, organizations need to be healthy (Martin, 2003) in order to promote participation and educational communities with self-awareness and sensitivity (Cardona, 2008). Organizations have to offer an education which is integrated with the community (Cieza, 2010) and which meets the needs of each country (Ospina and Sanabria, 2010), in order to help instigate social transformation (Asociación Colombiana de Universidades [ASCUN], 2008:16).

However, the relationship between organizations and the community is often conducted in ways that may hide the reality of the state of the community under the guise of efficiency. Some educational organizations are oriented towards customers by their use of marketing techniques, such as market research (Muñiz, 2008), market intelligence, geo-marketing, promotion, advertising, telemarketing, direct mail, public relations, the use of databases and customer relationship strategies (Customer Relationship Management [CRM]), among others (Curry and Curry, 2002). Similarly, they take into account promotion, distribution channels, pricing structure, market fragmentation (Slater and Narver, 1995) and educational programme needs, tastes, expectations and student satisfaction (Ospina and Sanabria, 2010). Disregarding the fact that marketing techniques consist of forms of manipulative selling (Wilkie and Moore, 1999), the overwhelming majority of technical accounts do not include a vision of the organization as a part of the community. Thus the key elements that could contribute to sustainability are often missed.

Education marketing relates to product marketing. It can fulfill the needs of the local environment (Ospina and Sanabria, 2010), reduce uncertainty (Eyssautier, 2006: 25) and include a target market (Zapata, 2000). This strategy attracts customers with products that take advantage of opportunities (Slater and Narver, 1995) and which meet needs and expectations (Jaworski and Kohli, 1993), by means of adaptive learning (Slater and Narver, 1995). However, such marketing does not in itself contribute to maintaining a relationship with the community.

Thus, although marketing in education leads to innovation and efficiency (Patrinos, 2000), its commercialization links to service (Moorman and Rust, 1999) maximizing benefits for segments and individual customers, with homogeneous responses (Rust and Verhoef, 2005). Nevertheless, these responses are heterogeneous, requiring heterogeneous resources, targeting small units and increasing the required representative sample (Rust and Verhoef, 2005). In this way, strategies such as Customer Relationship Management (CRM), which express a philosophy and organizational culture (Fayerman, 2002), constitute a segmentation approach based on product. However, the service-client connection puts an emphasis on service delivery and financial accountability (Moorman and Rust, 1999), and not on the community's needs. Educational events can solve such pressing problems within groups by encouraging the participation of the population (Lujan, 2010). This is impossible to achieve in one to one strategies, such as in relationship marketing (Juárez, 2011), so it is necessary to focus on community strategies. These strategies should allow predictions about the community, provide adequate support, and attempt to make the community organization relevant (Juárez, 2011).

Thus, the community approach includes community and popular participation (Freire, 1993), so that the community obtains knowledge with a conceptual-experiential base, promoting growth by integrating thinking and reality in a collective education (Pérez and

Sanchez, 2005). However, incorporating this experiential basis in the way organizations relate to the community is difficult, so other strategies are needed.

In consequence, there are different educational processes according to the state of the community development and context awareness. Although consciousness relates to needs and required actions (Perez and Sanchez, 2005), it is not possible to know what happens in a community, without being a part of that community (Juárez, 2011). It is a mistake to believe that we understand something from where we are not a part, even if making predictions is possible. An example is non-formal education, where participatory planning is the management approach (Lujan, 2010).

Therefore, community can be considered to be a relationship space for education modalities, as long as organizations are ready to change their vision and consider themselves as a part of the community.

**Community strategies that replace marketing in the relationship of education organizations with the community**

To solve the problem of the relationship of education organizations with the community, several strategies are available. There are large differences among communities (Juárez, 2011), so different approaches are used, depending on the nature of the communities and their opportunities for growth and development. The interest in the community links the various community strategies, but they have distinctive characteristics. These strategies replace marketing when using a community approach to business. A brief description of each one follows.

Community development depends on a form of community strategy which consists of encouraging citizens to communicate and express their desires and build a community (Van Der Veen, 2003). There are three forms of education in community development: a) local leadership education, b) awareness, and c) the provision of community services (Van Der Veen, 2003). Thus, the purpose is responsibility, social welfare (Riera and Civis, 2008, p.136) and culture, without discrimination (Zepke and Leach, 2006). One example is literacy programmes that require awareness (Van Der Veen, 2003) and an interest in community development, as literacy is a new resource.

A community development programme is another strategy by which the population participates in planning a programme and in sharing information about its objectives and processes (Zepke and Leach, 2006). Standards of living, culture, history, institutions, environment building, political structures, economic systems and technology can be considered to be resources of the community (Anderson, et al., 2003), but they also are a part of community development projects

in terms of their role in the procurement of better living conditions.

Another strategy is the creation of a learning community. This involves individuals of all ages exploring opportunities and facilities, as well as volunteering and community-based action (Holland and Robinson, 2008). This addresses the challenges and meets the needs of adults (Hartley, 2007) incorporating community structures, social capital, cooperation, knowledge, networks and a common vision (Kilpatrick, et al., 2003). Another form of relationship is the community of practice. This includes interactions such as reflection and meta-reflection, communication by e-mail and online discussions (Barrett, et al., 2009). This aim is to build knowledge, which can be useful to the community at a later time.

Another relevant strategy is a working community, which can even be directed to organizations. In such a community, individuals participate in volunteer programmes, with a corporate social responsibility to grow professionally (Holland and Robinson, 2008). For this strategy to succeed, it must involve a real and necessary learning (Van Der Veen, 2003), since there is no reflection on the outcomes of professional development based on community or voluntary sector, and this could lead to benefits being overlooked (Holland and Robinson, 2008).

The development of social capital is another compelling strategy. Creating social capital involves establishing relationships with people, creating awareness, trust, reciprocity and cooperation (Kilpatrick, et al., 2003), promoting formal and informal social networks, along with learning, integration, culture and cultural capital (Zepke and Leach, 2006). Social capital relates to community development and education (Kilpatrick, et al., 2003). It creates a community resource that offers a wide range of educational activities. Community-based adult education provides meaning and motivation for individuals. This is an experiential strategy in the community (Cueva, 2010), and many different activities can be performed. There are many different models of participation, including those with a public orientation, concerning success in life projects.

There also are other strategies that are designed to advance the transformation of relationship marketing into a relationship with the community (see Juárez, 2011). Community leadership is one of these strategies. Sometimes it poses a sense of claim (Negrete, 2008) and contributes to cultural renovation (Hartley, 2007), so encouraging positive actions (Juárez, 2011). Anyone can be a leader in social planning and community movement (Van Der Veen, 2003), while community development, leadership and participation can be related to citizenship education.

A grassroots organizations strategy can also be useful. This involves taking on several problem topics (Gundelach, 1982) and promoting creative ways to deal

with certain problems and social cohesion within an informal environment. Coalition, which is another community strategy, enhances social activity in chronic conditions, integrating organizations into the community (Butterfoss, et al., 1993). In the same vein, spontaneous union, in the form of joining or community based organizations (Feighery and Rogers, 1989) can improve the relationship with the community, focusing on problem solving.

Empowerment and critical reflection help in understanding and coping with real life conditions. Economic inequality, discrimination and social status influence health (Pearlin, et al., 2005), Therefore, reflection about one's position in life and future possibilities for development are a necessity, and education can be extremely useful in facilitating this. Models have been created regarding quality of life (Yanos, et al., 2001) which can contribute to planning development and sustainability.

Continuing education networking supports the development of university policy (Thomas, 1995) and leadership associated with collaboration among providers of formal education (Shrestha, et al., 2008) and building communities. Also, networks that extend beyond the community provide access to physical, human and financial resources, including the building of trust (Kilpatrick, et al, 2003). Network-based marketing would be useless (McColl-Kennedy, et al., 2008) without the participation of people who believe in what they are doing (Schwab and Syme, 1997).

Therefore, community strategies represent a breakthrough in the relationship between organizations and the environment. Students may differ in their expectations (Zepke and Leach, 2006), but many problems associated with education are caused to the lack of a community perspective in marketing segmentation. The challenge is to build systems that expand education into other areas, but which conventional perspectives ignore (Walters and Cooper, 2011) and which include a diverse educational continuum.

Work and permanent learning involve inequalities, knowledge, new definitions, informal economies, hierarchies of knowledge and the recognition of social forces (Walters and Cooper, 2011). Many organizations will not be able to meet all of these demands in a community context. A community approach emphasizes social kinship, capital, partnerships, participation, practice and daily interaction with neighbours (Kilpatrick, et al., 2003), using a number of techniques (see Cueva, 2010), within community strategies. This helps to create an environment where learning is generated between community partners (Holland and Robinson, 2008).

Thus, the empowerment of communities through different types of education can occur throughout the life of a community in a permanent development. In this sense, the kind of permanent learning which is prominent

in communities (Adler et al., 2008) needs to be in line with the aims of the community (Billett, 2010). Thus, continuing education cannot just rely on individuals and negotiation of educational products, but on a community approach, and should develop strategies which are relevant to the problems and the community to be addressed.

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