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EVALUATION OF THE NEW YORK STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT CONFERENCE, NUMBER 1.

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THE MAJOR PROBLEM FACING EDUCATION, ACCORDING TO THIS REVIEW OF THE CONFERENCE, IS TO DEVELOP THE MOST EFFECTIVE LEARNING PROGRAMS FOR DISADVANTAGED YOUTH, WHICH SHOULD BE EVALUATED SCIENTIFICALLY. RIGOROUS STUDY IS NEEDED OF SUCH ISSUES AS (1) THE NATURE OF THE MOST EFFECTIVE PROGRAM FOR THE DISADVANTAGED LEARNER, (2) THE ASSESSMENT OF THE BASIC COGNITIVE STRUCTURE OF DISADVANTAGED YOUTH, AND (3) THE PREDICTIVE VALIDITY OF TEST SCORES. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CHILD'S PERSEVERANCE AT A TASK AND THE DEGREE OF INTEREST AND CHALLENGE IT PRESENTS SHOULD ALSO BE STUDIED. COMPENSATORY PROGRAMS, TOO, MUST BE CRITICALLY SCRUTINIZED. BECAUSE SOME EVIDENCE SHOWS THAT THEY ARE NOT THE MOST SIGNIFICANT VARIABLES IN EDUCATIONAL CHANGE. ATTENTION MUST ALSO BE GIVEN TO SELECTION OF TEACHERS AND TEACHER CANDIDATES, AS THE TEACHERS CAN SIGNIFICANTLY CHANGE A STUDENT'S ATTITUDES. IT IS FELT THAT THE CONFERENCE OVERLOOKED THE IMPORTANCE OF SCHOOL INTEGRATION IN EDUCATING THE DISADVANTAGED. THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS MUST ASSUME RESPONSIBILITY FOR DESEGREGATION, AND SCHOOLS OF EDUCATION MUST INSTILL A COMMITMENT TO INTEGRATION IN THE SCHOOLS AND IN SOCIETY. THE SCHOOLS COULD ALSO ENHANCE THE SELF-IMAGE OF ALL MINORITY GROUPS BY TEACHING ABOUT THEIR HISTORICAL CONTRIBUTIONS. (NH)

EVALUATION of the New York State Education Department Conference, Number I

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This conference at Yeshiva University has been stimulating and provocative. After sitting in on many of the seminars focusing on the plight of the socially and educationally disadvantaged, several major educational concerns have become apparent. In reviewing these concerns, the approach of the educational researcher will be used to summarize those perceived to be most critical.

The first question we might pose as a result of this conference is, "Where are we in terms of developing the most effective learning programs for disadvantaged youth?" This is the major question raised at conferences which focus on problems of the disadvantaged. After each conference I become more convinced that, although there is much activity regarding the task of educating disadvantaged youth, we cannot readily answer this question. This is the major dilemma which confronts us today.

A proliferation of "so called" new programs for disadvantaged children have been structured but have not been systematically and rigorously evaluated. This lack of scientific evaluation is the major reason why we have such difficulty determining our progress. Dr. Leonard West commented this morning that in the past we have utilized teacher comments and responses of participants as one approach in determining the effectiveness of a given program. Granted such responses and comments give us valuable insight to the teachers' perception of the effectiveness of programs; however, we must approach this critical problem of evaluation in a more scientific manner. What we must begin to do is to effectively use experimental and control groups and look at independent and dependent variables as they relate to specific problems.

To illustrate, reading is a critical problem directly related to the plight of many youngsters in terms of their ability to move successfully through an academic program. But, as we view school programs throughout the country, very seldom do we see an attempt to take a random sample of disadvantaged youngsters, to test them before the introduction of the program, to introduce the experimental variable (specifically a new reading program), and to compare the new reading program (experimental treatment) with a more traditional or different approach to reading. This seems to be a very sensible and reasonable research approach that is seldom followed.

Many significant questions, such as the following, were posed in many of the seminars: (1) Need we discover the educational world all over again for disadvantaged youngsters? (2) Is curriculum approach more critical than academic motivation? (3) Is program content more relevant than aspirational levels? These questions concerning the direction of our effort—toward the learner or the educational program—should be systematically and rigorously studied. Furthermore, theory is needed which can be generalized for socially and educationally handicapped populations around the country. If we begin to assess the impact of a given program in terms of its ability to effect positive academic progress, this program, if operational from theory, will have implications for programs in East Detroit, Houston, Atlanta or Watts. Many of the educational problems that disadvantaged young people experience in one community are essentially the same as the educational problems that other youngsters in a different part of the country experience.

Another major problem which confronts us from the research standpoint is that of assessing the intellectual ability of disadvantaged children and making predictions of future success in educational institutions. The definition of what is meant by intellectual status in this regard is very critical. It is my impression that we do not know very much about basic cognitive structure. We do know that disadvantaged youngsters tend to lag behind their more favored counterparts in terms of intelligence and achievement test performance.

If we know very little about basic cognitive structure or intellectual processes, we cannot infer that disadvantaged youngsters have disturbed cognitive processes. We can, however, speak in terms of basic learning strategies. We know very well that youngsters who emanate from middle-class environments typically approach learning tasks very differently in contrast to their less favored peers, but this has no implications whatsoever for basic intellectual structure.

On the other hand, there is research data that we in education tend not to overlook. We generally assume that academic aptitude and achievement tests correlate significantly with academic achievement (grade point average). Several recent research studies indicate that test scores correlate highly with school achievement for youngsters whose environment is abundant. However, with disadvantaged youngsters, standardized achievement and aptitude tests very often correlate at a low and insignificant level; hence, they are poor predictors of later academic success. When a large sample of disadvantaged male Negro high school students in Detroit, Michigan were tested, a —.01 correlation was found between scores on the verbal section of the SCAT and high school grades. This study did find that a test of achievement motivation was a much better predictor of how Negro youngsters would perform when placed in an academic setting. This information is available, but we in the field of education develop programs based on instrumentation with doubtful predictive validity for all students. Many of the traditional tests we now utilize tend to assess much more effectively the effects of a past disadvantaging environment. They measure what a youngster has not learned and tend to be poor predictors of what a youngster can learn in the future.

Certain major premises relevant to disadvantaged children in the school setting must be further assessed. For example, it was stated that according to one well known educational researcher, lower class children do not focus well on difficult tasks. Other researchers conclude that these students have low motivation for academic achievement, either unrealistic or low-aspiration levels, and see no value in education. These assumptions could reflect just as readily the type of educational experiences provided for them. An assumption could also be made that, if lower and middle class children are presented with difficult tasks which are challenging and stimulating, they will attend to such tasks for very long periods of time. The difficulty of the task may not be the critical factor; it could be the perception that the youngster has of the particular task. The latter is a researchable assumption.

Comments about low motivation and low aspirational levels on the part of disadvantaged youngsters tend not to hold up at all times. In a study of Negro children in Prince Edward County, Virginia, it was found that the aspirational level of youngsters who were systematically denied formal schooling for a four year period was as high as that of non-deprived school children in a northern urban community. Thus, we cannot safely generalize about youngsters who are from poor backgrounds. We will

find a wide range of individual differences within class and racial or ethnic categories, and this range of differences must be taken into consideration in educational programming.

Systematic evaluation of compensatory programs must also be undertaken. We must determine: What aspects of the programs tend to be effective in promoting educational gain? The shotgun approach to compensatory programs appears to be nonfunctional. This is critical because most of the action-research money that is now available from private foundations and from the U. S. Office of Education goes into compensatory programs, including components such as teacher aides, small pupil-teacher ratios and after-school tutoring, with traditional programs "modified" to meet the needs of poor youth. We must ask, "Do they work, and if not, why do they fail to work?"

The recent Coleman Report and the Civil Rights Commission's report on Racial Isolation in the Public Schools as cited by Dr. Edmund Gordon indicate that compensatory programs and many of the modifications we structure in our public schools are not the most important variables in bringing about immediate and positive educational change for Negro disadvantaged youth.

A good example of this is the Mott Institute program in Flint, Michigan. Several million dollars have been poured into the Flint school system in order to raise the achievement levels of Negro youngsters who are in all-Negro schools. Often, the low achievement test scores of Negro children who have had the benefit of this program for the last three or four years are not significantly different from the achievement levels of youngsters in surrounding communities who have not had the benefit of compensatory programs financed by the Mott Foundation. This finding compares significantly with both the Coleman Report and the U. S. Civil Rights Commission report.

One recommendation resulting from exposure to the conference here is related to the approach being used to build effective programs for disadvantaged youth; namely, active and ongoing research is needed to systematically and effectively evaluate programs designed to facilitate educational gains in youngsters perceived to be disadvantaged. We cannot afford to wait until research points the way; we must keep innovating! But, we must systematically evaluate and, if necessary, modify programs that we design and put into the curriculum.

Permeating every seminar, irrespective of the focus of the group, was the following important concern: How can we assist teachers in developing healthy and positive attitudes toward poor youngsters? One discussant carried this concern even further: How do we assist teachers in developing positive, healthy and democratic attitudes toward young people who are not only disadvantaged but also are members of a minority racial group? This is a very difficult and extremely important question. Democratic attitudes are most essential to a teacher's ability to do an effective teaching job. Positive attitudes are even more essential when teachers are involved in instructing disadvantaged youngsters. If teachers do not recognize the dignity and worth of every student and desire to assist youngsters, regardless of their background, then they will not be effective as classroom teachers.

As an outgrowth of this concern, the question of teacher selection was posed. What criteria must we set up for teachers of disadvantaged children? How can we identify those teachers who are successful in instructing poor youth? One approach we might utilize is to look at classroom teachers through the eyes of their students. We might ask youngsters at the elementary level, "Why is Mrs. Brown a good teacher?" At the junior high school level, "What do you like best about Mr. Smith?" At the senior high level, "What qualities in teachers do you most admire?" In addition, effective criteria for teacher selection should be established by teacher education institutions. We must set up strategies to evaluate effective teaching ability.

We should also think very carefully about accepting into teacher education programs young people who have floated through five or six other educational programs before finally deciding to major in education. You know students who will say, "I was in engineering for a year, I was in pre-med for a year, I was in botany for a year, and then I finally decided that I was meant to be a teacher." You review the student's transcript and discover that he or she has flunked out of engineering school, pre-med, and a botany program, and now suddenly he has found himself. He wants to be a teacher!

"Culture shock" was another topic of concern during several seminars. This is relevant to the development of democratic attitudes. Teacher education programs have a major responsibility to assist young people in developing healthy and democratic attitudes toward all students irrespective of race or social class. We must find a way to develop appreciation of those who differ in terms of class, ethnic background or race. However, the shock of meeting youngsters whose language patterns may not be "acceptable," whose syntax or grammar is poor and who are not neatly dressed may not be the major aspect of the shock. Quite often the shock is precipitated by the structure of the school itself, i.e., administrative attitude, poor equipment, drab walls, and everything else that goes with schools in poor and often segregated neighborhoods.

Unfortunately, this conference has avoided questions about school integration. It's very interesting that most of what we have been discussing here may not be very relevant as indicated by the Coleman Report and the report of the U. S. Civil Rights Commission. This Civil Rights Commission report indicated that the one factor that brought about a significant increase in academic performance of Negro youngsters was school integration. If this is an important and significant factor regarding a positive increase in learning of Negro youngsters this has immediate implications for strategies that are presently being considered in programing for disadvantaged youth. School integration is a key strategy that cannot be avoided.

We speak about a democratic society and an integrated society, and then we place youngsters in a segregated institution or school that assumes responsibility for the structuring of long-term and very important attitudes.

Where does the responsibility lie in bringing about school desegregation? It is true that the public schools must assume a great deal of responsibility in this effort. We must also look to colleges of education to assume leadership in this area. Our teacher training programs are responsible for the principals and teachers who are in turn responsible for educating young people. We must assume a stronger posture. Colleges of education must lead in developing national commitment to school integration and an integrated society. Educators not only have responsibility in terms of fostering school integration but a commitment to integration at all levels. The difficulty here is essentially this: The plight of disadvantaged youngsters is tied not only to unfair educational programs but also to the inequities in our total society. Unless we educators also seek to bring about meaningful changes in other societal structures we will be dealing with the problems of disadvantaged youth in the year 2000.

The alternative to desegregation is the maintenance of Negro schools. If we continue to maintain segregated Negro structures in northern communities as well as in the South, we can expect to see more P.S. 201's. Negro groups will become more militant

and will demand that they have a larger share in the operation and maintenance of schools (which they should do anyway) that have been deliberately set aside for the education of Negro children.

Mrs. Marcella Williams indicated in one of the seminars that Negro children suffer damaged self images in segregated schools. Participants in other seminars concurred in this belief. This is a reflection of a system put into effect in the past to inaccurately report the historical participation of all ethnic groups in the development of our society. This is most apparent in the historical portrayal of Negroes and other minority groups in textbooks. What impact would it have on youngsters, Negro and white, if they knew that the first American clock was made by a Negro, or the first successful heart operation was performed by a Negro, or about Dr. Drew who developed blood plasma, or that a Negro developed the arterial traffic signal? Students should be aware of the fact that the same Negro man who developed the communication system on our railroads is the same one who developed the third rail on the subway system in New York. These events, in isolation, may not seem significant, but imagine the impact on the self concepts of minority youngsters when they see these events placed in historical perspective. We must accept the responsibility of encouraging school superintendents, heads of school programs, and state departments of education to reward publishing companies and writers who will adequately and honestly reflect the participation of all minority groups in the development of our country.

In summary, let me review the critical concerns discussed in this conference: (1) active and systematic ongoing research is needed to effectively assess programs now being structured to determine how they contribute to the educational progress of disadvantaged youth; (2) we must develop a systematic attempt to structure democratic attitudes on the part of all teachers. We are aware that there are some teachers who, because of their own attitudinal problems, will never be able to effectively work with disadvantaged youngsters. We must assist all teachers in developing healthy and democratic attitudes. Teacher training institutions should accept this challenge and structure programs on the undergraduate and graduate levels to attain this goal; (3) we must begin to develop a national commitment to school desegregation. This is an issue we can no longer avoid. It is not a problem reserved for Little Rock, Arkansas, or Athens, Georgia, but is a problem that is central to school systems throughout our nation. This is a national problem, and a national commitment towards school desegregation is needed; (4) an accurate historical portrayal of the role of minorities in the development of this country should be built into the curriculum. This will help to develop positive self concepts on the part of minority group youth and also will influence the perception of white youngsters and teachers; (5) the most critical task confronting educators is assuming the responsibility of educating poor youngsters. We cannot place the onus on the family, on the poor neighborhood. We can no longer afford to talk about cumulative or irreversible deficits. We must assume that all youngsters can learn and that it is our responsibility to teach them.

Finally, it is my general reaction to this conference that school communities around the country are in difficulty because they feel that they are unable to determine the direction in which to invest the efforts in coping with the problem of educating all youngsters. I believe that systematic evaluation of approaches that are now being structured can assist in determining an appropriate direction.