

SEL: A New Entry in the Acronym Game

By J. FOSTER WATKINS

TO be really aware, fully informed in today's educational world, one must be able to converse knowledgeably in acronyms. These words formed from the initial letters of various program titles in education—NDEA, ESEA, NSF, PACE, NFAH, *ad infinitum* — are the by-words, the labels of modern education.

The newest entry in the southeastern conference of the acronym game is SEL. The Southeastern Education Laboratory is one of a series of 20 regional laboratories formed throughout the United States following the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Educa-

tion Act of 1965 — ESEA. The funds for these laboratories are provided for in Title IV of ESEA, a section devoted to research. Each of these regional labs has identified specific concerns within their areas toward which their efforts will be directed. SEL serves Alabama, Florida, and Georgia, adjacent to the Atlanta Airport.

The alleviation of educational deprivation is the primary focus of SEL. Under the direction of Dr. Robert L. Hopper, the Lab Staff has chosen two approaches to this focus: (1) improving communication skills and (2) improving interpersonal relationships. The ap-

proach of improving communication skills is a long-term experiment designed to study the character of language usage in selected schools as a means of discovering ways of alleviating educational and cultural deprivation. The approach of improving interpersonal relationships is directed toward developing inservice education activities for professional personnel, curriculum experiences for students, and school-community activities for parents and lay persons.

To implement this program of research in communication skills and interpersonal relationships, a net-

(See next page)

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work of 24 potentially innovative schools which now serve large numbers of the educationally disadvantaged has been established in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia. While these schools differ among themselves, they serve a culture of the disadvantaged, possess leadership which expresses a desire to improve educational practices, and

manifest potential for change in other schools.

SEL IN ALABAMA

What does SEL mean in Alabama? Is it simply another acronym to add to one's list? Another special project?

SEL in Alabama means six pilot demonstration schools. SEL in

Alabama means research and experimentation directed toward alleviating educational deprivation. SEL in Alabama also means specific local efforts toward developing schools which can be examples of effective ways in which to combat educational deprivation.

Six of the 24 pilot demonstration schools in the region are located in Alabama:

Clements School, Limestone County System, Athens

County Training School, Choctaw County System, Lisman

Haleyville School, Winston County System, Haleyville

New Castle School, Jefferson County System, Birmingham

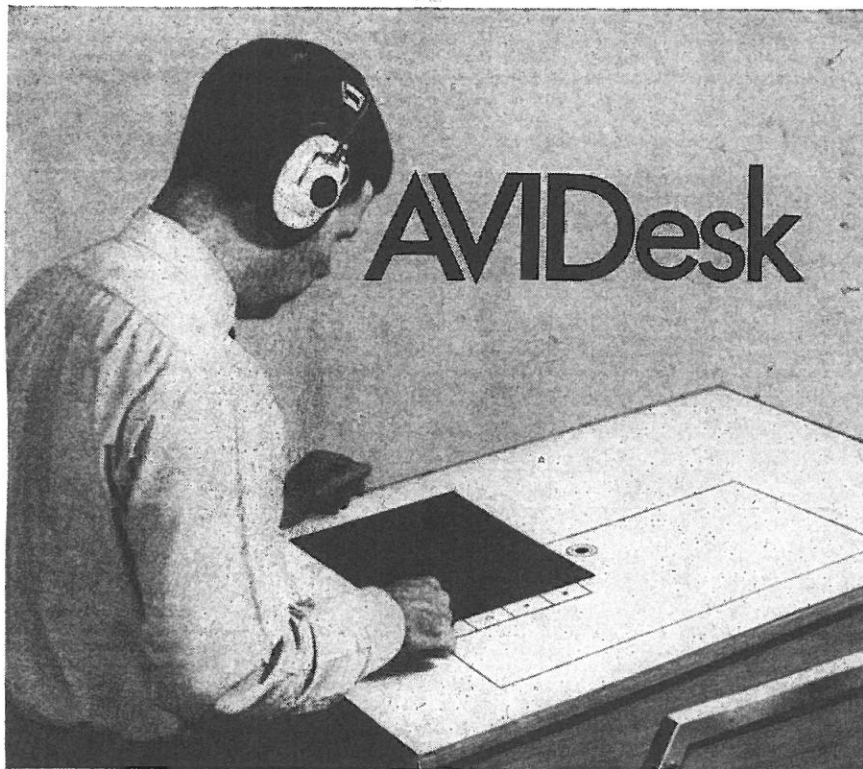
Stone Junior High School, Huntsville City System, Huntsville

West Elementary School, Cullman City System, Cullman.

More than 40 schools were visited and screened by the laboratory before final selection of these six. Many of those interested schools not selected may be involved in future expansion of the pilot demonstration school system.

The Southeastern Education Laboratory and these six Alabama schools are working together in two areas: (1) locally initiated curriculum developments and (2) the Laboratory's research program in communication skills and interpersonal relationships.

Through a self-study process conducted last Spring, each of the schools identified local curriculum and instructional problems and concerns. The Laboratory, operating through its field offices, provided assistance to these projects during the planning phase and has continued to support these local efforts with consultative assistance and limited instructional materials. Ranging from experiments in school-within-a-school organization patterns to in-service training programs, these local projects contribute to the devel-



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opment of these schools as exemplary situations.

In addition to the work on these locally-identified curriculum concerns, the six Alabama schools are cooperating with the Laboratory in its regional research program. The basis of the research to be done on improving communication skills and interpersonal relationships is being developed through the pilot schools in the region.

Four of the schools in Alabama are participating in the initial data gathering phase of the communication skills program. The literature related to educational deprivation contains many generalizations about the ineffectiveness of language programs for children who lack competence in standard English. From this point, SEL has begun a long-term project to study the character of language usage and ways in which educational deprivation can be alleviated by clearing up communication problems.

The communication skills program involves classroom observation, audio, and visual recordings of pupils' and teachers' language and interaction patterns. Multidiscipline panels of experts will analyze these data with special emphasis on the linguistic aspects of the teacher-pupil relationship. Significant observations will be organized into diagnostic and prescriptive techniques which will be refined and tested by teachers in the pilot schools.

The second regional program is concerned with improving interpersonal relationships between teachers, between teachers and pupils, between school personnel and parents.

Working in pairs and in small groups, professional members of school staffs seek a better understanding of their own attitudes and behaviors, as well as the attitudes and behaviors of others. The involvement of specific schools in these activities dealing with interpersonal relationships stems from the self-studies which indicated that

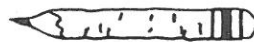
the lack of understanding of self and others is often a significant deterrent to the achievement of maximal instructional effectiveness.

Using guest consultants and programmed instruction materials, activities in interpersonal relationships are already underway with staffs and students. The involvement of the communities in these activities will begin later in the year.

Through its regional program, the Laboratory will continue to evaluate the application of its research findings and recently developed materials in the local school situations.

As it becomes necessary, new materials and processes will be developed. Other school staffs will be invited to participate in clinics designed to disseminate the results of the work done during this year.

So for Alabama, SEL is not just another acronym, but is definitely an important part of the efforts being made to strengthen education. The six pilot schools in Alabama would readily agree that SEL is a powerful member of the education game as well as the acronym game.



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