

Caliguri Applauds Federal Interest in Education

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THE VISION OF EDUCATION as one of our primary hopes for a Great Society will be highly enhanced when new school programs are instituted to serve an old customer--disadvantaged youth. New organizational and instructional changes in school programs will make the old customer, the academically deficient child, a thing of the past.

The Federal Government has finally recognized this fact by giving top priority to legislation designed to alleviate the educational problems of children in economically depressed communities. The Economic Opportunities Act of 1964 may well become a milestone in educational progress. Prof. John F. Mesinger makes this statement in a recent issue of the Phi Delta Kappan magazine:

"The burden of our poor is a great one, estimated by some to involve thirty million persons. . . The greatest hope for a breakthrough must come in the education area at an age prior to the normal legal entry into public schools. Public Law 88-452 offers the necessary support for many programs and particularly to develop pre-school demonstrations with culturally disadvantaged children."

Now that the Federal Government is offering more of its dollars to financially pressed school districts, many answerable questions can be raised about the academic problems of deprived youth. One key question may be posed here: How can academic values of culturally deprived youth be reconstructed? In considering this question, some background thought seems necessary.

NOTWITHSTANDING THE NECESSITY for pre-school programs, it is a hard fact of life that many Negro youngsters on the elementary and high school level also need a different type of educational programming in order to harness their energies and talents to academic values. In short, if the environment of these youngsters cannot be controlled by the school, then the school program must become the major control in more visible and productive ways than heretofore. As it stands now, many of these youngsters readily make the following statements:

"I don't study enough. . . I don't like to read. . . I can't concentrate. . . The other kids make fun of me if I try to make good grades. . ."

Competition for good grades by disadvantaged youth, in many instances, can be likened to a desire to take castor oil.

Moving to the front line of thought, it is urgently necessary to bolster the weak academic values of deprived youth through new educational program arrangements. These new educational programs must aid deprived youth to develop self-disciplined study and interest in academic subjects.

For instance, we may find that integrated education is necessary at the pre-junior high school level to provide a competitive push in counter-attacking the poor environmental influences which emphasize a "no-learning" theme to deprived youngsters. As another instance, it may be suggested that some program arrangements must be developed on the secondary school level whereby deprived youth will be grouped together as a means of focusing upon common academic deficiencies. As these academic deficiencies are removed, adolescent youth may move back into regular school programs. It seems clear that special organizational help is a first order concern for academically deficient children.

Now that some general hints have been offered about changes in grouping deprived youth, additional attention focuses upon possible specific instructional changes for the so-called students who "can't learn." From the first to the sixth grade, changes in the learning situations of these children are practically mandatory to accomplish any kind of achievement trend.

AS A FIRST CASE, reading instruction practices demand specialized staffs that can deal directly with the reading readiness and reading problems of early-grade children. Also, the

use of specialized staffs must be accompanied by sufficient time periods to increase the achievement potential of deprived youth.

As a second case, it has long been recognized that the present textbooks, curriculum guides, primers, and the like, are ineffective and non-applicable to "culturally-bound" children. To deal with the materials problem, curriculum specialists are needed to aid the teachers in developing their own instructional materials for the special problems of formal language deficiency and limited home emphasis on education. It is not easy to row the boat of instruction when one is unfamiliar with the currents of education.

Taking a final case, sixth grade and junior high students represent, in many instances, the accumulated failure load of the first to fifth grades; that is, in place of building success upon previous success, the reverse occurs. It is highly likely that the addition of study supervisors at this breaking point between elementary and high school would be most helpful. Study supervisors could work with 20 students per group on study methods and study habits with most of the time allotted to developing skills

in note-taking and concentration, especially listening with attentiveness. The defeatist attitude of deprived children may here take a turn for the better.

IN REVIEW, education is receiving national attention at the Federal level. As the Government ear-marks more of our tax dollars to deal with educational problems of the poor, many questions may be raised as guide-lines for improved school practices in disadvantaged areas. The question of reconstructing academic values of deprived youth has been considered in terms of organizational and instructional changes in school learning situations. For the purposes of brevity, no mention has been made of many other possible program aids to deprived youth. Nor has consideration been given to school staffs, school administrators, and community forces.

It is hoped, however, that all of these elements in the school and community complex will bend toward providing academically deficient youth with new school programs or learning situations which may whet the appetite of these youngsters, and thus increase their motivation and aspiration for school success.



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