

1258 ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION AMENDMENTS

The flexibility of the program, its sensitivity to the needs and desires of the teacher-participants and the aide-trainees, and its capacity to change structure and focus were notably enhanced by the presence of three process observers. These staff members were asked to observe with sphinx-like detachment *all* activities in the program from its very heart—the practicum—to activities of peripheral interest in which teacher or aide might be involved. The process observers were asked to “feed back” to the staff, no less than weekly, the fruits of this labor. Staff meetings inevitably extended beyond their scheduled limit because of the interest generated by observer reports.

IMPRESSIONS OF THE PROGRAM FROM VARIOUS SOURCES

“This program,” said one member of the Visitation Team, “reflected the careful planning which went into it.” The purposes of the Institute were clearly stated in the proposal: to enhance the quality of education through the use of auxiliary personnel, to offer the possibility of meaningful employment for the indigenous poor through a program of instructional experience, and to work toward both role definition in the educational process and improved self-perception of the individuals involved in the program. Each purpose was treated separately in program planning to maximize the possible benefits accruing to all concerned—the individual participants and all involved in the learning-teaching process. The resulting design then incorporated the goals and the pertinent techniques and strategies into a single program.

Although the selection of mothers receiving Aid for Dependent Children seemed to fit admirably in the overall objective of the program, it evoked immediate resistance from the teachers: “These are not the kind of people you want in a classroom.” Many teachers later admitted that this initial reaction could be attributed to stereotyped notions about people on welfare. It became clear that one of the purposes of the program would thus have to be to change the teachers’ impressions of these specific persons and through this new perception to challenge stereotypes about welfare recipients.

Most of the auxiliaries lacked a high school education and many had experienced family disorganization with attendant personal and economic problems. One staff member said, “The auxiliaries came on the defensive, not knowing what to expect.” Close contact with these mothers, through the program, revealed that most of them were looking for a new direction, a change in their lives.

The director of the program observed that the auxiliary’s image of herself “began to change just by virtue of leaving the home situation.” He added, “She was no longer just another ADC mother: she was a woman getting dressed up and going to work. That made a terrific difference.”

The desire to change was further established when eight out of 12 who took the high school equivalency test, passed the examination at the end of the summer. The teacher-participants who had helped by tutoring in the evening shared the auxiliaries’ pride in their achievement.

A one-hour typing class each morning may have had little direct bearing on assistance in a classroom, but the development of such skills (“cosmetic skills,” the director called them) did much to alter image and relationship. It was an occasion for jubilant celebration when one auxiliary passed her 70-words-per-minute test in typing. (Most of the others were able to type over 20-words-per-minute by the end of the project).

Commenting on the acquisition of such competence, a staff member said, “If the auxiliary has no skills, if she walks into a classroom and is told to sit over there and wait for an errand, she is defeated. If she has skills, she can cope with the situation in which she finds herself.”

The background of the mothers was occasionally richer in some aspects of living than that of the teachers with whom they worked. One auxiliary, for instance, who had come from a military family, had travelled extensively and lived abroad—for several years in Turkey.

Shortly after the program began, the visiting team was able to perceive the high esteem in which the teacher-participants held the auxiliaries. Such acceptance by the teachers was a source of obvious gratification, even elation, to the auxiliaries.

While one purpose of the program was to offer opportunity for new careers for the disadvantaged, it also worked to the advantage of the schools. In the staff’s opinion, the program revealed definite benefits in several areas. The auxiliaries