

LESSONS FROM URBAN JOB CORPS EXPERIENCE

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THE Urban Job Corps Center programs, for the most part, have been designed and developed by experienced and forward-looking educators. It is not surprising, therefore, to see in full operation at the centers many of the educational innovations that for years have been discussed in the literature and occasionally have been tried out on a very limited scale in public schools.

The unique structure of the Job Corps experiment has made it possible to implement many practices not commonly found in local schools. On the basis of more than a year of Job Corps tryout, some of these practices now can be examined for their practicability in public school programs.

Unified Effort

First, the job corps programs have demonstrated that *education can become an* (a) *all-encompassing*, (b) *integrated*, and (c) *year-round experience*. All of the centers have assumed responsibility for coordinating the planning of opportunities for experiences that make up the full life of the individual. The programs are concerned with recreational and leisure time activities and living in the dormitory and broader community, as well as the more formal classroom and shop learning experiences.

Deliberate efforts are made to involve the trainees in the activities of the community surrounding the center. Recreational facilities at the center are often more extensive than those offered by the community. Local schools could certainly expand their recreational facilities and increase the involvement of their students in civic affairs.

Although dormitory life is more easily supervised than scattered living in many homes, this does not mean that public school personnel can or should ignore the home life of their students. Many students do not have satisfactory homes or living conditions. We know that many students from such homes are not physiologically or psychologically ready for sound learning experiences. Is it any less important to establish a reasonably good "home" environment in a public school

situation than in a job corps center? The use of more social workers, parent education, student stipends, student dormitories, and similar devices could be instituted effectively by public school systems to improve the situation where needed.

The success of an all-encompassing program requires full integration of the various facets. This is achieved in the job corps centers by organizing all program activities under one administrative unit, frequent conferences of sub-unit supervisors, and a constant effort to blend the "parts" together. Up to 25 percent of the time of teachers and administrators is frequently budgeted for "planning" activities.

There is frequent exchange of staff personnel among the sub-units (e.g., physical education and recreation, social studies and dormitory supervision), and many team efforts (e.g., social studies teacher, work supervisor and public relations staff member team up with trainees to assist local sponsorship of an industrial exhibit). Communication skills, social studies and science are often taught in self-contained classrooms. Reports on trainee progress are exchanged among the several divisions concerned with an individual trainee and all reports are collated by an adviser who is responsible for not more than 18-20 trainees. This leads to integration of the program *in the eyes of the trainee*, as well as from the viewpoint of the staff.

The job corps programs of necessity have become 'round-the-clock, 'round-the-calendar operations. Activity does not cease at 4:30 p.m. or during the weekends and summer. Public schools could offer many more evening activities and recreational and cultural excursions during the weekends, and they could operate on a continuous educational year.

Trainees arrive at the job corps centers at all times of the year, are accepted at their level of development, pursue a program, and leave at various times during the year when they complete their programs. This is possible because each trainee is offered a program tailored to his needs rather than packages of subject matter organized into 180 one-hour periods. Public schools need to reevaluate the traditional "package" concept.

Individualized Program

Second, the job corps centers have successfully *individualized their programs through the use of* (a) a "station" concept of staffing, (b) "block" scheduling, and (c) favorable teacher-student ratios. For many years we have staffed school libraries on a continuous basis, we have made "lab assistants" available throughout the day, and vocational schools often have assigned their teachers to "stations" rather than to "classes." Several job corps centers have extended this concept to all learning activities. Laboratories and shops have supplanted classrooms as such, and have been equipped with facilities peculiar to the kinds of experiences intended for the area.

Some formally organized groups meet day after day, but many groups are informally organized for short periods—maybe 30 minutes or three weeks. Many trainees return to the shops and laboratories in their leisure time. Thus, it be-

comes necessary to staff the various learning stations up to 70 hours per week; they are, of course, staffed with reference to the number of trainees present at any given time. "Learning stations" include: vocational shops; science, social studies, mathematics, reading and other laboratories; arts and crafts and music studios; recreation center; gymnasium and playing fields; and others.

Numerous scheduling experiments are under way today, but the job corps centers have generally used large blocks of time for basic scheduling, thus allowing (with the lab-shop concept) unlimited flexibility within the block. Half-day blocks are generally used for vocational activities and "general" or "basic" education, the latter including communication skills, civic education, science, and in some cases, arts and crafts and music. Physical education periods may run from 20 minutes to two or three hours and include the usual physical training activities, intramurals, and recreational interests.

Within the larger blocks, each teacher or team then helps the trainee plan his activities in terms of his specific needs. For example, a trainee who is weak in reading will spend more time in the reading laboratory than others; one who plans a program requiring about two years may spread his reading practice over a longer period than the trainee who plans to finish in six months. The various major divisions are responsible for helping each trainee achieve his goals through wise scheduling of time within the block. The trainee's adviser is responsible for helping the trainee schedule the total amount of time to be devoted to each block, based on an analysis of needs, and his "leisure" or unassigned time.

Some centers are attempting to utilize conventional teacher-student ratios, but most of them have found that more favorable ratios make for more favorable learning. Three or four months' progress in reading can be achieved in one month with a favorable ratio in a laboratory situation. There is obviously a limit to the number of learners that can gather around the motor of a car or the chassis of a television set. One center has established the following ratios as optimum: vocational shops and communication skills laboratories 1-10, general education laboratories and studios 1-15, physical education classes 1-25.

Under these conditions, it is possible to (a) accept each trainee as an individual, (b) through diagnostic techniques determine his achievements and capabilities, (c) through counseling and orientation and readiness experiences help him identify his needs, interests, ambitions and goals, (d) tailor an individual program for him, (e) let him progress at his own capability, and then (f) place him in industry or further educational experiences when *he* is ready. Some of these practices could be adapted to public school situations only with considerably increased budgets. Perhaps if some of the federal funds now allocated to job corps centers could be diverted to public schools to permit such changes, the need for job corps centers to handle dropouts would diminish.

Innovation

Third, the job corps centers have successfully utilized (a) *new content*, (b) *new methods*, and (c) *new materials in their programs*. A full evaluation of the

new content being injected into the job corps curriculum must, of course, await the passage of a decade or two. However, some of the most exciting innovations are developing here, and some already are showing immediate success. An area that may be described as vocational science is developing to support vocational skills. This involves the science, and often theory, of mechanics, combustion, electronics, horticulture, dietetics, color and many other phenomena which explain the "why" and "how" of vocational activities. Picking up where "related work" in vocational education leaves off, this program provides depth study, broadens understandings and challenges the better student. It is taught by a science specialist or a team of vocational and science teachers.

In communication skills, content has been introduced from the vocational areas. Spelling includes the vocabulary of the trainee's vocational field. Composition includes preparation of a résumé and a job application, correspondence regarding parts orders and other job-related activities. Speech includes an oral application for a job, making a sale across the counter, meeting a customer, etc. Mathematics emphasizes the computational skills of the trainee's vocation.

Consumer education, particularly in mathematics, science, and social studies, is being emphasized and expanded beyond conventional limitations. Homemaking is developing in the boys' centers as well as in the girls' centers.

Social studies is nearly unrecognizable as such in some centers. Many of the civic goals develop in dormitory group meetings of the trainees and their counselors, held daily to plan and supervise life at the center, in student government groups, curriculum councils and other trainee groups. Social studies "courses" are confined to a basic program including such units as "How To Live on \$30 a Month," "How To Read a Newspaper," "You and the Law," "Finding and Holding a Job," and to elective units in history, cultural anthropology, elementary economics, economic geography, debating, and current events.

Among the methods of teaching used, lecturing rarely finds a place. Emphasis is on trainee-centered and trainee-directed learning. Demonstrations are given by trainees, often more for the value to the demonstrator than to the listeners. Laboratory techniques, panel discussions, "projects," excursions—these and all the other learner-involvement techniques so long advocated and so little used, particularly at the secondary level, are utilized to such an extent that many trainees are heard to comment, "This doesn't seem like school."

Most of the centers have ordered, at least on a trial basis, nearly all of the pertinent instructional materials on the market. However, in nearly all cases these have been supplemented by teacher-written materials. Shop manuals have been rewritten for sixth grade reading ability, new pamphlets have been written for social studies and science, new worksheets with practical problems in mathematics have been prepared, new spelling lists are being used. Resource visitors, museums, collections, audio-visual and programmed materials, electronic learning devices, are all in evidence. The job corps programs are considerably ahead of the publishers, but the latter are aware of the needs and anticipate a wide distribution of materials in schools, once they have been tested in the centers. ↵

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