

TITLE I: WHAT A FIRST INNING!

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LAST year, almost every school district in the nation qualified for and most received a share of federal largesse unparalleled in the history of American education. The portions varied in size and went to wealthy districts as well as to struggling systems. But the millions of dollars were directed toward the needs of children—wherever they lived.

The vehicle for this massive infusion of dollars was ESEA—the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965—the Big Buck legislation. Every title of ESEA authorized sums for special purposes, but surely the heart of the act, however, was Title I, programs for culturally disadvantaged pupils. As the projects financed by Title I have gone and continued to go, so in large measure the entire act will be judged.

Then, what is the state of Title I programs one year later? What happened as federal dollars helped translate men's ideas into programs for children? Some official evaluations should be announced soon. Definitive answers, however, may be delayed for months or years, perhaps even a generation or longer. Yet, for this year and next summer, plans must be and will be made,

and, hopefully, will rest on best, though tentative, estimates. The comments which follow are answers of this type and, as well, both personal and impressionistic.

The Rules of the Game

This look backward must assert the tardiness and, at the same time, the effectiveness of the guidelines with which



the act has been administered. Both the U. S. Office of Education and the state departments share responsibility and praise for the situation. Congress approved ESEA and voted millions of dollars in authorization, but months passed and little of the money left the federal treasury. Schoolmen knew their districts would be eligible for funds, but under what formula? under what type of application and accounting procedures? under what time pressures? Tentative guidelines were issued, then recalled, and rescinded. New guidelines and forms were agreed upon and distributed.

The weeks of delay were frustrating and new programs for children went unplanned. In one state, at least, the first approved program began operation with the second semester. The agonizingly slow pace by which the administrative machinery was constructed, however, may very well be judged, years hence, as deliberate speed. The rapidity with which programs were approved must be attributed to the guidelines. Their preparation solved or postponed a number of enfeebling problems.

Facets of the church-state issue, for example, were involved and, in large part, sidestepped. But children who attended private schools were enabled to benefit from the act. Critical problems persist and must be directly confronted without undue delay. For example, may a public school consultant supervise a teacher in a religious school whose activities are supported by Title I funds? May public schools require children who regularly attend a private school to come to the public school facilities to avail themselves of a Title I program? Unquestionably, the relationships of

public and private schools, their pupils and staff, will change as experience and judicial opinion proceed. But ignoring the problems causes them to become even more potentially calamitous.

The real possibility of a new type of school segregation was also avoided by the guidelines. Surely, the consequence of assembling together all culturally deprived children in a district for instruction was as unthinkable as it would have been a monstrous error. In some districts, the newly constituted units would have been ghetto schools in fact—whatever the pigmentation of pupils' skins; in all, the return of the pauper school would have stigmatized if not destroyed the entire venture.

Imagine in a moment's fantasy the existence of federally supported classes—even richly endowed—"across the tracks" or in the same building with classes financed by local funds. Or the grotesque irony of a national law encouraging segregation—of poor children—in the same community in which desegregation—of Negro and white children—had been accomplished by heartache, terror, or even death. Probably no organization representing the multitudinous array of culturally deprived peoples nor any local school official nor a responsible American conscience could have withstood the heat.

Practical politics exacted of lofty goals only a small price. The notion of qualifying entire school attendance areas was one. Another was the definition of cultural deprivation. While appropriated funds were allocated on the basis of a measure of poverty, cultural deprivation was defined outside economic constraints. Thus, children whose parents were poor were included if they

needed the program planned by teachers; also eligible were children who needed the program but who came from homes not gripped by poverty.

That is, once the basic poverty measure established eligibility, cultural deprivation was permitted to be translated into "educationally disadvantaged" under the logic that cultural deprivation is at the heart of educational disadvantage. Nevertheless, "educational disadvantage" opened the door for the development of almost any type of program directed at a specific group of pupils who needed special attention.

While the guidelines charted a precarious course between a workable program for children and the writhing waters of religious factionalism and the rocks of a reinstitution of vicious school segregation, they also skirted the whirlpool of mistaking specific aid for specific programs for general support of all programs. Not that some schools may not have used some of their funds for general improvement programs. For example, a single high school in a district automatically qualified and some funds might have been used for a remedial reading program there when it enrolled not a single student on whom eligibility was based.

While such a situation was blessed by the guidelines, little abuse of the dictum against general aid was noted. Not that some school officials did not try to evade the intent of the law. In the few cases personally noted, the attempts were clumsy and signalled to reviewing officials more careful scrutiny when the revised proposal was submitted. The lure of cash to launch almost any imaginable program to help educate chil-

dren was itself powerful enough an incentive to keep projects within the guidelines.

Some consequences of the Title I funds are general in nature. For example, new equipment and modified facilities may be used this year outside the confines of the program for which they were purchased. Schools in attendance areas not qualified for a Title I-supported mobile reading laboratory last year may use the facility this year if the school finances the program. In any event, the equipment is the district's to use wherever and under conditions its officials decide.

The Name of the Game: Action

Another, albeit less tangible result is the stimulation to local districts to extend throughout the system educational innovations introduced by Title I funds. That this "pump-priming" may be possible for an extended period seems altogether unrealistic. The Title I allocation for one district with which this writer worked amounted to one-third of its year's budget. Clearly, before Title I, it was able to do nothing new or better for its pupils because of its own poverty. "Stimulation" in such a district will forever yield a "dry hole" without accompanying—and substantial—"outside" funds. Politically, a viable alternative surely must be seen as the provision of federal funds as general support. If this possibility eventuates, the impact of Title I will be more dramatic and spectacular than it is now.

Obvious to all who would examine last year is the action fostered by the Big Bucks of Title I. The play was fast. So much to do: plans to be made, materials to be purchased, teachers to be

employed, facilities to be rescheduled, and pupils to be involved in the program. In such a short time: one semester, six weeks, a summer term. And all the money spent and an evaluation report written and on file by the end of the summer. Then, the always insistent reminder of Title I's intent: results.

The action—in terms of program—seems at the same time to have been both varied and strikingly similar across the nation. Many hungry children ate meals at school—not just lunch or mid-morning juice. Others received comprehensive medical and dental examinations. Pupils were transported to summer school on buses that would have sat idle. Some took records home to play on the family phonograph.

Title I funds also paid for admission tickets to concerts and trips to museums and points of interest. More books, filmstrips, films, projectors, and other learning resources were located, bought for and used by pupils. Specialized services by psychologists, nurses, supervisors, secretaries, and drivers, cooks, janitors and auditors were paid by Title I money. In all, the money seems to have gone into action for children.

While they were in the minority, unusual programs were impressive. For example, a city system developed a summer program for school age unwed mothers to help them achieve a more adequate feminine role concept in personal and family life. Another system conducted its "summer school" at a day camp with an emphasis on outdoor education.

One school worked on a pilot space science program to be incorporated in the regular year's science studies. A school used video taping in its elemen-

tary school program in a number of ways. When detailed reports of Title I projects are available, the "different" programs should illustrate the range of activities developed and undertaken. Truly, the limits on the types of programs approved were not due to the legislation or the guidelines; the unusual, atypical, even creative projects emanated from minds released and thinking beyond local budgets.

A majority of Title I projects, however, were not innovative and may be classified into several large groupings including remedial programs (principally mathematics and reading), pre-school programs, learning resources centers, and, undoubtedly, the largest category, "language development and reading." There were both developmental and remedial reading programs, some at the secondary level but most, by far, at the elementary level. Some projects focused on oral language development, but most were for kindergarten and primary age children. A number of projects had such euphemistic titles as "communications arts development for culturally deprived children."

Explanations for so many reading programs—and most were that, under whatever guise—are not simply come by. Undoubtedly, in most cases the label "educationally disadvantaged" was applied to any pupil who had not profited from the school's normal program. The basic cause of the pupils' failure to profit from the regular program was probably reasoned to be their inability to read well. However valid this circuitous diagnostic logic, the prescription of "more of the same" seems indefensible. More books, more machines, more film-

strips, were bought and used, to be sure. Pupils were taught in smaller groups, sometimes by roving teachers. But the sad fact remains that what pupils and teachers *did* in the Title I situation varied little from what they would have done in a materials-enriched "normal" setting.

The most understandable reason for concentrating at the elementary level was the candid statement of one supervisor who saw the situation in its ugly reality. "To spread our money over the whole system would be wasteful. If we work with the young children, maybe we can salvage them." But many schools were simply unwilling to give up on the "educationally disadvantaged" adolescent. Reading programs were popular projects in secondary schools. The merits of such programs, apparently, had been recognized long enough. Whether or not a pupil received "credit" was irrelevant. With money available, the notion became materials, space, and a teacher and pupils brought together.

A heartening experience of the Title I activities should be the changes in which many state departments of education are viewed. Title I divisions still processed mountains of paper and school districts desired immediate approval of any plan, in whatever form, they submitted. But the state department office did more. It helped local districts. Staff consultants were in the field more than they were in the office. Consultants from universities were contracted to work with a school on its problem. When a project proposal was unacceptable, for budgetary or conceptual flaws, specific assistance to the district was provided. In most cases, this



kind of leadership from the state office was largely unfamiliar but warmly welcomed by local schoolmen.

Grounders Muffed; Timing Off; and Overthrows

In this program, errors were predicted. And they occurred. That there were so few monstrous faults accompanying the distribution of so many millions of dollars should be accorded positive commendation. However, the custom of games demands recognition of errors and solid efforts to remedy them in the future. At least four categories of blunders were recognized by this observer.

Lack of Vision

The projects developed by local districts, in overwhelming number, simply lacked vision and emphasized the commonplace. Many were anemic if not insipid. Probably never before have so many schoolmen exposed their empty slogans in such an awful public spectacle. For years, the moan has been, "If we only had the money we could build a real *program*." The Congress voted the money, probably not enough.

but millions, and many educators' long-held posture was seen for the bluff that it was.

How else to explain the emphasis on reading programs (commonly of the more-of-the-same-in-smaller-groups variety)? Or traditional programs embellished with media (audiovisual materials are definitely *not* camp)? Or programs conducted during the traditional school day? Or, for the children who were casualties of the academic year, summer programs, which ran them faster through the same material on which they had been wrecked earlier? Where were the innovative projects? Ones which broke with revered schedules and instructional materials and setting? Ones which focused on children and youth with special talents and needs who were not academically enfeebled or retarded?

A kind explanation for this situation would involve many factors. Probably, like the apocryphal farmer, most schoolmen believed they weren't doing things nearly as well as they knew how—and thus justified the programs they developed. However kind, this suggestion seems at once too weak and, yet, accurate. Programs predicated on the commonplace were chosen in most cases because they were really all that decision-makers knew. Other alternatives simply did not exist for them.

Three major factors contribute to an understanding of this tragedy. One, decision-makers in schools seem not to be program-oriented. They care about curriculum and instruction, but, not caring enough, they assume that program will carry itself. Their interests and energy are directed to other matters. Their understandings about program, moreover,

are dusty, shopworn and threadbare. More, not less, substantive attention to curriculum and instruction is an obvious first priority, for personal study and reflection, for organizational support, and as a focus for the school system as a whole. Perhaps, even, preparation programs for educational leadership posts will admit, however grudgingly, more concern for curriculum.

A second factor seems to have been the ineffectiveness which characterized the efforts of school staff to work together. Most staff members filled in the forms they were sent from the central office, but little of this "participation" capitalized on their ideas, skills or feelings. Techniques for staff development are available, but appear to have "gone out of style" in the last decade. Surely, the opportunities of the present, not even to comment that fashions change, suggest that schools again concentrate on building effective teams, even if it means dusting off and relabeling workable ideas, like "group dynamics," ignored far too long.

A third factor contributing to the lack of vision about Title I programs was itself simply the fruit of poverty. Educational decisions seem always to have been the handmaiden of a school budget roughly hacked deep past any fat. Schoolmen, consequently, may be excused for not thinking beyond yesterday's program; they have seldom experienced the heady wine of an adequate budget. One superintendent confided to me that he did not see how his district could spend the \$7,600 allotted to it. And his district the poorest in one of the most economically distressed counties of the state! He and his staff, and the pupils, had had only the barest

view of minimum for so long that he did not know how to spend money. But, more pathetic, he couldn't think of anything worthwhile for the district except to hire some mothers to supervise the playground while teachers worked extra time with poor readers.

Title I dollars may very well help schoolmen to leapfrog their own budgetary poverty, but only as attention to worthy curriculum and instruction ideas are coupled with improved staff development will future allocations provide greater yield for the investment.

Little Interest in Evaluation

Although the law mandated evaluation, few projects incorporated adequate attention to this activity. There was not just little interest in evaluation; frequently, contempt for the process was manifest. Many school officials convinced observers that an adequate evaluation (of any project!) consisted of listing the scores on a general achievement test, at most, or checking with the principals about how they felt the program went, at least. In so many districts, evaluation simply has never been conducted except under the rubrics of tests, pupil grades, or administrative whitewash. Past failures to evaluate programs might be understood to have been abortive because of fiscal limitations, but Title I provided money for programs *and* evaluation. For once, evaluation money was available.

Probably one reason for the reluctance of some and the hostility of others to evaluation of the Title I projects was that schoolmen who had glibly professed the socially proper slogans in college courses and professional encounters lacked both the basic under-

standings and skills for doing the job. And they did not enjoy their deficiencies being displayed. Some school officials honestly wanted to commit all the available funds to program rather than allot some for evaluation. Nevertheless, evaluation activities, substantial and systematic, probably will not be dropped from federal programs. The special skills and knowledge required and the administrative facilitation must be acquired.

New Positions—No New Players

The thousands of new programs created unnumbered new teaching positions and other posts—for secretaries, aides, drivers, materials assistants, supervisors, and evaluators. To staff the new positions meant personnel shifts resembling the old pea-and-thimble dodge. Many positions calling for specialized skills, remedial reading, for example, were filled with the best teacher available even though his specific technical qualifications may have been meager.

Some special training was permitted by the guidelines, although it was seldom written into a project application. Thus, teachers appointed to remedial reading programs or evaluation activities, to mention two, and who lacked the necessary skills worked as well as they could without help—even a “hurry-up” short course or visits with consultants. Hopefully, some “in-service” education will be incorporated into subsequent projects. The law itself needs expansion to encourage this type of special, program-relevant training.

Several other shortcomings deserve mention. For one, there was some inefficiency in the Title I administration.

Not ineptness, usually; simple inefficiency born of too few people having too much to do. Few education agencies—whether local, state or USOE—were ready or really knew how to get prepared for the year's work with Title I. Additional positions must be created at every level and filled with qualified individuals. At the state level alone, such a move would help reduce the delays and oversights experienced last year. Local districts must have additional assistance in developing, administering and evaluating the new programs.

Another nagging problem was the slowness, reluctance, and even refusal by some school boards to permit local district participation in ESEA programs. Schoolmen, in such situations, could only lament the passage of weeks and months in which local pupils were not benefiting from the act. The board of our local district refused to participate, a spokesman of the "non-partisan" group remarked, "We don't know whether we want this federal money. As Republicans. . . ." As usual, the board made no efforts to provide the needed programs through local money. And the district's children and youth who needed the special program, special teachers, and special equipment did not get them. When the board finally agreed to apply for Title I funds, the school year had almost run its course.

Meriting special approbation are those publishers, film producers, and other companies which flooded local schools with "canned" Title I proposals incorporating usage of their commercial products. Some districts may have been well served by these stock items and may have gained ideas

for their own use. Nevertheless, the motivation of the companies was surely the exploitation of an available economic market, reasonable enough in this light, but educationally shabby and insulting.

Rather than mocking schoolmen by offering to write districts' project proposals, the companies can better serve schools by honestly displaying their wares and demonstrating them in classrooms. Educators, then, will make their own judgments.

After the First Inning

A year of Title I operation gone, questions persist. For example, will new guidelines take into account the problems encountered? Will the evaluations submitted in August be used locally to improve programs? Or will reports simply accumulate in the state capitols and in Washington? What will the Congress learn of the millions of the people's money invested in Title I? Will local boards and professional associations tire of "ear-marked" funds and mobilize for general federal support? Will the state departments survive as independent, viable agencies? Will they develop more initiative and provide more leadership for school programming? What role will the U. S. Office of Education assume in its enlarging relationship to local school problems and issues?

After one Title I inning, counting all the hits, the runs, and the errors: American children are winning. But in this game, team effort is continually crucial and no margin, however apparently comfortable, is secure. Play ball! ❧

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