

## ● Innovations in Education

### Follow Through:

### A Promise for School Reform

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PROJECT Follow Through is a joint effort by the Office of Economic Opportunity and the Office of Education. Its aim is to extend the preschool Head Start program of comprehensive interdisciplinary education into the public schools. This project has been operating in 30 local school districts, spread over 26 states, since the opening of the 1967-1968 school year.

Each local district involves about 100 school beginners at the kindergarten or first grade levels (depending upon the organization of the school district). A majority of these children have had Head Start or similar preschool experience, and, wherever possible, they have been mixed with children from different racial, socioeconomic, and cultural backgrounds in order to avoid isolation and to stimulate experimentation.

This is a small pilot program. It serves approximately 3,000 children across the nation. A single elementary school could contain a total local project in five classes averaging 20 or fewer children. At most, this population is dispersed over six elementary schools, each with a single kindergarten or first

grade pilot classroom. An experiment this small should certainly have a high probability for quality control.

Follow Through is designed to bring the best of Head Start into public education. Each classroom is staffed with a teacher-leader, an assistant teacher, and an aide from the community. A complement of comprehensive interdisciplinary services provides specialists in early childhood education, health, dentistry, nutrition, social services, and psychological services during the course of the school day. A learning group of less than 20 pupils is suggested, along with such essentials as a midmorning snack, a hot lunch, a nap for those who need it, and after-nap activities. Maximal parent and community participation is required. Five percent of the local budget is set aside for research and evaluation.

No matter how one views it, one Follow Through classroom (I prefer to start with a kindergarten) can be a magnet which energizes and excites an entire school and its school-community. Multiply this by the possible 100 or more schools across the country, and

you have an intriguing field test for John Goodlad's proposition:

. . . In seeking to effect whatever educational changes are deemed desirable, we should bring them about in the school as a single comprehensive unit. The school with its principal, staff, pupil population, parents, and surrounding cultural milieu, is the largest organic unit for change. For most people this is the educational system. It is visible, manageable, and concrete. Move beyond the single school and you have an abstraction or, at best, a supporting structure.

He concludes the discussion of this proposition with:

. . . It is my belief that we would see profound changes taking place in our schools if we really believed and acted on the premise that the central office and school district mechanisms exist only to be supportive of the local school.<sup>1</sup>

The central office responsibility for Follow Through in each community is in the hands of a local program coordinator. It is the elementary principal, however, who will be the most visible target, for he continues to be responsible for the total elementary school even though there may be only one Follow Through classroom in his school. The pilot classroom is one of *his* classrooms, led by one of *his* teachers, serving a group of *his* pupils, in *his* school-community. I emphasize the "his" not to establish sovereignty, but to identify responsibility and all that it implies.

One classroom singled out for prefer-

<sup>1</sup> John I. Goodlad. *Implications for Education of Prospective Changes in Society*. "The Educational Program to 1980 and Beyond." Designing Education for the Future: An Eight-State Project. Denver, Colorado. 1967. pp. 55-56.

ential treatment will provoke teachers and parents to request that its resources and benefits be extended to other classrooms and pupils within the school. All will knock on the principal's door to complain, request, and demand.

Unfortunately, the principal cannot ignore the pressures and postpone the benefits. He must respond immediately. He cannot conduct the reform single-handedly—nor should he. He must involve the Follow Through program director, the staff, the central office, the university, and the parents in the community in order to provide more relevant school opportunities for all children within his school.

### **Conditions of Intraschool Reform**

Three specific conditions are essential when a school embarks upon a program of reform.

First, there must be a model or laboratory within the school. The Follow Through classroom, of course, is the laboratory. It is a magnet classroom designed to individualize education through a comprehensive, interdisciplinary approach. The total school is the magnetic field, with each classroom a satellite laboratory.

Second, the school must function as a year-round institute, with released bi-weekly time for total staff participation. Thus, the school itself becomes the domain for a continuous program of intra-school reform.

Third, the university is the natural agency to help the individual school coordinate its reform efforts. An NDEA proposal could be jointly prepared by the university and the elementary school, with a high-ranking early child-

hood education faculty member as coordinator.

Specialists providing consultative and ancillary services are the natural instructional staff. The Follow Through teacher and her assistants are the experimenters. All other teachers in the school modify and extend the experiment to their respective classrooms. Thus, the total school is reforming itself as a "single unit."

### **Critical Components**

A new staffing pattern, comprehensive services, parent-school-community involvement, and research and evaluation are the most critical components of the Follow Through design.

#### **Staffing**

The Follow Through teacher-leader is responsible for the educational program of her children and the teamwork of assistants, aides, interns, volunteer, ancillary, and auxiliary personnel within her classroom. To individualize the experiences of each child, there must be continuous day-by-day planning, evaluation, and modification of the program.

The utilization of staff in the experimental classroom must provide the impetus for developing new school-wide staffing operations to involve Teacher Corps interns, VISTA Volunteers, Neighborhood Youth Corps, student teachers, neighborhood aides, and others. This approach demolishes the long outdated concept that the classroom is a fortress and that the teacher is a sovereign.

Other adults bring personal skills and resources to enrich the education process and the lives of teachers and children.

### **Comprehensive Services**

Critical services involving the pediatrician, dentist, nurse, nutritionist, psychologist, social worker, and others are proving increasingly valuable when these specialists come to the school to examine and treat children, advise parents, and serve as resource and instructional staff throughout the school.

To confine their services to a single classroom would be utterly wasteful. These services should be extended to preschoolers at home and to older siblings in other classrooms. Thus, all children in a family are served simultaneously.

#### **Activities of the Day**

Opportunity for interaction in a one-to-one relationship and in small clusters gives children visibility and suggests radical changes in the structure and pace of the school day. Follow Through children are predisposed to such defects as iron deficiency, anemia, dental caries, skin disease, poor vision, asthma and hay fever, impaired hearing, and some behavioral abnormalities that can be identified, treated, and eventually remedied through school efforts and medical resources.

When the school day is planned to release maximum energy, reduce tension, provide learning tasks leading to success, the child flourishes in an all-in-one-piece manner. This means that nutrition, outdoor activities, rest (including naps) may have to be provided for other than kindergarten children if and when they are essential.

#### **Parent-School-Community**

Emerging parent advisory organizations are exceedingly influential in help-

ing schools develop more relevant and authentic programs. They also encourage adult education, recreation, and school-home endeavors that lead to effective relationships with departments of sanitation, health, police, fire, and with voter registration groups, housing agencies, recreation centers, labor unions, churches. All these agencies can work with the school to support and enhance the human spirit by developing a school-community environment which is beautiful, safe, and satisfying.

#### **Research-Evaluation-Modification**

Of the \$80,000 each local school district received for a program involving 100 children, only five percent—around \$4,000—is designated for research and evaluation. Such a modest sum will hardly buy a program of basic research—nor should it. The research in this program is to shed light on ways to improve the lives of children *now*.

This paper has developed two propositions: one, that the individual elementary school is the most appropriate unit for school reform; and two, that Project Follow Through is the first federally funded program which provides a vehicle for such reform.

Recognizing that an elementary school needs from five to seven years to absorb reform and to provide evidence of its effectiveness upon children, the following steps are suggested: (a) a continuous, unbroken program of indi-

vidualized instruction and comprehensive services to *all* children in school—automatically leading to nongraded education; (b) a continuous program of staff development leading to varying and imaginative staffing patterns; (c) a deeper involvement with parents and community to bridge the gaps between school, home, and community; and (d) to develop a cadre of school personnel trained to initiate and conduct programs of reform within a total elementary school.

Follow Through comes as a vital transfusion that promises to draw the breath of life into our weary schools and devastated communities. Let us use it as a vehicle to revitalize education for all children. Schools must mend instead of mutilate; they must heal instead of hurt. They must break the cycles of failure and must design programs for success.

Schools must become places where children flourish. While this program is of benefit to vulnerable and deprived children, it must revitalize education for *all* young children. Follow Through schools must become laboratories of educational reform to develop each child as a successful and cherished human being.

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