

Tomorrow's Educational System—TODAY

RICHARD O. PETERS

IN THEORY and practice, Operation E.P.I.C., Portland, Maine's ESEA Title III "Experimental Program in Curriculum," is an operational microcosm of a futuristic, pupil-centered, success-oriented educational system.

The major objective of Operation E.P.I.C. is to design a program for under-achievers in the junior high schools of Portland; to assist these students in making school a pleasant place to be as well as to help them find some measure of success in educational achievement. E.P.I.C. is an attempt to help inner city disadvantaged youth of the King Junior High School district find success in a program geared to their particular needs and abilities, to help them develop a strong and positive self-image, and to help them relate effectively to their world in terms of personal fulfillment and social worth.

Utilizing a home economics-industrial arts core curriculum approach, a modular schedule, weekly teacher team planning sessions, large group instruction presentations, and a modified ranking-reporting system as well as weekly field trips, E.P.I.C. has created an educational system which is perceived, by more than 95 percent of the students, as being relevant to their contemporary needs.

The core curriculum is built around the

natural interests of young adolescents. There is an attempt to complement mutual instruction, to reinforce rather than duplicate instruction in the nine discipline areas—home economics, industrial arts, mathematics, science, language arts, social studies, music, art, and physical education.

The modular schedule alleviates the monotony of the traditional structure built around periods of instruction of specific length from day to day. Each E.P.I.C. class module is 20 minutes in duration; thus, well suited to the tension-relieving needs of students of this caliber. The length of time students spend in a given class determines, in large part, the type of activities to be conducted. The flexibility of the daily schedule gives students a change of pace.

The modular schedule provides time for E.P.I.C. team planning sessions. Weekly planning sessions for seventh, eighth, and ninth grade teachers allow them to meet to solve mutual problems and plan a cohesive and integrated instructional program. Teachers have the opportunity to discuss individual students, correlate subject matter activities, and exchange ideas.

One afternoon per week is allotted each grade for a large group instruction presentation. Guest speakers are invited to appear before E.P.I.C. students; their mission is to

acquaint students with the social, cultural, esthetic, and industrial opportunities of the total community.

The use of National Cash Register (NCR) paper subject rating (S+ S S-) reporting forms has simplified the interpretation of grading and provides a basis for student success. A personality rating scale consisting of four components: courtesy and cooperation, dependability and honesty, desire to improve in each subject area, and work habits, enables teachers to write comments regarding student progress and to give substantive information rather than a letter or numerical grade. The planned procedure of allowing each student to make his own independent evaluation of himself and to compare himself with his teacher's evaluation holds promise as a method of developing introspection and realistic self-appraisal without emotional stress or loss of self-esteem.

Weekly excursions into the community provide student exposure which initiates and/or reinforces contrived opportunities for experiences in the classroom. Mobile classroom field trip experiences serve to merge the abstractions of the classroom with the realities of day-to-day living.

Exposure to a diversity of community resource sites has been a socializing as well as an educational process and experience. The field trip concept has been incorporated into the scheme of the E.P.I.C. project as a means of aiding the concept development of inner city students. Classroom pre-trip activities help students better understand the value

of a field trip in the process of formal education occurring in the classroom.

E.P.I.C.'s "Environmental Education Program" attempts to develop student awareness of and appreciation for the components of the total urban complex. Only by understanding and interacting with the "parts"—social, cultural, and industrial sites—will E.P.I.C. students perceive the "whole," the city in which they live and learn. They do not exist apart from the city; thus, they must be introduced to it in a logical and informative manner.

The E.P.I.C. program was initiated at King Junior High School during the 1968-69 academic year and has been expanded during the 1969-70 year to include Jack Junior High School as well as King. It is the hope of the E.P.I.C. faculty and staff that this program will be modified and introduced into the total curriculum of Portland's two senior high schools.

E.P.I.C. is not a complete answer to all of today's educational problems but we believe it is a step in the right direction. Students must perceive their educational process to be of immediate value and worth to them. We believe that E.P.I.C. is a relevant system which has been accepted by Portland's inner city students and is perceived to be of value in their lives.

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