

Project Follow Through:

PROJECT Follow Through was launched by the federal government in 1967. Its creation grew out of concern over the disappointing and transitory effects of the Head Start experience on the school-related abilities of preschoolers from impoverished backgrounds. As a consequence, Follow Through was designed to carry over and to sustain the momentum gained by Head Start, through systematic exploration of alternative approaches to primary education and through the development of a subsystem patterned to transform the institutional context of urban education. Some initial indications of what changes are being brought about by Follow Through programs across the nation can be gauged by the impact the program is having on a single urban community.

Cited by the U.S. Office of Education as a potential showcase for the nation, Philadelphia stands in a unique position among large metropolitan areas, in that it was funded for the implementation and operation of seven distinctive Follow Through models. These seven programs are currently having an extensive impact through the delivery of comprehensive instructional, psychological, nutritional, dental, and medical services to 7,000 children and their families.

Such activities involve the participation of 19 schools and communities distributed across six city school districts. The comprehensive nature and advantages common to all the programs include:

1. Additional and supportive paraprofessional staff
2. Daily hot lunch program and nutrition education
3. Staff training and materials development for teachers, paraprofessionals, and parents by resource persons within each model and through model sponsors
4. Local supportive services by on-site team leaders, social workers, school-community coordinators, psychologists, and local model liaison persons working within the program
5. Supplemental medical, dental, and mental health services
6. Active parent participation and the involvement of community agencies in the planning and operation of models through on-site Policy Advisory Committees.

The coordination of such services represents an ongoing commitment and marshaling of the resources of the school, community, and family in a comprehensive program to meet the needs of the whole child. The broad implications and emerging influences of Follow Through programs can be seen by examining what is occurring at present in Philadelphia.

Establishment of Alternative Systems

There is a special significance in establishing alternative forms of primary education specifically designed to compensate for

In Philadelphia



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“deficits” of school populations or curricula within a single urban educational system. Response to the research and literature on so-called “disadvantaged” children has spawned a variety of theories concerning the nature of “deprivation” and prognosis for “social intervention” and educational reform. For the first time in the history of American education a broad array of theories, deriving rationales from the disciplines of psychology, sociology, and education, have a chance to gain empirical feedback about their efficacy.

The seven models operating in Philadelphia are representative of a wide spectrum of programs concerning what is good education for the young child. While all models have a common focus on individualization, successful experiences, and the development of “school-appropriate” behaviors, each model translates these objectives into separate programs with their own salient features and distinctive elements.

Two models, Education Development Center and Bank Street, reflect the growing interest in America in the “open classroom” patterned after the British Infant School concept. These instructional systems concentrate on providing an enriched environment that stimulates exploration, discovery, and manipulation of materials through the child’s self-initiated and self-regulated activity.

These systems draw upon such develop-

mental theorists as Piaget, Erickson, and Bruner, with evident influence from the ideas of Dewey and the self-concept theorists, all of whom give important emphasis to the premise that learning entails a continual expansion and reconstruction of the child’s conceptions of reality and himself. The process of learning is conceived as also following a hierarchical arrangement of developmental stages which emerge as the child carries out physical, affective, and cognitive transactions with his environment.

The striking feature of a third model, Behavior Analysis, is its accentuation of sequentially organized and individualized acquisition of specific learning skills (3R’s and spelling), based on the concept that learning will occur and can be controlled as a consequence of positively reinforced responses. This model employs a direct application of the behavior analysis and behavior shaping techniques of B. F. Skinner through the instrumentation of a “token” economy and a reward system of activities offered as contingency of appropriate responses.

Although all of the programs include parental involvement, two make this factor the center of focus. One, Florida Parent

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Education, drawing heavily on a Piagetian frame of reference, is constructed to educate parents to provide direct instructional activities as well as a supportive learning environment in the home. In a somewhat different vein, the other model, Parent Implementation, bases its program effectiveness on the assumption that active ongoing community involvement in development, implementation, and management of the program will have significant and lasting results in providing a high quality of education.

Yet another program, Bilingual-Bicultural, distinguishes itself through its programmatic response to the problems that Spanish-speaking children face when they are exposed to the often foreign linguistic and cultural environment of the American school. The seventh program, Philadelphia Process, gives specific attention to the development of cognitive processes such as observing, classifying, etc., as patterned after Gagné's notion of intellectual processing skills.

The existence of such varied approaches to primary education functioning within a single urban community tends to stimulate discussion concerning the basic direction and appropriate means that should be exercised in working with city children. In addition to such a healthy dialogue, teachers, parents, administrators, and individuals from other agencies are afforded a firsthand opportunity to examine the nature and effectiveness of each program.

Subjecting model rationales to the systematic scrutiny of empirical testing will aid in isolating their most effective elements. Since Follow Through programs and their potential expansion and replication on a broad scale will affect the lives of thousands of children, there is a moral imperative to

avoid *a priori* judgment and theoretical reliance in support of any one approach. "The proof of the pudding" will come in the form of hard data, both immediate and longitudinal as reflected by standardized tests, as well as a variety of more subtle measures of attitudinal, behavioral, and institutional change. Philadelphia is fortunate in having available a wide diversity of programs and instructional elements upon which it can draw in the formulation of future programs.

Transforming Primary Education

The sustenance of any effective educational strategies will ultimately depend upon the development of institutional alterations and arrangements for continued support. The onset of Follow Through in Philadelphia has brought about some very positive and interesting changes, both within the intrastructure of the educational system and in terms of the interstructural linkages of the system with other agencies concerned with the education of young children.

Model program implementations have had the effect of setting up novel and distinctive in-service subsystems for training, materials development, and the dissemination and application of program elements. As a consequence, a cadre of instructional leaders with expertise relevant to a particular approach to primary education has emerged. A number of instructional roles have been brought into existence that range from the model trained parent volunteer aide on one hand to the local model representative and model sponsor on the other. Such a configuration of diversified roles allows a flow of communication and feedback between the centers of educational theory, research, and development and the school and community, resulting in program modification, effectiveness, and relevance.

The past alienation and disenchantment of many parents and communities with urban schools have been a critical weakness. During the past three years a viable influential relationship has been established between the school and community, both immediate and broad. Parents have become deeply involved in the decision-making process about concerns of importance to them and their children.

Health services and their delivery; instructional programs and materials; personnel employed within the school; staffing patterns; and budgetary expenditures are now an integral part of parent meetings and discussions. Negotiations with model sponsors and representatives of the U.S. Office of Education are yearly occurrences for residents of communities surrounding the 19 Follow Through sites. A sense of being involved at the local level is a reality. Relationships of trust and respect are deeply entrenched within the program.

Deeper involvement for parents and community residents in the educational enterprise has been accomplished through several avenues. One of the innovations within the local program has been the establishment of a scholarship series. Parents receive preservice training, primarily in handwriting, and through stipend support work directly in the classroom as instructional agents for an eight-week period. They become part of the classroom team—parent, paraprofessional, and teacher, all working together to improve the level of instruction for the children.

As a result of this experience, parents often apply for a full-time position as a paraprofessional. For those who wish to move toward a degree and certified status as a teacher, a support system of released time, fully paid tuition, and special program services has been created through the HEW Career Opportunities Program, operated by the Board of Education in cooperation with Temple University and Philadelphia Community College.

The nature and extension of Follow Through have also brought about interstructural linkages between the school system and other agencies concerned with education of young children. The previously described connection of the school system with the outside agencies in the form of model sponsors is further accentuated by the establishment of regional training centers in Philadelphia for two of the model programs.

The involvement of ancillary agencies interested in welfare of children constitutes an important link in the avoidance of conflict and duplication as the agencies combine in a concerted effort with the school and community to meet the needs of the child.

Furthermore, local institutions of higher learning are offered an urban laboratory wherein future teachers and students of primary compensatory education can be exposed to exemplars of the vital merger of theory and practice. During the summer of 1971, Temple University graduate students, many of whom were Philadelphia teachers, participated in a special summer block of courses designed to provide firsthand observation and analysis of the seven programs of Philadelphia.

In Perspective

Whether the seven programs in Philadelphia are truly a "follow through" will depend on a number of factors. In addition to finding out the immediate consequences through local and outside research, longitudinal studies must determine what happens to Follow Through children in the later elementary grades and high school. Will the program and institutional alterations continue if and when federal support ceases?

Finally, the ultimate value of any program designed as social intervention must be weighed in terms of its contribution to changing the vicious cycle of poverty in urban ghettos. At this point, however, it can be affirmed that 19 Philadelphia schools and communities have developed a viable partnership with a variety of local and national agencies to provide better life chances to children and their families. □

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