



Can Federal Money Be Used Creatively?

ANNE CAMPBELL*

DEPENDING on who is speaking and from which vantage point will come an answer to the question, "Can Federal Money Be Used Creatively?" That answer will be on a continuum from an emphatic "no," to a "well, maybe," to a "but, if," to a resounding "yes." And all answers may be correct! The fact that a program designed for support by federal funds can fail just as well as it can succeed is a significant factor in federal funding of programs.

Public schools have not had, to any great extent, the opportunity to fail *publicly* in a program of instruction. Support for experimental programs, either contemplatively or financially, has been considered in the majority of public school systems as inappropriate and needless.

However, with the demise of most of the "laboratory schools" connected with colleges and universities, there was a void in the practical research and development necessary for continued progress in educational knowledge and application. Because of that void the federal government, under the guise of social and economic considerations, stepped in.

Granted, the expectations for the public education system to provide the answers to all social problems was an overextension and

an impossible task. Yet amazingly, many good things resulted in spite of negatively reported information. Positive outcomes often tend to elicit apathetic response, and there is need for continual examination of our educational inadequacies. With Robert Browning we strive for "perfection" remembering, "else what's a heaven for!"

Categorical aid with resulting differentials in rules and regulations has made it difficult for a school system to approach a problem in a creative or innovative manner with critical-mass concentration. Yet this can be done if local school districts will enroll personnel in "clinical" (variety) settings. Linkage of human and financial resources in an interdisciplinary management design process can mount, through the use of federal funds, a creative attack on an educational dilemma. To be creative in a public school system requires commitment by "people" to solving a problem and a selflessness of special and specialized interest. Such a commitment takes time to establish.

The problem to be solved is not in iso-

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lation and should not be left in a vacuum. It should be deliberately planned with an established goal. The parts of the puzzle can be designed to fit. In other words, there is strength in generalists' management (in the best sense of the word) of a systematic procedure for solving a problem.

What is the problem? What are the components of it? What will it require in human resources to approach a solution? What financial commitments are necessary to solve it? How long will it take?

Because the basis for political reaction, which is used in developing programs for federal funding, relies heavily on "instant success," it is important that written proposals include realistic time frames. Such time frames allow the school systems to meet their stated objectives as they have pledged to do in the proposal. The blame or the credit for attaining federal program objectives belongs to the applicant public schools.

With all the variables of human resources, which include the boys and girls,

adults—teachers, parents, and administrators—and with the support of the taxpayers outside the identifiable groups, we can point out the positive, constructive, creative use that federal funds have, in our opinion, afforded to us.

To get the best creative thought in developing a federal project after determination of need requires broad use of personnel expertise. For example, a public school would include in a task force for planning:

Curriculum planners, subject-matter consultants, building-level curriculum planners

Student services personnel—psychologist, social worker, counselor

Teacher(s)—implementor(s)

Students—participants

Parents—vested interests

College/university specialists—research background

Administrators—management (fiscal and program)

Community—taxpayers, including board of education members.

Use of federal funds from several federal program sources and from local sources to carry out the planned project would require creative designing.

In meeting the rules and requirements for program credibility and fiscal audit of each funding source, creative management is needed. Some school systems would require technical assistance to accomplish this in proposed programs. Other school districts would have such expertise in-house.

Would the process described here for carrying out the objectives of an approved project indicate creative use of funds? Who decides? In the view of this writer, most federal funds are being used creatively.

Such a planning process should be on a continual basis in the meeting of identified needs of children and youth to be served. It is difficult to plan "crash" programs with short deadlines. The results are more on the basis of "let's get the money" than on what might be in the best interest of educational progress of the district. Sufficient lead time for planning would add greatly to more creative use of federal funds at the local level. □

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