

Compensatory

AS IN the past, the promise of education today is that each citizen will receive those educational advantages which prepare him for full participation in our democratic society. To achieve this goal, schools often must first change their basic curriculum and organization to more nearly guarantee that all students have access to a good school curriculum and high quality instruction. Without this maximum effort, schools must accept more and more of the blame when children do poorly in school. In order to achieve the goal of equal educational opportunities, schools must provide programs specifically designed to compensate for environmental conditions which result in educational needs that cannot be met by the regular instructional program.

Thus, compensatory education encompasses all those special services and activities which some children from disadvantaged environments need in order to have an equal chance to succeed in school. The most common environmental conditions which give rise to the need for compensatory education are poverty, social isolation, and, often, linguistic isolation.

Major Efforts for National Needs

In the mid-sixties, with large scale compensatory education programs, such as Head Start, Follow Through, and Title I of the

Elementary and Secondary Education Act, came a new definition of equal educational opportunity. We came to realize that equal educational opportunity does not mean the same educational program for each child, but an educational program geared peculiarly to the needs of each individual child.

The many national evaluations of these programs call attention to profound problems in dealing with the evidence on compensatory education. Irrespective of the design of a study, there are likely to be different opinions concerning its validity. For example, it has been argued that standardized tests, because of various content and measurement biases, tend to understate the capabilities and achievement gains of poor children. This conclusion is accepted. However, achievement data provide the only basis for analysis of evidence across a wide variety of evaluation studies and are the only accepted set of measures now available.

An analysis of *national* reports on cognitive benefits resulting from compensatory education reveals a rather dim picture. Yet, a brighter picture is revealed when certain *state* reports are analyzed (California, Colorado, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and Texas). An even brighter picture is presented when selected *local* programs are analyzed.

For example, two national evaluations of Title I, ESEA, conducted by the U.S. Office of Education through a Federal-State-Local

Education? Yes!

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information reporting system concluded that Title I participants had shown no improvement in achievement gains compared with nonparticipants. Yet the selected states previously mentioned show, in state reports, cognitive gains above the national average of .7 grade equivalent per year for most disadvantaged children, while a significant percentage of disadvantaged students in those same states are achieving at or above the national norm of 1.0 grade equivalent gain per year.

In a search for successful local compensatory programs, a review of 91 state Title I annual evaluation reports by Stanford Research Institute identified five states which reported data on a total of 55 "exemplary" local projects that produced grade-equivalent gains greater than month-for-month.

According to the American Institute for Research at Palo Alto, California, "Apparently, as the unit of analysis is narrowed from the *nation* as a whole to *states* and then to *local* projects, more signs of positive impact on participating children can be identified."

Impact on Early Childhood Education

One of the primary benefits of ESEA, Title I, has been the recognition of the need for early childhood education programs. This impetus has led to the establishment of

kindergartens for the disadvantaged and has given rise to a new movement for early childhood education for all children.

A most significant development in North Carolina compensatory education is the proliferation of effective preschool programs funded by Title I, ESEA. A North Carolina preschool program worthy of note is the Charlotte/Mecklenburg preschool kindergarten program for 650 five-year-olds. The 1970-71 independent evaluation used a pre-post test design with control and experimental groups. In addition, scores of the Title I kindergarten children were compared with the North Carolina state kindergarten results for 1970-71.

The results of the evaluation showed that the Title I participants enrolled in the program:

- Gained significantly on every measure used
- Scored higher than either the North Carolina state group or the control group—a significant accomplishment in consideration of the fact that the home stimulation scores were 10 points below the other two groups
- Showed significantly greater test performance than students who had no kindergarten experience, when results of appraisal

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data were adjusted for difference in home background.

As a part of the dissemination effort of this project, the program activities implemented in the program have been captured in a 30-minute film entitled, "We Belong Together Here."

A New National Effort

One of the most promising compensatory education programs being proliferated is the Follow Through program now operating in 147 school sites in the nation.

Preliminary evaluation results based on data collected in 1969-70 by the Stanford Research Institute indicate:

- Follow Through children made greater achievement gains than comparison children.

- Achievements were greatest for children from poorest families.

- Achievements were greatest where approaches heavily emphasized basic academic skills and structured activities.

- Follow Through children showed more substantial positive shifts in attitudes toward school and learning than comparison groups.

- Parents of Follow Through children were better informed about school, more likely to visit school, more likely to work in classrooms, and more convinced of their impact than were parents of comparison children.

- Follow Through teachers were more likely to value parent participation, home visits, and pupil progress than teachers in comparison classrooms.

The U.S. Office of Education has recently awarded planning grants to six states

(North Carolina, California, New Jersey, Arkansas, New York, and Michigan) to develop plans for the expansion of Follow Through to continue the gains for children in Head Start and Title I, ESEA, kindergarten programs.

Conditions Associated with Success

The American Institute for Research (AIR), in a 1968 study of 18 successful compensatory education projects, identified the following six components that appeared to be associated with success: (a) clearly stated objectives and/or careful planning, (b) teacher training in methods of the project, (c) small group or individualized instruction, (d) directly relevant instruction, (e) high treatment intensity, and (f) active parental involvement. Analysis, again by AIR, of 21 successful projects identified since that study indicated that the majority of them incorporated at least four of these six components. A review of five other studies also indicated general agreement with respect to the AIR-identified components of success. AIR concludes that clearly these six components are present in many successful projects, and they have been found to discriminate between matched successful and unsuccessful endeavors in compensatory education.

Further evidence of conditions necessary for success in compensatory education programs is noted by the Metropolitan Applied Research Corporation in a report to the Select Committee on Equal Educational Opportunity of the U.S. Senate. This report states:

An analysis of successful "compensatory" or "educational enrichment" programs reveals that these programs are "successful" only when they succeed in imposing upon a particular school and classroom the pattern of essential ingredients of an effective educational program—systematic and specifically defined sequentially developed curricula; high expectations for the students, and acceptance of them as individuals who can perform in terms of high standards; effective teaching and diligent supervision; and regular evaluation and reinforcement of strengths.

The new frontier in compensatory education lies in accountability to the community on the part of schools and educational agencies. Schools can no longer be free to conclude that alleged or acknowledged poor results are due to the inadequacies in the children. In the meantime, schools must find ways to join hands with other community institutions, for there is a larger arena in which the school and the underachievers function; that is the community.

We must build on the known successes in compensatory education and, at the same time, search for more creative instructional designs for both the basic school program and the special compensatory programs.

Compensatory education works, but only when it is tried.

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