On Phasing Out a Federally-Initiated Success Story

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RECENT rumors from Washington indicate that Title III is dead. It is to be deleted from the fiscal year 1974 budget.

Why did it die?

Did success or failure cause its death?

Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 was to provide funds, on a competitive basis, for innovative activities. It was called PACE—Projects To Advance Creativity in Education. One report on Title III suggested that PACE should mean Projects To Accelerate Change in Education. It was planned to fund projects for a three-year period in order to establish the innovation and then it looked for a local takeover of the program. Its success might be a measure of "advancing creativity" or of "accelerating change."

This article probes into the apparent impact Title III funds had upon intended target audiences. Data are gleaned from two studies of Title III which were reported by Polemeni [1] and Hearn [2] and from a recently completed study by Sullivan.[3] These sources offer evidence pertaining to the success or failure of Title III. The reader can use these data to judge whether program impact was a factor in discontinuing Title III.

Three Studies Differ

The extent to which local education agencies adopted innovations supported by Title III funds constituted the primary criterion for overall program judgment by Polemeni, Hearn, and Sullivan. Polemeni focused upon projects which were approved, funded, and then phased out after one year of operations. Hearn studied projects which were approved and funded for three full years, the maximum authorized. Presumably, projects studied by Polemeni could not fulfill their contracted obligations, and presumably projects studied by Hearn met this requirement. Sullivan focused upon submitted proposals which were then followed up regardless of whether the proposals were rejected or funded for one, two, or three

[1] Anthony John Polemeni. "A Study of the Status of Title III Projects." *Phi Delta Kappan* 51 (1): 41; September 1969.

[2] Norman E. Hearn. "When Sugar Daddy's Gone, Does Baby Starve? or A Study of the Adoption Rate of ESEA Title III Innovations When Federal Funds Were Terminated." *Phi Delta Kappan* 52 (1): 61; September 1970.

[3] John J. Sullivan. "A Study of Selected Factors Related to the Successful Institutionalization of Educational Change." An unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 1973.

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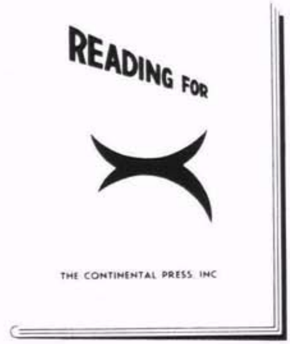

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years. Sullivan sought to determine the influence of proposal conceptualization upon subsequent adoption of innovations.

Anthony J. Polemeni studied projects which were funded in 1966 but terminated by December 1967. He found that 16 percent continued for more than one year; 80 percent died immediately with the end of federal funds; and 4 percent continued for a while and died within one year. Out of 1,085 approvals in 1966, his sample consisted of 149 projects which were deselected by the U.S. Office of Education staff because of a shortage of funds. The sample represented less than 15 percent of approved projects which might have been deselected. That 16 percent continued beyond one year seems rather remarkable, considering the sample. Polemeni indicated that it might be "argued that the comparatively small percent of the projects which were continued indicated a failure on the part of the Title III legislation to achieve its objective of stimulating creativity and innovation."

Norman E. Hearn reported that 84 percent of the superintendents queried by him indicated that innovations undertaken would continue after federal funding. He said that this seems "to confirm the fundamental soundness of Title III as a vehicle for dissemination of educational innovations." Hearn studied 330 projects that had been three-year successes, that is, that had been approved in 1966 and reapproved in 1967 and 1968—for three full years of funding and operation. Polemeni reported that 1,085 projects were approved in the 1966 fiscal year. Thus, Hearn's sample is a select one-third that lasted three full years. Hearn's questionnaire was sent in the spring of 1969 while the Title III grant was still in force; the question on continuation used the future tense. His 84 percent continuation rate should be considered a rate of anticipated continuation of successful projects.

Three researchers who responded to Hearn's study—House, Steele, and Kerins—challenged points raised in the study. They challenged the self-report data by the superintendent while he is receiving the federal funds. They also indicated a bias in the covering letter. Hearn in reply admitted that "the Title III continuation rate, one year after termination, is more likely to be 50-60 percent."[4]

A third study of Title III has recently been completed by Sullivan. He used as a sample all the 1966 Title III proposals submitted in Massachusetts regardless of whether the proposal was rejected or approved for one, two, or three years. A questionnaire was mailed to superintendents in May 1971, several months after all federal funding had terminated. Of the 138 proposals followed up, 101 or 74 percent responded. This survey revealed that 72 percent of all approved projects had been continued. The 72 percent rate of continuation of approved Title III proposals seems more accurate than the 16 percent or the 84 percent of the earlier studies. Only 28 percent of the innovations were not adopted, and perhaps some failed and should not have been adopted. More interestingly, 41 percent of the rejected proposals had been carried out by the local communities without benefit of Title III funds! Totally, 58 percent of the sample of 101 usable replies indicated that innovations had been adopted. This figure seems impressive from any standpoint.

These three studies have used adoption rate as a criterion for evaluating the success of Title III in stimulating innovation. One suggests a 16 percent adoption rate; the second an 84 percent rate; and the third an overall 58 percent rate. Given the context of each study, the third figure seems most palatable.

In conclusion, Title III provided venture capital to education, funds to do research, development, and dissemination work. This investment has certainly paid off, based upon data described here. Prior to Title III, only exceptional local education agencies budgeted funds for R D & D work. Title III got many more districts into the act. Should this progress be ignored?

Vast amounts of money are budgeted by America's corporate giants for R & D and marketing activity. Most of this money does not produce profits. When successes are realized, they pump new blood into a corporation. The profit-producing product line of most large electronics corporations, for example, generally comes from products which were unknown a decade earlier. Corporations that fail to maintain large R & D and marketing investments in this field cannot compete in today's marketplace.

Venture capital for R & D work and for marketing undertakings are givens of institutional survival in the United States. Title III gave educators a chance to get involved in similar institutional revitalization enterprises. Interim information suggests educators have not abused their opportunity. So why is such a promising program being discontinued?

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[4] Ernest R. House, Joe Milan Steele, and Thomas Kerins. "What Happens When Sugar Daddy Evaluates His Own Baby?" *Phi Delta Kappan* 52 (4): 247-48; December 1970.

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