

Instruction— Inner City: “Where It’s Really At!”

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Teachers, programs, facilities suitable to the special needs and potentialities of inner city youngsters must be provided if we are to fulfill our obligations as a free democratic society.

THE CRISIS in urban areas is not just a news item, but a major and significant facet in current American history. This crisis has extreme import for education. It heralds a “new” kind of education.

Large urban school systems are predominantly “minority” populated. This knowledge means that these systems should be revamped and restructured to adjust to the reality that maintaining the “status quo” is no longer appropriate.

An article, “Collision in the High Schools,” which appeared in the May 16, 1969, issue of *Life* magazine, noted that:

The huge migration to the cities has, for example, created an educational crisis that com-

pletely transcends the ability of the schools to deal with it, and has revealed a clash in values and failure of understanding that is largely beyond the competence and training of white, middle-class teachers.

Minority group students (whether Puerto Rican, Appalachian white, Black, or whatever) may differ in background, learning style, family structure, values, and other variables from their teachers. If one is to work with persons from a different culture it is essential that one becomes as familiar with that “difference” as possible. A *decided* modification of urban education appears in order.

A challenge exists for our nation, and more specifically educators, to eliminate, certainly to lessen, the waste of human resources in “the inner-city.” The choice is between seeing America further divided, or united. The choice is between expending funds for better and more effective educational pro-

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grams for children and adults, or the perpetuation of increased law enforcement, penal institution operation, and public assistance. Assuming that the former alternative is more desirable, it becomes mandatory for education to offer solutions to the problems.

Giving attention to urban education requires a look at several areas of concern—determining adequacies, limitations, and insufficiencies. Effective teachers are needed in inner-city education. This is the stage for the conflict facing the middle class teacher with middle class values, meeting the “every-class” situation. The type of teacher sought in these classrooms should not be solely dependent on the ethnic derivation of the teacher. Many teachers of inner-city youngsters lack certain skills and knowledge, regardless of ethnic background. Chief among these is the lack of adequate knowledge of the learning styles and behavior patterns of many of the pupils. Linking knowledge in this area with knowledge in the application of materials and teaching styles, would probably produce a more effective teaching-learning situation.



Another factor worth considering relates to learning theory. One course in educational psychology does not do the job of equipping teachers, in general, with a thorough knowledge of how people learn. Examples of violations can be noted by the number of teachers who “punish” children through homework assignments; and, to add insult to injury, most often the assignment is one involving mathematics and/or writing. Is it any wonder that many pupils show a significant dislike for “math,” to say nothing of creative writing assignments? Teachers, especially those in inner-city schools, should possess skills in questioning strategies, motivation, and the ability to meet critical problems with teaching alternatives.

Personal Commitment Required

What teacher education programs provide in the way of education for their prospects undoubtedly may be decisive in determining the ultimate success of candidates. It is doubtful that “a good teacher is a good teacher is a good teacher”—*any* where. Very few teacher education institutions have given a great deal of attention to specific programs, or a large proportion of their presently structured programs, to preparing their students for inner-city teaching assignments. There are few institutions which have *planned* programs for prospective teachers indicating an interest in teaching in the inner-city.

It *does* take certain kinds of training and exposure to prepare one for an inner-city teaching assignment. If what we acknowledge is true regarding the backgrounds, life styles, learning styles, and individual needs of children in the inner-city, then it seems this would require specific types of teacher education programs. A related course, or two, will not do the job. An adequate program should be planned, sequential and logical, weighted in the teaching of reading, learning theory, and human relations. It should have abundant professional laboratory experiences throughout the program prior to student teaching or internship period of total actual classroom responsibility.



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The prospective teacher should be aided by the preparatory institution in answering the questions: Do I really want to teach? What do I want to teach, to whom? And, what kind of preparation do I need? The preparation for inner-city teaching should take into account the relevancy of the program to the real world and the social situation. The program should fit teachers for practical situations, giving them a repertoire of alternatives for dealing with situations likely to be encountered in their teaching.

To work effectively with inner-city children requires a personal commitment. Many teachers are reluctant about taking such an assignment. Hopefully, such reluctance is not a reflection of racial or class prejudice, but rooted in a feeling of inadequacy. Teachers in urban schools need to know themselves in terms of "who they are" in relation to others. This should be reflected in their attitudes, personalities, teaching styles, and their ability to make a personal analysis of their own situation.

We cannot be deluded into believing that what will work and is successful in one inner-city locale is going to meet with the

same success in another. What faces teachers and principals in inner-city locations is a local school/community matter. There must be an assessment of the students, the families, the immediate community, and the general community for the school program to be effective.

Inner-city elementary school programs demand early preschool and kindergarten programs which develop identified skills and abilities needed by children for future school success. These programs *must* be followed by others that are unique, *but effective*, in teaching reading, using various instructional materials, and teaching different learning styles. Even these basic programs may require postponement in favor of developing "learning how-to-learn" skills, and motivation to read and pursue other academic endeavors.

Knowing the Pupils

The literature is replete with descriptions and analyses of the "disadvantaged child." However, once one gets to know—really *know*, understand, and appreciate inner-city children, one finds them basically little different from other children. Many of

these pupils are "turned off" because they are wise to the ways of society. They have learned from their parents, associates, and general community that things may not be what they're "cracked up to be." They are often disbelieving of society at large.

When Black youngsters are told they can be electricians, machinists, managers, corporation executives, or the like, they may look at you and say: "Man, are you kiddin'? You know damn well the unions are racist; and tell me how many Blacks are in managerial or executive positions?" A big selling job is necessary; and it must be "for real." None of the "if you work hard at it" business and let it go at that.

Is it any wonder that many of these children are hostile, lack an enviable self-concept, and have low aspirational levels? They still adhere to the "code of the ghetto," which is "Them that has, gets," and "Do others before they do you." These kids are crying out for people who are "for real"—not patronizers, but really genuine and honest human beings. We must be able to *tangibly* indicate to youngsters from depressed areas that there is opportunity—that it is possible for them to become successful at "living."

Effective inner-city education cannot be isolated from parents, the immediate community, or the community at large. Community control is one thing, but community accountability is another. The education of children is a two-way street. Communities should be accountable to the schools, and the schools *must* be accountable to the communities. Together they share a common bond in inculcating children with the realization that the home, the community, and the school are unequivocally interested in *them*, and that school is all-important in their destinies.

At present, a large number of parents in the inner-city are apathetic regarding the schools. They still see the school as a bureaucratic institution, generally insensitive to their needs or presence. Many can be placed in a different category: They are hostile and angry. They are fed up with the "establishment," and are willing to disrupt ineffective programs rather than allow them to continue.

Materials, Methods, or "Mess"

Conventional curricula and materials are generally considered irrelevant, unstimulating, and non-motivational to most of the children attending inner-city schools. This creates a mild dilemma, because children from low socioeconomic backgrounds are just as diverse as any other children. What may be relevant and familiar in Chicago, New York, or Philadelphia may *not be at all* significant in Atlanta, Birmingham, or New Orleans. Too, disadvantaged children in *rural* areas are quite different from children in *urban* areas in terms of background and general exposure. We cannot assume that the materials and/or curriculum normally a part of "general" school programs are going to be adequate for inner-city areas.

The success of inner-city education, however, will not come as a by-product of a *single* effort of a school system or teacher education. The task requires the concerted effort of many other community agencies and personnel. Success demands a many pronged approach. Many agencies and people are needed to bring about cooperative efforts of the home and school, resulting in satisfactory school achievement by children. Basic to the school's role is this question: What knowledges, skills, and basic attitudes should be acquired by youngsters in depressed areas, and how do these differ from the general objectives of "traditional" public school programs?

We must provide adequate education for *all* children, commensurate with their abilities and interests, within the framework of their lives, regardless of their ethnic backgrounds. A concomitant conviction is the reality that this country will only achieve its ultimate potential greatness by utilizing the talents, abilities, and strengths of all its citizens to the optimum. The notion that each individual normally has the potential for making a significant contribution to society mandates that the thinking and concerned citizens of this country see to it that our educational institutions, curricula, and personnel provide for this optimum result. □

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