

# THE KOTTER KEY

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In the April 1980 *Educational Leadership* Richard Benedict said that educators should emulate the Kotter method (from the television series "Welcome Back, Kotter") of teaching disadvantaged students. Benedict offers a simplistic solution to a very sensitive and difficult problem. For the past 15 years I have studied and researched procedures to use in helping disadvantaged students succeed at cognitive tasks. I have not found any indication that the Kotter syndrome is a "key" to educating disadvantaged students.

Benedict said his study was based on the Ohio State Leadership Studies that suggested there is a most and least effective teaching style for educators of disadvantaged students and that Kotter's behavior may be an example of the most effective style. I find it difficult to see how Benedict could state his conclusions in such strong terms based on responses from only 25 students in one high school.

Asking disadvantaged students to name the teacher who contributed the most and least to their education is assuming that these students have had enough successful experiences to make sound judgments about such matters. That and the other questions Benedict asked are not the kinds of questions one asks a group of students who have already experienced failure many times.

As measures of "structure," Benedict used (1) the degree of detail with which teachers elaborated their curricular expectations of students and (2) the degree to which they individualized instruction. For "consideration," he used the self reported attitudes of teachers toward disadvantaged students. These are not adequate operational definitions of those terms.

Benedict's findings that "The degree to which teachers individualize instruction appears to have little, if

## The Kotter Key to Educating Disadvantaged Students

Richard K. Benedict

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# IS NOT THE ANSWER

any, influence on the student's decision to place teachers in the most or least contributing groups" contradicts my finding (1971) that disadvantaged students want teachers to individualize their work. My study included 150 teachers, 50 teacher educators, 50 administrators/supervisors, 25 disadvantaged students, and 25 parents of disadvantaged students.

It really troubles me for Benedict to report that detailed curriculum planning correlated negatively with student positive ratings. I cannot believe he is saying that the more carefully teachers plan, the more they are disliked by students. My research shows that effective planning by teachers causes students to want to learn and reduces the number of discipline problems the teacher experiences (Johnson, 1980).

Working with disadvantaged students is so difficult and so important that it must not be treated as a joke. The Kotter approach might be fun and some of the ideas from the television series may even be useful, but the Kotter method should not be described as the "key." ■

## References

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