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SUGGESTED EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS FOR
TEACHERS AND PARENTS OF
URBAN INDIAN YOUTH

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CONTENTS

Introduction.....1
An Educational Program for Teachers of Urban Indian Youth.....2
An Educational Program for Parents of Urban Indian Youth.....10
Conclusion.....14

Introduction

The main purpose of this paper is to present the designs for educational programs for teachers of urban Indian youth and for parents of urban Indian youth. Specifically, the focus will be on the cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul in Minnesota. These cities are selected because they are familiar to the author. They are an interesting selection also because they have unusually active urban Indian populations.

Why the attention to urban Indian youth? Recent reports indicate that the drop-out rate of Indian students in the Minneapolis Public Schools is approximately 64 percent. The same or higher drop-out rates exist for Indian students throughout the state of Minnesota.

It is the opinion of the writer that there are many factors which contribute to the problem. Certainly, such socio-economic factors as lack of employment, inadequate housing, low educational level of parents, etc. cannot be lightly discounted. The problem is multi-facted and, therefore, it calls for multiple approaches.

This paper will be divided into two main sections. The first section will deal with a suggested educational program for teachers of urban Indian youth. What should be included in this program and the reasons for its inclusion will be discussed. The second section will present a suggested educational program for parents of urban Indian youth. Again, content will be suggested and the purpose of such content will be discussed.

A Suggested Educational Program for Teachers of Urban Indian Youth

One of the points at which the problem - the high drop-out rate of Indian youth in Minneapolis and St. Paul - can be attacked, and the point which this section concerns itself with, is the teacher. Too many times teachers demonstrate an appalling degree of ignorance about, and insensitivity to, Indian students and their situations. This ignorance and insensitivity leads to a lack of communication and understanding between teacher and student. The result, then, educational failure, is almost inevitable.

The writer would like to mention some basic beliefs or biases which will help the reader to better understand why some assertions are made in this paper. One such belief is this: teachers should know something about their students besides grade reports, test scores, or other teachers' recommendations. Teachers also should have some general idea of the parents' background. Knowledge of such things as educational level, occupation, size of family, marital status, etc. may help the teacher to better understand the student.

Teachers should possess some general knowledge of their students' language. To study the language is to look into the mentality of that people. To know how a student expresses himself will give the teacher an idea of how he sees things, whether that student is from an urban ghetto or an Indian reservation.

Teachers should know how their own biases can be reflected in the classroom. Most teachers are from a middle-class background, and their attitudes and values are many times set up as norms or standards in the classroom, sometimes consciously and certainly unconsciously. For example, it is normal and proper for one to brush his teeth after meals. For whom is it normal and proper? Maybe this is so for the teacher, but what about the student? There are many other examples and more serious examples which could be mentioned and which could have devastating

psychological and emotional effects upon the student. As Miles V. Zintz in his Education Across Cultures says, it is "not that teachers should change either their beliefs or the children's, but rather, that they be completely aware of and accept the differences."¹

One last belief that should be mentioned is this. The writer strongly believes that formal education can be of value to any individual in this society. Especially is this true for our Indian youth. Education can be looked upon as a device, a very effective device, not only to acquire a secure economic position in this predominantly white society but also to preserve his cultural heritage and strengthen his sense of cultural identity.

Several comments upon the procedure to be followed in this paper should be made. First of all, the content in a curriculum for teachers of urban Indian youth will be discussed. Many of the items that will be mentioned have been talked about for many years by leading educators both Indian and non-Indian. However, most of these things have never been implemented on a formal or official basis. The writer is seriously suggesting that most or all of these recommendations should be initiated in our educational institutions.

Second, why these things should be taught will be discussed. The discussion will be brief and general but will state basically the writer's own feelings.

Third, how these things should be taught will be discussed. What the writer hopes to provide is some general guidelines. Perhaps an analogy will help to illustrate what is meant. The writer hopes to provide the skeleton, i.e., a basic framework. Experts in education-educational psychologists, theorists, specialists in curriculum development, etc. - will have to provide the flesh and blood for the skeleton.

WHAT SHOULD BE TAUGHT AND WHY

What should teachers of urban Indian youth know, and why would they know it? This is a question that many concerned people in Minneapolis and in the state of Minnesota are asking. In this particular section the writer would like to define and discuss twelve areas of concern.

First of all, teachers should know something of Dakota and Chippewa cultures. The Dakota and Chippewa nations are the two predominant tribes in Minnesota. It would be interesting and useful for the teacher to know the technology of these peoples. What were the tools and techniques used by these peoples to maintain their biological existence and their culture? How did they obtain raw materials from the environment and process them into food, clothing, shelter, and other necessities? It would be good for the teacher to be aware of the sociological systems of these cultures. What was their kinship system like? Their political organization? Their economic system? Teachers should know the ideological systems - the legends, mythologies, theologies, philosophies, and science. How did these peoples look at themselves, at others, or at the universe and the supernatural? Also, what were the differences and similarities between the Dakota and Chippewa cultures? What was the nature of the interaction between these two nations, and how and why did this interaction develop? The main purpose of the above study would be to provide information and background to the teachers - to help develop a frame of reference in dealing with Indian youth.

Second, teachers should know something of Minnesota history and the role and contributions of the Indian in the development of Minnesota as a state. The history of Minnesota does not begin with the coming of the white man. Most of the textbooks dealing with Minnesota history totally disregard or minimize the Indian and his contributions. As teachers gain this information, perhaps an appreciation of the role and contributions of the Indian could be developed.

Teachers also should possess a general knowledge of either the Sioux or Chippewa languages or both. A teacher should have some understanding of the likenesses and differences between English and the Indian languages. A teacher, according to Miles Zintz, "can know something of the differences in the phonemes of the two languages, the structural differences, the sentence patterning."² Language conditions the ways in which people view their natural and cultural surroundings. Even though most of the urban Indian youth in Minneapolis do not speak or understand their native language, especially among the Chippewa youth, the writer contends that the youth still possess an "Indian" point of view which has been conditioned by the language of their grandparents and ancestors. If the teacher knows something of the language, he can perhaps better understand how the Indian student looks at things and, consequently, relate better to him.

Fourth, teachers should be aware of the names of the state, the rivers, the lakes, the towns, etc. that are Indian or Indian in origin. The name "Minnesota" itself is Dakota and means "sky-blue water". Other names such as Minneapolis, Bemidji, Mankato, Mahnomon, and Owatonna, are Indian. This kind of information would make the teachers aware of, and appreciative of, the rich cultural heritage the state possesses.

Fifth, teachers should be aware of the values of Indian students. If there are Indian values, what are they and how do they affect the Indian student's performance and attitude in the classroom? The writer suspects that many of the values held by Indian urban youth are shaped by mainly two factors. One factor, of course, is the student's ethnic background, consisting of language, music, folklore, customs, etc. The other factor which contributes largely to an urban Indian youth's scale of values is the culture of poverty. Consequently, many of his attitudes, actions, values, and performance would be unlike those of the poor white or the poor black. If the teacher were cognizant of these forces, he would be better equipped not only to understand why that Indian student acts as he does in that classroom, but also to better reach and relate to the Indian student.

The curriculum for teachers of urban Indian youth also should include study of contemporary life on a reservation and life in an urban setting. What are the major problems faced by the modern Indian? What caused these problems? What are the attitudes of Indians toward assimilation? What is the attitude of the urban Indians to the reservation? This kind of study would produce in a teacher an understanding and empathy with the students he or she is dealing with.

The influence of Bureau of Indian Affairs upon Indians both on a national and local level cannot be overlooked. The world of the Indian is dominated by this one federal agency. As Edgar S. Kahn points out in Our Brother's Keeper, "Every aspect of his being is affected and defined by his relationship to the Federal government--and primarily to one agency of the Federal government: The Bureau of Indian Affairs."³ From such a study, teachers would become aware of one of the most powerful and pervasive influences on the Indian today.

Another area of concern that could be studied in conjunction with problems of Indians would be the location and history of Indian communities in Minnesota. This kind of information would help to broaden the background of the teacher and fill his frame of reference.

Another topic of study would be concerned with current trends in Indian affairs. What about militancy and the Indian? Does the Indian want separate educational facilities? Is the State Indian Affairs Commission a strong political force for the Indian? Teachers from such a study would become more aware of where the Indian in a collective sense is going. Also, the teacher could help the Indian student find his place in the movement.

Teachers of urban Indian youth should know of the past and present leaders in both the rural and urban areas. These leaders the teachers could hold up as role models for Indian youth. Also, if the teacher

wished to influence the students in a desirable direction, he could use the actions and statements of some Indian leaders to achieve his purposes.

One of the most important things a teacher should know would be the background of Indian parents. Items such as education level, occupation, religion, whether one parent is white, size of family, etc. would enable the teacher to better understand the student and also to work more effectively with the parents in helping the child.

Another course in the curriculum for teacher-training would be on stereotypes of the Indian. What are some of the common stereotypes of Indians? How did these stereotypes develop? In this course, also, would be the study of other Indian groups in the nation to show the wide variation in Indian cultures. This would be beneficial to teachers because they would see the rich diversity among groups of Indians and realize how difficult it is to generalize about Indians.

Structure of the Training Program for Teachers of Urban Indian Youth

This section will present a statement of method. The previous section is a statement of ideology, i.e., it dealt with the questions of what should be taught and why it should be taught. As was indicated previously, the writer will present a general framework as to how this suggested program can be implemented. One of the main reasons why the writer can only present some general guidelines is his limited expertise in education. If this program were to be considered seriously by others (the writer hopes it will be), it would remain for the experts to "beef it up."

The University of Minnesota in Minneapolis is a logical place for a training ground for teachers of urban Indian youth. Many innovations and programs that are Indian-oriented have been initiated and developed at the University. With the development of the American Indian Studies Department, the hiring of Indian faculty and staff, and the establishment of

various Indian programs on campus, the proximity of the University to sizeable Indian populations (both reservation and urban), there now exist some rich resources upon which to draw.

The length of the training program for teachers of urban Indian youth would be one year. This one year would be the fourth or senior year in a regular teacher-training program (at the University of Minnesota, most teachers spend two years in the College of Liberal Arts and the third and fourth years in the College of Education). The first three years would be similar to the training received by a regular teacher. These three years would consist of General Education courses, courses in the major subject, courses in the minor subject, some education courses, and some electives. One difference would be that either the Dakota or the Chippewa language would be required, and this language would begin in the junior year.

Student teaching would be an integral part of this fourth year. In the fall quarter, there would be student-teaching half-a-day all quarter. The student teacher would be assigned to a school in which there were a large number of Indian students. Although he would be teaching all students in that classroom, his main focus would be on the Indian students and the problems in reaching them. Also, in the spring quarter of that fourth year, there would be student-teaching for half-a-day all quarter.

The main reason for having student-teaching in the fall would be to expose the prospective teacher to the classroom situation immediately. The other education classes which he would be taking during that quarter and the rest of the fourth year would be more meaningful because of the actual classroom experience. The student-teaching the spring quarter would also be more meaningful because the prospective teacher would have had the benefit of learning from his mistakes in student-teaching fall quarter and profiting from his education classes both fall and winter quarters. In the spring quarter, the prospective teacher would have his choice of which school in which to teach. If he had an unfortunate

experience in fall at one school, he could choose another school for spring.

Education classes would be an important aspect of this teacher-training program. During the third year, the education courses would be mainly theory. During the fourth or senior year, however, educational theories and techniques as they pertain to teaching Indian students would be the focus.

The study of Indian languages would be a requirement of the fourth year. Either the Dakota or Chippewa language would be mandatory. The Indian language would, however, begin in the junior year and end in the fourth or senior year.

The twelve areas of concern that were discussed in the previous section would provide the content for ten courses which could be taught in the fourth or senior year. These ten courses could be 1) Dakota and Chippewa Cultures, 2) Minnesota Indian History, 3) The Dakota or Chippewa Language, 4) Indian Values, 5) Indian Problems- Rural and Urban, 6) Minnesota Indian Communities (with attention to Indian place-names), 7) The Bureau of Indian Affairs, 8) Contemporary Minnesota Indian Affairs (with attention to Indian leaders past and present), 9) The Indian Family, and 10) Stereotypes of Indians.

Other general guidelines would include the following: to use qualified Indian people whenever possible in teaching, consulting, lecturing, etc. in the training of teachers; to eliminate grades and use "Pass, No Pass, or Incomplete" during the fourth or senior year; to utilize films and all available Audio-visual materials on Indian culture and education; and to use projects, surveys, papers, oral reports, panels, etc. as assignments for prospective teachers.

An Educational Program for Parents of Urban Indian Youth

To say that parental involvement in the educational process of their children is necessary is perhaps trite but nevertheless very true. Especially is this true of our Indian parents in the Twin Cities area. Parental involvement is imperative if more of our Indian youth are to finish high school.

To involve parents actively is a difficult matter in the opinion of the writer. There are so many factors that can account for their lack of involvement. One such factor is inadequate housing. Another factor is lack of employment or menial employment which provides insufficient income to adequately maintain a family. Another factor is a low educational level which can result in a lack of choices or alternatives to improve his economic lot. In some homes a mother is the only parent present, and generally she is on Aid For Dependent Children (AFDC), with many children to support. The problems are many which confront Indian parents. With such huge problems, survival takes most of the time and resources of the parents so that they cannot always devote too much time to the educational affairs of their children. It is a truism that man must make a living before he can spend time and resources in developing other aspects of his situation. To put it more bluntly, if a man has food in his belly and money in his pocket, he can then afford the luxury of thinking about other areas in his life to develop.

The above barriers are mentioned to point out the difficulty that one may encounter in any attempt to structure a program for parental involvement. There are several things, however, which parents should know -- things which could be incorporated in a program. These same things could be applied to all institutions and social service agencies as well. However, attention is given to the educational institutions which serve the children of the parents.

Content

Parents should possess a general idea of the structure of an urban public schools system. Where is the central administration office? How does the line of authority run? Which departments are responsible for which affairs? What is the relationship of a particular school to the central office? To other schools? Such knowledge on the part of parents would enable them to better relate to and function successfully in dealing with a public schools system.

Parents should also be aware of the personnel in the public schools system. Who is the superintendent of the Minneapolis Public Schools? Who is the head of teacher personnel division? Who is the principal of a particular school? What is the function of the school social worker? To whom does a parent go when he feels his child has been mistreated? If parents were better informed in this area, when problems arose, they not only would know which department to go to but also whom to see in that department. Such information would certainly help the parents to establish more effective lines of contact and communication.

Third, parents also should have a general idea of what some of the major policies and procedures of an urban public schools system are. For example, what is the school policy toward a student who is a severe disciplinary problem? In a local school, how and when is attendance taken? What is the policy toward bussing of students to other schools to maintain an appropriate racial balance? If a parent wants to transfer his child to another school, what is the procedure to follow? This kind of knowledge would again equip the parent to better cope with a school.

Finally, parents should be aware of the techniques and approaches to be used in dealing with educational institutions as well as other social service agencies. The use of nonprofessionals as an opportunity for eventual careers and for aides to enter the professional ranks should be carefully explored. How to use parents' advisory boards as well as nonpro-

professionals to accomplish goals within the systems and also to effect change within the systems to better serve the community should be encouraged. Expertise and information should be provided to look into the possibility of new programs to create opportunities for better employment, further education, improved housing, etc.

The preceding paragraphs have outlined some general things which parents should know to more effectively function within their community. The structure, personnel, policies, and techniques and approaches to utilized in dealing with educational institutions and other social service agencies have been emphasized.

Procedure

In the following paragraphs an attempt to structure an educational program for parents will be presented. The training program will be loosely defined because the writer has only general ideas. The main purpose will be to include the above-mentioned topics such as structure, personnel, policies, and techniques in a training program for parents with a focus on working with and within an educational system, though many of the statements and techniques could be applied to other kinds of systems as well.

The length of the training program would be one academic year, i.e. from September to the following May. Parents would meet one night a week - each session lasting three hours. After each session, refreshments such as coffee, doughnuts, and sandwiches would be served (most Indians like to eat, including the writer). Also, a stipend for attendance would be included. Many Indian parents fall into a low-income category, and an immediate pay-off would be desirable.

The personnel to teach these Indian parents would be Indian community leaders, university faculty, public schools personnel, and social-agencies

personnel. Whenever, possible, courses could be structured to meet university requirements and university credit would be given to those parents who desire perhaps some college credit or a college degree. This cooperative University-community arrangement could be a route for nonprofessionals to enter into the professional level in the educational and social services.

In this training program for parents, the development of community-action groups should be encouraged. If mothers on AFDC feel they need more allowance for clothing for children, a group of such mothers could exert pressure on the local welfare department. If the community feels the police have been too harsh in dealing with Indian alcoholics, such a group could begin dialogue with the police department.

Parents in the training program would form advisory bodies to various institutions. The advisory bodies could apply pressure on the system at various points and demand more relevant service. Such a body could be a useful structure for the expression of consumer preferences.

The preceding paragraphs have attempted to show what should be included and how it would be presented in an educational program for parents. Hopefully, information gained would better enable the parents to deal with a system, to effect change within that system, and to improve services from that system. As Miller and Riesmann point out, "To some extent, information is power."⁴ This information, effectively utilized, can accomplish whatever purposes the parents might have in mind.

Conclusion

In this paper an attempt has been made to present the designs for educational programs for both teachers and parents of urban Indian youth, especially for the Indian youth of Minneapolis and St. Paul. Such programs are sorely needed, for the drop-out rate of Indian high school students is very high. With more teachers that are aware and sensitized to the educational needs of Indian students and with more parents that are informed about existing educational and social service institutions, this problem can, to a large extent, be alleviated.

FOOTNOTES

¹Zintz, Miles V. Education Across Cultures. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1969. p. 101.

²Ibid., p. 31.

³Kahn, Edgar S. Our Brother's Keeper. New York: World Publishing Company, 1969. p. 5.

⁴Miller, S. M., and Frank Riessman. Social Class and Social Policy. New York: Basic Books, Inc. 1968. p. 250.

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